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**Liberal Education as a
Key for World Citizenship**

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Liberal Education as a Key for World Citizenship

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Abstract

The aims of educational system, in general, are formatted according to the demands of society. Nowadays, these demands are articulated by a society that as main aim has the development of science and technology. By contrast, human sciences and arts are often neglected even though they stand in the foundations of a liberal education and constitute the main courses/activities able to cultivate capabilities such as humanity, world citizenship and most importantly, nourish the principle of democracy. The liberal education promotion takes a major significance considering the range of issues the world is facing today, a key one being terrorism. Diversity in terms of ethnicity, social, cultural and belief belongings continue to produce violence and conflicts. The second part aims to explicate the relationship between the liberal education and its contribution towards the consolidation of a healthy democracy, as well as it provides an overview of the ideas developed by the most noted authors in this field. Further, the third part addresses the difficulties encountered in practice and in curriculums. These difficulties are related to: the inertia against any change that appeal for a new philosophy, which contravenes the classical one or the one embedded in the old curriculum; the lack of funds and infrastructure, especially in schools located out of the developing map; the lack of specialized teachers/professors; the pressure of parents; an unclear policy of the internationalization of higher education. Finally, it is concluded, *inter alia*, that the liberal education must be at the top agenda of the education policy and public debate.

Keywords: schools, art, democracy, world citizenship, critical thinking, empathy, human being.

Introduction

Nowadays, an increasing number of stakeholders are involved in the debate about education and different issues related to it. Because the complexity of the school, the topics of this debate are of many kinds, but the principal aim is always the same: how to improve educational quality of our children. For Brighthouse (2009, in Siegel, *ed.*: 42), “An individual’s prospects for educational achievement should be a function only of that individual’s effort, not of his or her class background or natural talent”. Like Brighthouse, we all are aware about the challenges we have to face in order to achieve that quality. The School-Institution must show the same care for all children and students, regardless many factors, objective or subjective, “because human development approach is about a better education” (Sen, 1999).

But educational policy, in general, is the exclusivity of state, especially regarding pre-university education system. For Bell & Stivenson (2006: 9) “Policy is political: it is about the power to determine what is done”. “State policy”, whether national or local (or increasingly supra-national), has a considerable impact on shaping what happens on a daily basis in schools and colleges, and the lived experiences of those who study and work in those establishments. Apple says that “Formal schooling by and large is organized and controlled by the government” (quoted, Bell & Stivenson, 2006: 9). Many thinkers (Bell & Stivenson, 2006: 8; Bourdieu, Bourdieu & Wacquant, Bourdieu & Passeron, in Ritzer, 2011: 533-4) saw the state as the site of the struggle over the monopoly of what Bourdieu called symbolic violence, a “soft” and “indirect” form of violence. For Bourdieu & Passeron (*Idem*, Ritzer), the educational system is the major institution through which symbolic violence is practiced on people.

But for Nussbaum (in Siegel, *ed.*, 2009: 54-5), we are living in a world that is dominated by the profit motivation, which one combined with the demands of a global market, are asking to focus in scientific and technical abilities. The result of these demands in relation to schooling was a curriculum that become fragmented and tracked many students into the training they would need for employment. (Mulcahy *et al.*, 2015: 11) In contrast, other abilities, equally crucial, like those that are associated with the humanities sciences and arts: “the ability to think critically, the ability to transcend local loyalties and to approach world problems as a citizen of the world” (Nussbaum, *Ibid*) are judged more and more as useless and helpless for the nation to compete at the global scale. About 100 years ago, Lindeman, (1926: 120) states the same, too: “The significant problems which confront modern states are primarily technical, not political, in character”. For Lindeman, higher education has come to be predominately a form of vocational training. (*Ibid*: 118). Roth (2014) highlights the pressure on education system to have a more direct connection to the workplace. Freedman (2003: x) quotes philosophers from the sociology and psychological fields to articulate the same opinion, but from another point of view: “...this college generation ... is preoccupied with career

ambitions and financial security ... and adopted the selfish credo “more for me”.

