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# MULTILINGUAL ACADEMIC JOURNAL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



## Educational Aims and Professional Fulfillment

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### Abstract

The present study records the level that employability and professional fulfillment in the globalized post-modern social era should be considered in the formulation of educational aims. The purposefulness of the gravity in the professional dimension of the given knowledge and in the labor market priorities/needs for employment is justified. It is maintained that the strategic keystones during the stage of preparation should be based first on the instillation of the cognitive and technical skills which the profession demands and second on the formation of the psychological and social traits of personality.

**Keywords:** Profession, Education, Aims, Skills, Society.

### Introduction

The determination of education aims starts from the antiquity and continues until today to capture the interest and to raise the concern first of the scientists in the fields of Pedagogy, Sociology, Anthropology, Philosophy, Psychology, Economics, comparative and cultural studies, second of the political officials and third of every concerned citizen.

Plato is the first intellectual who systematically delved into education, presenting an entire educational system, which he founded and developed in his two longest works, the *Republic* and the *Laws*. His educational philosophy is grounded in his vision of the ideal state, wherein the individual is best served by being subordinated to a just society. Within this context, he asserts that it is the formal education's responsibility first to identify children's skills and natural abilities and second to significantly improve these skills and abilities, in order to prepare every person for the suitable profession and generally for his/her duty in the society as a citizen (Resp, 327a-330c, 433a, 519e-520a, Menex, 238c, Criton, 51b-c).

The educational concepts of Plato's student Aristotle are detailed mostly in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and in the *Politics*, in which the philosopher introduces a unified educational system, aiming to develop the natural skills of the individual, enhance his talents so as to accomplish the education of a man as an individual and mainly as a good citizen (*Pol.* 1260b 15-18, 1337a 21-30). The cultivation of the soul, the implementation of ethical behavior and the pursuit of virtue will safeguard both the individual's serenity and stability of the city. Only thus, happiness as the ultimate educational goal can be achieved (*Pol.* 1310 a12-17, 1334b 24-26).

At the same period of time, Isocrates analyses his educational thoughts mainly in *Against the Sophists* and *Antidosis*. He maintains that education should focus on the development of sound judgment and on the shaping of wisdom, in order to enable people to confront the hardships of life effectively and to adopt opinions which contribute to the implementation of excellent acts (Soph, 17, Nik. 41, Antid, 184, 271). The orator, considering that the only way to secure peace and prosperity in Greece is the moral reform, appears as a devotee of the moral purpose of education, through which the shaping of a virtuous, selfless and honest individual can be achieved (Antid, 281).

Thenceforth, through the ages, investigating the role and purpose of education has become a fairly attractive topic among the scientific community. In our era an agreement -in general terms of course- has been reached concerning the aims and functions that the formal education should undertake and implement. Among the almost endless, as White noted (1982: 2), list of aims, we can include socialization, skills transmission, spiritual development, shaping of personality, instilling moral values, facilitation of professional and social role selection and undertaking.

However, an intense debate is developing regarding two aspects: first, priorities given and second means selected or processes followed or policies implemented. As far as the first aspect is concerned, many argue that educating children is as much a matter of shaping character as of imparting knowledge· some believe in a balance between intellectual and practical achievements or between the arts and the sciences· many consider individuality or personal autonomy as of first importance, while some stress art and culture or moral character and others promote the stimulation and guidance of self-development, the development of potentialities and the growth of understanding· also, many argue that the main role of education is to take over responsibility for the socialization or the citizenship process primarily carried out within the family· moreover, several scholars speak of the needs of ensuring a literate and numerate workforce, emphasizing on the purposefulness of the professional dimension of the given knowledge and on excellence within specialisms.

This last dimension was acknowledged by prominent sociologists. Specifically, Durkheim (1983) argued that in industrialized society education provides the opportunity to learn skills that will place the individual in an advantageous position for the future· he concluded that one of the ways to maintain the division of labor is that schools should sort students into skill groups, encouraging them to take up employment in fields best suited to their abilities. Similar was, more than half a century later, Parsons' approach (1954), who stated that an important education purpose was to inculcate certain technical skills and requirements and separate out potential workers for different points of entry to the labour market. He argued that occupational decision making occurs when people have achieved first an accurate understanding of their individual traits, second knowledge of jobs and the labour market rational and third an objective judgement about the relationship between their individual traits and the labour market. Generally, since the 1960s a gradually growing understanding among scholars concerning the fundamental role of education to the reinforcement of employability has been observed. In such a theoretical direction, Eliot (1965: 69) advocated that education aims mainly to prepare a child to make a living (for a vocation), to equip him/her to be a good citizen, to develop his/her powers and so enable him/her to enjoy a good life. Three decades later, Taylor (1997: 15) noted that high quality secondary provision is an essential basis for the vocational and specialized education and training

necessary for the competitive success of individual countries within world economies. More recently, Winch (2002) recognized the development of a particular conception of education, which involves a significant vocational aspect, with two aims: individual fulfillment through employment and social well-being through economic prosperity.

