

## AXIOLOGICAL PREMISES IN EVALUATING INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL PARADIGMS. A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH\*

Anca Florea\*\*

**Abstract:** *The main purpose of this paper is to examine the recent tendencies in analysing the axiological grounds of educational paradigms, inspired by the historical, ideological and social context of postmodernity. My aim is to explore the particularities of a certain type of reflexivity targeted by educational paradigms, determining the expectancies that experts have on orienting education towards autonomous behaviours, quality, creativity. I will explain larger European coordinates and specific, Romanian cultural implications of educational paradigms developed under the edge of postmodernity, emphasizing the urgency to embody constructivist approaches (from social and epistemic standpoints) in educational trends. An important contribution of my research is represented by the study of two core-concepts – reflection and reflexivity – as axiological coordinates of educational paradigms, for which reflection is understood as the process of mental construction of interpretations, whereas reflexivity depicts a metacognitive process of analysing and contrasting such interpretations.*

**Keywords:** axiology, educational paradigms, reflection, reflexivity.

To meet the purpose of the current study, it is imperative to evaluate the role the philosophy of education plays in developing educational paradigms and management styles, as well as in educational leadership. In fact, the innovative aspect of the current study resides in devising some principles and good practices relevant to the process of building educational policies for pre-university school management, inspired by the philosophy of education and centred around the concept of 'axiological imperative'. In

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\*\* Ph.D Candidate, University of Bucharest; e-mail: florea\_ancamaria@yahoo.com

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order to meet this requirement, it is necessary to analyse several aspects related to the synergy between the philosophy of education and the educational management.

As Nigel Tubbs<sup>1</sup> also noted, the contest of faculties, put forward by Kant, reminds us of how essential education is in the process of identifying the high goals an individual sets oneself in the pursuit of knowledge. Education, as an inherent condition of personal development, is a permanent concern for philosophical investigation. Tubbs's line of thinking is that 'philosophy entails thinking, thinking means negativity, negativity equates experience, while experience equals learning experience as negativity, in thinking, as philosophy'<sup>2</sup>. Nonetheless, according to the author, this relation is possible as long as the philosophy of education starts from the premise that the educational process per se is neither about the subject, nor about the system, but about the truth. A Kantian and Hegelian preoccupation to a large extent.

At the same time, even if the purpose of the educational approach is, from an epistemic point of view, to identify the truth, at least from a formative point of view, the goal consists in acquiring *phronesis*, that is practical wisdom, which has nowadays been reduced to a sum of competences, skills. In terms of Aristotle's ethics, practical wisdom enhances the role of the intellect in the field of concrete activities, as the equivalent of *sophia*, in the field of theory. Therefore, the purpose of education could be to acquire intelligence, with *phronesis* leading the subject to a better life through rational actions both critically and reflexively deliberated. In this way, an educable person becomes a '*phronimos*', that is a good deliberator: an arbiter of possible worlds in problematic, concrete situations operating with principles, values and causal relations. Aristotle's legacy in the philosophy of education is undeniable: he pushed for making the *paideia* approach a source of intellectual virtue. What is thus expected from an educable person? Unquestionably, to become 'pragmatic flexible, context-dependent, action-oriented'<sup>3</sup>.

According to Costello, by means of these features that we consider ideal for an educable person, we actually wish - through the devised educational policies - to increase:

- a) the receptive and phenomenological reflection;
- b) the cognitive-intentional reflection;
- c) tacit or implicit reflection;
- d) critical reflection<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Nigel Tubbs, *Philosophy's Higher Education*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2005, XXI.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Anne Kinsella and Allan Pitman, *Phronesis as professional knowledge: Practical wisdom in the professions*, Rotterdam, Sense Publishers, 2002, 2.

*Phronesis* means capitalising on all these forms of reflection. Still, one question arises: is the educational policy ‘phronetic’ enough? For instance, Flyvbjerg<sup>5</sup> thinks it is not. Although we should take a more prudential approach in devising educational systems, these somehow lagged behind Aristotle’s desideratum. This is also due to the fact that, as Costello puts it, educational policies left the individual with a desire of a better life, as a model of social conduct and personal fulfillment. Maritain, Copleston, Taylor, all insist on the crucial relevance of these two concepts in the development of educational policies.