Of course that no one has any objection regarding a good scientific and technical education (Nussbaum, in Siegel, *Ibid*: 54-5) and is understandable that these abilities have the same significance as for the individual and the society, too, but of the same significance for the society is the inclusion of individual as citizen. To emphasize this demand, Durkheim (quoted, Ritzer, 2008: 105-6) uses the term “functioning”, and most important for the process of education are moral tools. For Durkheim the classroom is very important because it’s “the rich collective milieu necessary for reproducing collective representations”. The functioning of individual in society is very important for Freedman (2003: x), too, but “moral tools of Durkheim” in the work of Freedman is equal to be a citizen, one of the most higher obligation of a person: “devoted to the ideals of the nation and to the well-being of the entire commonwealth, rather than to only a narrow segment of it”.

In our attempts of reasoning for what is the best in the field of education, to find out smart choices and as well as the necessity to evaluate, according to nowadays optic, the yesterday axioms and beliefs, schooling with the philosophy of liberal education takes an important role.

Why Liberal Education

In the Deweyian language of problem-solving learning, or inquiry, which Habermas also employs at times, the macroproblem characteristic of our time is the problem of difference. (Young, in Smith & Wexler, *eds.*, 1995: 8-9). Our society is suffering as the result a perceived rise in intolerance, xenophobia and racism and we are concern about the apparent alienation and marginalization of some young people from the mainstream of society, too (Fogelman, in Bridges, *ed.*, 1997: 203). The violent attacks of terrorism all over the world, lastly at the heart of Europe, on behalf of difference in religious, values and cultures indicate that the “macro problem” is turned on a “global” problem. “The difference” continues to be a reason of separation, not living together. Ethical, cultural, gender and racial background are producing more and more conflict and violence. For Sen (1999: 242) cultural nationalism or chauvinism can be seriously debilitating as an approach to living. While the society is becoming far more global, its citizens continue to act locally.

For Young (*Ibid*: 8-9) we live in a quasi-democratic society. No community can transmit skills and information – to its children or to anyone else –without also transmitting, wittingly or otherwise, and for better or for worse, its own prevailing beliefs and attitudes (or, to use the much abused term “ideologies”) (Gless & Smith, *eds.*, 1992: 10). But, if we want a democratic society, it must be able to overcome the traditional barriers of race, group, class and wealth. (Sen, 2009).

In our efforts to ensure a safer, healthier, more prosperous and environmentally sound world, education can play an important role (World

Declaration on Education For All, 1990). Schools must be able to cultivate capabilities such as humanity, critical thinking and, most importantly, nourish the principle of democracy. How can education supply directive energy for collective enterprises? For Lindeman (1926: 153), the most concise answer is threefold: a) by revealing the nature of social process b) by transforming the battle of interests from warfare into creative conflict c) by developing a method for social functions which will make collective life an educational experience.

There are some preliminary questions that can be rise about the liberal education. Lanham (in Gless & Smith, *eds.*, 1992: 33) addresses some questions regarding methods, texts and curriculum. For Lanham, while concerns are the same as those about 160 years ago (in his paper he quotes the Yale Faculty Report of 1828) the other question that can be made is: Why hadn't we found any answers? (*Ibid*:34). Even why is out of the aim of this paper to analyze what should have been different, is very important to underline that the issues related with education have been and will be always object of debate. In this point of view, even the issues related with liberal education. But it is important to highlight that Lanham, too, make appeal for liberal education. For Freedman (2003: XI), a liberal education “seeks to strengthen students capacities, to deal with the world’s and the nation’s agenda, to expand their horizons, enrich their intellect, and deepen their spirit. It asks them to accept responsibility for their actions and for the welfare of others”. Nussbaum (in Siegel, *ed.*, 2009), while addressed her ideas for the necessity of involving of principles of liberal educational at school program and curricula has two philosophers as principle point of reference: Rabindranath Tagore and John Dewey. Both Tagore and Dewey are characterized by a deep indignation toward the conventional education. According to them, conventional education is unable to inspire and cultivate empathy to the others, to stimulate criticism or to go out of the “pedestrians” that the strict pedagogy is able to impose. Nussbaum appeals for liberal education. For Roth (2014) liberal education isn't about studying things that have no immediate use, but creating habits of action that grow out of a spirit of broad inquiry.