The gradually growing body of literature arguing for the pivotal role of secondary education to to the reinforcement of employability made Zinser (2003) conclude that there is general consensus that career skills should be taught in high schools. On the contrary, Cohen (2006) recognized a lack of consensus on the desired content and aims of basic and secondary education, as many schools do not sufficiently emphasize such skills. This estimation seems to reflect more the reality, while the scientific community has not unanimously concluded yet to the education level that the instillation of employability skills should be implemented. Even though it is becoming increasingly important for graduates to be able to apply the knowledge and skills learned in education institutions to the workforce (Crebert et al. 2004a), surveys consistently show that, because many high school graduates do not meet employers' standards in a variety of academic areas as well as in employability skills, they are not prepared to enter the workforce (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2003; Crebert et al. 2004b; National Association of Manufacturers, 2005; Peddle, 2000; Peter, Hart Research Associates, 2005). Thus, Harpe's et al. (2000) conclusion that the existing undergraduate programs are not producing graduates with the skills required in order to be successful in their careers is valid.

### **Educational Aims in the Post-Modern World for Professional Fulfillment**

Education, considered as the keystone for a country's progress and development, cannot be excluded from the current trends and not stay in line with the varied demands and high expectations of modern society. In the postmodern globalized world and the "information society" (Bell, 1973) educational systems cannot remain unchanged· education policy should be established under the careful consideration of the existing social reality. The more decisive implications of globalization for education lie, according to Morrow and Torres (2000: 35), in three areas. First, the changing role of the state in the global, informational economy in response to the failures of the previous welfare-state. Second, neoliberal pressures to develop educational policies that attempt to restructure postsecondary educational systems along with entrepreneurial lines, in order to provide flexible educational responses to the new modes of industrial production. Third, a related call for the reorganization of primary and secondary education and teacher education along lines that correspond to the skills and competencies ostensibly required by workers in a globalizing world. Indeed, the expectations specifically about the role of workers in society naturally and inevitably make more necessary first the linking of national education policies and plans to employment under a neoliberal framework and second the adaptation of educational objectives to market demands for new skills and types of work which will be applied to the globalized work environment. It is necessary, therefore, that the objectives of the typical formal education should become more flexible and adjustable to new data, by equipping learners with the skills to manage globalization demands and to survive in the competitive labor market. Especially as far as the second part is concerned, which of course stems largely from the first, it is necessary to promote the employability of each trainee as a main task in education through the transmission of the skills required in the workplace (Shavit and Muller, 1998).

The division of labor and specialization of roles and duties is an important characteristic of developed societies. A malfunctioning educational system would be one in which individuals are not assigned the most appropriate role, and will hence lead to inefficiency. This implies the need to prepare young people for different roles and to assimilate different kinds/types/dimensions of knowledge and skills which are required by the specific roles they will undertake. This preparation procedure is directly related to the function of skills transmission, which is one of the main purposes of education, and includes the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills which result (in the context of social division of labor) in specific occupations leading to two outcomes. First, this function of skills transmission enhances the national economy and creates better conditions of life, as in the globalized economy the creation of educated manpower/work force reinforces the competitive advantage of states (Brown et al. 1997: 8). Generally speaking, the economic aims of education (even from its early level) are as legitimate as any other aims, and by no means should be downgraded. Second, the level of usefulness of the transmitted skills determines the degree of achievement of the individual's professional and social aspirations, as the rapidly changing conditions in the workplace demand the update of knowledge. Only under this condition can the individual increase the odds of improving his/her professional and social status in accordance with his/her career requirements and expectations.