Liberal education emphasizes teaching of humanities and arts at all school levels, as well extracurricular activities involved in daily life of schools, because these subjects and activities are able to discover our common human disabilities, to challenge our real differences and encourage endeavors to create a better world. This framework helps students understand their connections with others and with canonical works in religion, art, science, and music, learn how to learn, because learning became part of who they are. (Roth, 2014:5).

Liberal Education and Its Contribution towards the Consolidation of a Healthy Democracy

The issues regarding liberal education have received considerable attention and continue to do so. While they, as always, are object of a worldwide debate, a very important aspect of liberal education is its contribution towards a

healthy democracy. According to Nussbaum (in Siegel, *ed.*, 2009: 55-9) liberal education can cultivate “three abilities, crucial for citizenship in a pluralistic democratic society that is part of an interlocking world”: I. The capacity for critical thought; II. The capacity to see oneself as member of a heterogeneous nation and world; III. The capacity to have empathy. For Nussbaum (*Ibid*), it’s very important to emphasize that these values need to be cultivated appropriately in primary and secondary education. Otto and Ziegler (2006), this “capability approach”, which includes a focus on the individual's abilities to act, proposed by Amartya Sen, is very important approach for education, too, because is related “to the idea of what is needed for each person to function as a full participating member of modern democratic society”. Further, each of these abilities are connected with 3 Cs of Martin: care, concern, and connection (Mulcahy et al., 2015:73), and can be seen as a good solution towards old concern regarding to Hirst liberal education, the later judged as exclusively enables only for knowledge.

I. *The capacity for critical thought.* “Good thinking is a prerequisite for good citizenship because it helps the citizen form more intelligent judgments on issues and to the democratic solution of social problems” (Phillips, in Bridges, *ed.*, 1997: 264), “questioning established prejudices, vested interests and unexamined preconceptions (Sen, 2009:396), trying to distinguish lies from the truth (Phillips, *Ibid*: 264), understanding how the institutions work (Brighthouse, in Siegel, *ed.* *Ibid*:40) and enabling to exercise social pressure for providing a better life and security. Arts and humanity sciences are very good, too, like natural sciences, to encourage critical thinking. Nussbaum (*Ibid*) quotes mostly John Dewey, who ideated and inspired the progressive movement of educational system in USA, to underline the connection between critical thinking and democracy. For Lindeman (1926:108) “Art is essentially a form of mental release; its conception may lie in feeling, but its result to the personality is intellectual enrichment”.

II. *The capacity to see oneself as member of a heterogeneous nation and world.* The use of arts and human sciences as part of the curriculum contributes in citizenship education through these keywords: escape from isolation, integration, activism and communication. Quoting Sen, (2009:415) “Escape form isolation may not only be important for the quality of life of human life, it can also contribute powerfully to understanding and responding to the other deprivations from which human beings suffer” and for Lindeman (*Ibid*: 132) “Integration is not a verbal exercise, but a method by which active differences interpenetrate”. Activism is part of our accountability as human being. Further, through arts we enable to create a horizontal communication in the relationship student-student, a feature that makes socialization and integration both, equal and real, as well helps formation of tolerant values.

III. *The capacity to have empathy.* “It is the part of human condition that most people like to operate within a comfort zone, and comfort often equates with familiarity” (Birtwistle, 2009). For this reason, but of course even for many others not listed here, our culture has created “blind spots” towards specific groups (Nussbaum, *Ibid*: 57). So, different groups are seen with the

eyes of “society”, which in many cases are fully blinded because of prejudices. Even though we accept human rights as legal rights, for a healthy democracy it’s very important to increase the freedom degrees of human rights, to include “new freedoms” in them. But for it, is clearly very important to provide reasons for others to pay serious attention to it. (Sen, 2009: 358, 367) Instruction in literature and arts can cultivate empathy and be a very good instrument not only to understand better the human rights, but to analyze the life of others and ask for more. For Lindeman (1926: 111) “Art has its way among many powerful alternatives” to educate and is connected to the feelings: “Feelings adds warmth to understanding and understanding gives meaning to feelings” (Ibid: 106). Arts are very important for the adults, too, “because produce an enduring and even attractive dialogue with the prejudices of the past, rather than fraught with fear and defensives” (Nussbaum, Ibid: 54). Remember “Dictator” (2012), when Sacha Baron Cohen says to his pregnant woman: Is this a boy or an abortion? This is an added value for the arts.

But liberal education looks for revise, through a critical perspective, of the national identity, its values and culture, which are often reflected, in an unconscious way, in the curriculum politics, and in the way how teacher and all the academic staff construct their expectations for achievement for different group of students. “If the illusion of the nation hinders the development of autonomy as an aim of education, and if it conceals the effective exclusion of some from full democratic citizenship, then national identity ought not to be given a place among the aims of education” (Enslin, in Marples, *ed.* 1999: 109).

From the other side, schools often help in embedded social roles through “the poisonous fanaticism of divisive communal thinking” (Sen, 2009: 352) and, of course, in the expectations for life and quality of ambition. “Cultural miseducation occurs when so many cultural liabilities or such devastating ones are passed down that a heavy burden is placed on the next generation”. (Martin, 2002: 5) Exactly for these reasons, many teachers have low expectations for particularly group of children who came to school from low-income communities where “few reads and even fewer graduate and go on to receive the college education they will need to succeed in the knowledge age of the twenty-first century”. (Smith & Peterson, in Hess & Manno, *ed.*, 2011: 19) A permanent issue is the one regarded with the discrimination of women. The lives and works of woman of all races, classes, ethnicities, and sexual orientation are either missing from the disciplines of knowledge or are misrepresented therein. (Martin, 2002: 6) For Sen (2009: 372), the move from a reason for action (to help another person), which is straightforward enough in a consequence-sensitive ethical system, to an actual duty to undertake that action is neither simple, nor sensibly covered under just one straightforward formula. (Sen, 2009: 337). Human sciences and arts are very good ways to stimulate critic towards those traditions and habits that tend to stop our will to move on.

In this perspective, liberal education looks for reformation of curriculum, too, in pre-university education system and higher education, for a much

broader view of how learning is conceived and takes place. It is known that the problem of curriculum selection today is becoming more crucial. There are a lot of new studies and information, accumulated over the years, which for Martin (2002: 8) “The blossoming of these relatively new studies does not guarantee their worth.” But our perspective is more liberal, thus referring education as possibility to offers knowledge and enables skills for citizenship in a democratic society, for empowering the youth how should analyze, understand and respond toward a world in change, how can nourished with humanity and empathy. Paraphrasing (Martin, 2002: 3) “How do we maximize the abilities for citizenship and at the same time without minimize those needed for a competitive market?”

According to Nussbaum (in Siegel, ed., 2009: 57), pupils and students should learn race and gender, institutions and practices, the rudiments of world history, literary and historical studies of woman; should get a rich and nonstereotypical understanding of the mayor world religions, to inquire, in more depth, into at least one unfamiliar tradition, to focus on understanding of differences of religion. Martin (*Ibid*:3) goes further: A solution to this educational problem of generation requires close study of the claim that democracy mandates on curriculum for everybody.” Regarding "how learning takes place", for Rothstein (in Pierce & Stapleton, 2003:83) “by focusing only on things that we can do in schools, we are guaranteeing failure”. Even though Rothstein is concerned about the standards and quality of students’ achievements, the same could be said for our argument too, but the schools should be the main institutions to start from.

Difficulties in Practice

Liberal studies, especially the humanities, even they are indispensable to a global world, they are fighting with their back to the wall. (Höffe, in Curren, 2007: 102) The main difficulty for adopting the principles of liberal education relates to the fact that how much policy and decision makers are ready to accept liberal education, no matter how inspiring and hopeful are its aims. It is difficult to convince policy and decision makers that for a better society, teaching math or natural sciences have the same importance as teaching human sciences, literature and arts. From the other side, finding out of the right balance in school curriculum, that’s mean, between the weight that must have math & natural sciences, as a prerequisite for a technological society and as good start to find a job after graduation or a scholarship for college, compare with the one that must have human sciences, literature and arts, as a prerequisite for a pluralistic society and as good start for world citizenship, continue to be at the center of debate, even from the lines of partisans for liberal education. “What should be taught?” (Martin, 2002: 7) especially it regarding to liberal education is at the heart of debate.

Another difficulty is the same as it is for all educational reforms: the issue of large-scale improvement. Quoting Elmore (2007: 8), innovations that

require large changes in the core of educational practice seldom penetrate than a small fraction (of U.S.) schools and classrooms, and seldom last for very long when they do. How much able we are to replicate the success in every school, especially in those that belong to low-income communities, or in communities out of the map of development?