Employment in the post-industrial society is characterized by the growth of the tertiary sector of services comparing with the secondary industrial production sector, first as far as the number of employees and the percentage of GDP are concerned and second as far as the general restructuring of jobs is concerned. This restructuring along with the scientific and technological development contributed to the liberation of man from the direct production process and to the subsequent undertaking by him the role of supervisor, designer and developer of the overall production process. The result of this stage of social evolution in macro-social level is the radical change in the economic, professional, political and cultural structures of society and also the shaping of a new reality, which, as noted by Kelpanides and Vrinoti (2004: 71-72), has led to two necessities. First, to the acceleration of the preparation of human resources to undertake scientific and technological roles. Second, to the preparation of the non undertaking scientific roles society members for the assimilation of new knowledge and technologies, in order become active users of the potential opportunities offered by their society. A necessary condition, however, for the use and exploitation of these opportunities is at least a basic level of literacy, which of course nowadays is far higher than ever before.

As far as the first necessity is concerned, namely the adequate preparation of young people for the undertaking of scientific and technological professional roles, the orientation of education, according to Castells (1996: 204, 229), should not stem from the needs of the post-industrial economy, but from the needs of the dissemination of information (informationalism). This reality has led to the gradual decline of the traditional manufacturing employment and to the significant increase of work that require specialized academic knowledge. In this development and through the internationalization of markets and the reduction of national borders, it is observed that a remarkable salary difference (mainly in multinational companies with a large workforce) between well-trained skilled workers and unskilled exists in countries with standardized, stratified and professionally orientated education system (Zakhilwal, 2000). Moreover, three things can be observed: first, the factor "qualifications" reduces the risk of being unemployed and increases, in a situation of unemployment, the chances of a quick finding o new

job (Gangle, 2003). Second, there is a closer connection between the level of education and the quality of the first job· third, the level of labor mobility is usually lower in scientifically trained employees (Pollmann-Schult and Mayer, 2004).

Of course, in today's globalized labor reality, the changing of working environment is not an uncommon phenomenon even for a scientifically qualified individual. Therefore, education should promptly prepare young people for the possibility of following flexible career paths during their working lives (International Labour Organization, 2000). As eloquently noted by Bauman (1998: 147-148), "the flexibility of work seeking means freedom to move where the most fertile meadows are and abandonment of the litter and waste scattered in the land of the previous working settlement, in order to be cleansed by the indigenous." Thus, in response to the rapidly growing labor requirements and opportunities, the adaptability and flexibility and the capacity of efficiency and creativity in different working environments are considered as a means for the prevention of unemployment, especially in highly competitive societies (Burbules, 2000: 22).

At the same time, as the economic development of post-industrial societies and the consequent reinforcement of employability in these societies relies on the use of technology (mostly computer science) and physical and mathematical sciences, emphasis should be given in preparing young people to act in that type of society. Such preparation presupposes the acquisition at list of the basic and general knowledge of these sciences, the access to and use of computer and the development of e-business. Moreover, as the world of work undergo significant changes so quickly and is becoming so demanding, competitive and complex, only the continuous monitoring and learning of the changes, the updating of knowledge and generally the updating of people's cognitive readiness for the changing conditions in their professional field can lead to the improvement of the occupational and social status in accordance with the requirements of their career (Delors, 1996; Scottish Office, 1998: 4; Wilms, 1996). Of course, the objective of the school (integrated into the world of information and technology and into the knowledge society) is not only the learning of the adequate management of knowledge and technology, but also their critical, analytical and synthetic utilization, that will deliver new ideas, innovative actions and will lead to increased productivity and enhancing employability (Baumol, 2002).

The creative participation of the individual in the occupational group and its efficiency is not only a result of the acquisition of specialized skills (i.e. cognitive and technical skills necessary for the exercise of a profession) but also of the shaping of personality characteristics (namely the acquisition of broader social skills and competences). Thus, education should not aim only to instill profound scientific knowledge, but also to include elements that shape and develop behavioral characteristics, values and principles, to create social incentives in order to facilitate the young person's preparation for a smooth and creative integration into social relations especially in the working environment. Referring to this, Bowles and Gintis (1976: 131) assert that the structure of social relations in education not only inures the student to the discipline of the workplace, but also develops types of personal demeanour, modes of self-presentation, self-image, and social-class identification which are crucial elements of job adequacy.