In addition of the difficulties, two others are regarded to with the high financial costs and with the absence of human capital resources. For Nussbaum (*Ibid*: 59), such an education needs small classes, or at least sections, where students get copious feedback on frequent writing assignments. Further, it needs investments in infrastructure and time, appeals for prepared teachers and professors for subjects that are out of conventional pedagogical structure (for example, requires being prepared on study for women, religion, Islamism, Christianity, Judaism, on different cultures and traditions, for the pre university education system as for the higher education). Nussbaum highlight the fact that in general, universities are not ready to expand their curriculum with subjects of this kind, especially in Europe, and even when they are included, have not a secure place.

Another difficulty related with higher education that must be pointed out is that universities are largely concerned with competition: "Universities recognize that there is an emergent ranking of institutions on a centrality/marginality continuum. The press for reputational work that benefits the institution is explicitly required." (Smith & Sachs, in Smith & Wexler, 1995: 196). In this competition, reflected and sized by the number of student's employment after the graduation, the focus is on offering those courses that have a guaranteed success. The subjects and activities that liberal education promotes have not such a reputation. For these reason, they are often neglected

“Positive” Difficulty

While much more attention is giving the need for internationalism of higher education, and in the same time, the shift from internationalism to globalization, for example through mobility of students and joint programs, Birtwistle (2009), try to aware of the risk and uncertainty that it carries out, too. “A joint venture to establish a joint degree programs faces legal obstacles as well as educational challenges” (*Ibid*: 19). According to him, we should take the necessary steps to identify and evaluate them, while through the most important is enabling students how to cope with the cultural differences, which must be analyzed and categorized in a variety of ways: “Preparation of the participants for the style of experience should help to lessen any cultural antagonism to it and therefore minimize adverse feedback”. Liberal education must seen as a very good opportunity.

Conclusions

“Modern life derives its momentum from three interrelated sources: science, specialism and industrialism. So, our ideas and our activities now come from science, but our ideals are traditional.” (Lindeman, 1926). The critics of liberal education define it as “out of touch with the age of science and technology”, “separates reason from emotion, thought from action, mind from body, and education from life” (Mulcahy *et al.*, 2015: 72). But racism, hatred, segregation, terrorism, wife beating and gender discrimination, child abuse, child war, child labor, corruption are still dominated cultural practices in many countries. We have to accept that democracy has to be concerned both with majority rule and the rights of minorities. (Sen, 2009: 352). The relationship between majority rule and the protection of minority rights, both of which are integral part of democracy practice, is particularly dependent on and priorities. (Sen, 2009:337).

Schools and universities must play an important role through revised their priorities and respond with accountability the violent shift in growth of nowadays. Today’s teachers are shaping future citizens in an age of cultural diversity and increasing internationalization. (Nussbaum, 1997: 6). Our opportunities and prospects depend crucially on what institutions exist and how they function. (Sen, 1999: 142)

One of the best way is to adopt and integrate liberal education, which enables three basic “aspects of individual functioning: as a human being, as a participant in a system of cooperative production, and as a citizen of a democratic state” (*Ibid*, Otto and Ziegler). Developing this ideal further and thinking about how to modify it in the light of our times is one of the most exciting and urgent tasks we can undertake as educators and citizens. Nussbaum, 2004).

In this paper, it’s emphasizes the need to see liberal education under an integrated analyze: method, aim and philosophy; must be part of educational curriculum; must be involved as philosophy, able to contribute with its ideas and arguments; should be embedded to the aims of education. For this, liberal education must be at the top agenda of the education policy and public debate. But in order to influence public politics, the number of publications must be increased, offering pro and against arguments, concepts and information, priorities and analysis. Further, in the domain of “liberal education” is not very clear how we can make it possible especially for poor countries, where the education budget is extremely low and even the “education topic” is very often out of the public debate. Given the laudatory rhetoric that surrounds the discourse of knowledge and understanding – and the traditional idea of liberal education in particular – it is also inexplicably blind to the possibilities and to the requirements of education for personal autonomy, democracy, and social transformation for the better. (Mulcahy *et al.*, 2015: 74)

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