According to Robinson (2000) employability skills are generally divided into three skill sets: (a) basic academic skills, (b) higher-order thinking skills and (c) personal qualities. In the first skill set, reading, writing, math, oral communication and listening abilities are included· in the second skill set, learning, reasoning, thinking creatively, decision making and problem solving capacities

are considered· the third skill set includes responsibility, self-confidence, self-control, honesty, integrity, flexibility, adaptability, team spirit, self-motivation, and good work attitude, namely the personal qualities required for the function of each working group -every member of which must be associated positively to the production of the collective result- and evaluated as necessary for the professional development and the completion of the individual. Particularly, the ability to implement a successful collaboration, to communicate effectively, to work on a team, to possess interpersonal efficiency and generally to work cooperatively with people of different personalities, race, sex, across different authority levels and organizational divisions are the skills most desired by employers (Billing, 2003). Suarez-Orozco (Cohen, 2006: 252) adds, thereon, that three are the prerequisites which will safeguard the accomplishment of a successful career in the 21st century: First, the capacity to work with others on complex problems that often cut across disciplinary boundaries; second, new forms of transcultural understanding; and third the development of hybrid identities indexed by the ability to navigate across discontinuous or incommensurable linguistic and epistemic systems.

Furthermore, considering that the overall result, production or performance in a business, firm, corporation, enterprise or department is considered as the sum of the contributions of its members, it is important that each of them should embrace common goals and comply with the rules, norms and codes of conduct at the specific given workplace whether it is personally pleasing or not. Generally, the acceptance of the prevailing rules of a group has, according to Kelpanides (2002: 233-234), a formal and an informal side. The former include the consistency with the obligations undertaken by the team member and the avoidance of selfish behaviors. The latter concerns the climate shaped by the positive attitudes of sympathy and acceptance of other members and by the reduction of tensions occasionally generated. The level of utilization/ application/ implementation of professional qualifications, skills and knowledge depends on the ability of individual's integration, contribution and operation in a group. In this context, therefore, a key concern of education is the development of the capacity of collaboration and team spirit as attitudes necessary for the proper functioning and coherence of a workgroup (Dunne and Rawlins, 2000; Popkewitz, 2000: 171) and moreover the acceptance of the social presuppositions of communication and cooperation with other people as a result of the internalization of the dominating values and normative principles of society.

## **Conclusions**

Based on the previous arguments and assumptions, it is essential that formal institutionalized educational process should emphasize the vocational dimension of the provided knowledge and the requirements of labor market for employment. Preparation phase should begin in the elementary schools with a realistic picture of the world of work and should also have dual orientation. The first orientation should be the transmission of cognitive and technical skills necessary for the practice of a profession· the second should be the shaping of personality characteristics, namely the wider social skills and competences for social inclusion and in particular for vocational integration. The first priority axis involves the concern about the person's knowledge acquiring and assimilation that will enable him/her to undertake scientific and technological professional roles, knowledge needed in the labour market. The second axis includes behavioral traits, personality characteristics, attitudes and values, namely the psychosocial skills necessary to utilize his/her academic qualifications.

This theoretical standpoint in favor of the emphasis that education should place to facilitate young people's employability must not be considered as contradictory to education's humanitarian dimension, virtues cultivating and personality development. Of course, the concern that pervades part of the scientific community is understandable, when it is realized that knowledge, technological competence and intellectual creativity in general are promoted as commodities-merchandise (external to the goods of knowledge and of rational and critical thinking) and are propounded to serve the purpose of increasing productivity and business profitability (Abbot, 2008; Bagnal, 2000; Fitzimons, 2000; Heath, 2000; Karavakou, 2011). Indeed, such a concern is founded, since it is valid to a great extent. However, technical and scientific training emphasizing professional fulfillment, as it had already been noted by Freire in the early 70ies (1972: 157), it is not necessarily contradictory to humanistic education provided that science and technology are at the service of permanent liberation, of humanization. Besides, if the educational process obtains pragmatic and realistic content so as to be closely related with the contemporary conditions and needs of the globalized society and with work activity, does not necessarily imply instrumental- mechanistic treatment of human personality and its potential. This is true, because syllabuses and curricula in this context do not only lead to the acquisition of encyclopedic knowledge or even to the strict specialization of the individual in a particular/concrete field of knowledge. On the contrary, as was stated by Hirst (1974: 47), they are constructed so as to introduce pupils into the interrelated aspects of each of the basic forms of knowledge, to cover at least to some extent the range of knowledge as a whole, to instill wider social skills, in order to facilitate the creative participation in a professional team. Thereby, the creation of the educated individual can be accomplished, an individual whose identity contains the specific knowledge and skills concerning his/her surviving needs and occupational activity, and also the perceptions on issues and phenomena of broader interest. Only with such equipment can the communication with current reality and the understanding of the world be facilitated and finally achieved. Only with such equipment can the successful transition to employment and the effective career management thereafter be accomplished.

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