From my point of view, there is also a ‘psychological’ ruin at work here as far as these notional relations are concerned: what contemporary educational policies seem to minimise is the ethical goal of prudential thinking and of practical wisdom that is happiness. Nobody wants our current educational systems to produce ‘happy’ individuals, but individuals ‘equipped’ with as many qualities and skills as can be interdisciplinary valued. Therefore, the fundamental question that narrows the horizon of this research is to what extent the return to these concepts of traditional education is still possible today and if so, what place does innovation have in all this fundamentally-conservative, or at least paideia approach.

Costello's merit is to have synthesised the key concepts of the philosophical and pedagogical literature that represent a good reference of phronesis and that can be implemented in the design of educational policies:

Author	Concept
Kinsella	Reflection, judgement
Flyvbjerg	Praxis, lived experience, power relations
Maritain	Common good
Gadamer	Practical commitment, interpretation
Levinas	Empathy for the ethical face of ‘the Other’

This selection leads us into thinking that the revival of prudential thinking and of practical wisdom in educational policy enables us to perceive education in terms of a relational process, which shapes individuals in such a way as not to make them 'states of exception' in society, but part of that society. Costello believes that views such as

<sup>4</sup> See G. J. Costello, *The Philosophy of Innovation in Management Education: a Study Utilising Aristotle's Concept of Phronesis*. In "Philosophy of Management", 18, 215-230 920190, p. 216.

<sup>5</sup> B. Flyvbjerg, *What is Phronesis and Phronetic social science?* 2018 <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/what-phronesis-phronetic-social-science-bent-flyvbjerg-%E5%82%85%E4%BB%A5%E6%96%8C/>. Last access date: 20<sup>th</sup> of August 2020.

those held by Moussavi and Kermenshah<sup>6</sup> further convince us that innovative educational systems are more of a macro problem of instructional design and the building of educational policies, strictly related to two key concepts: knowledge and learning. The fact that they are inherent to practical wisdom, yet more increasingly explored outside it in the design of educational systems leads us to a second set of concepts, reason why the philosophy of education must be urgently reconsidered as a philosophy of innovation. From this point of view, Owen's (2013) concept of responsible innovation colonizes any approach to devise public educational policies.

According to Costello, the philosophy of education as a field of innovation, at least in educational management, must fit the following key concepts:

<b>Author</b>	<b>Concept</b>
Huhn	Ethics of virtue
Moussavi & Kermenshah	Interdisciplinary learning
Sand	Student-centred learning
Kamisjima, Gremmen & Akiawaza	Practical intelligence and Aims
Hammershoj	Affective process, enthusiasm

The author is right to think that the main concern experts in educational policy seem to have today is to keep as moral as possible in the design of hyper-bureaucratic mechanisms of educational governance. However, I believe that there is an extraordinary focal point between the ancient tradition of driving forward practical wisdom as a desideratum of any educational approach, and the modern paradigm of the need to train educable individuals adapted to problematic contexts, oriented towards resolving conflicts and difficulties of daily life, that is pragmatism. It is true that the Greek roots of education now correspond to an American orientation, which Dewey represents formidably in the arena of contemporary philosophy. American pragmatism often made Dewey seem like a 'prophet without honor'<sup>7</sup> in Europe. And yet, his formula of interpreting education shows us that Western civilization is focused on the need to make education a reactive field to morality and democratic institutions. After all, institutions are reduced to people, and their education is what fulfills the formal purpose of these institutions or social structures. The fundamental problem the philosophy of education has to deal with is, according to Dewey, the right

<sup>6</sup> Arash Moussavi, Ali Kermanshah, *Innovation systems approach: A philosophical appraisal*, in "Philosophy of Management", 17 (1), 2018, p. 59-77.

<sup>7</sup> John Childs, *Review on John Dewey: Lectures in the Philosophy of Education, 1899*, in "Studies in Philosophy and Education", Vol. 5, Issue 1, 1966-1967, pp.60-76.

understanding of the relationship between means and ends in any human action or experience, by engaging responsible thinking. Pragmatism concludes, under the circumstances, that an educable person cannot be trained to think responsibly unless he is confronted with life situations in which morality is not presented as a rational exercise unless it takes into account the changing dynamics of contingent elements that reduce a problem to a tension, therefore to a decision.

Education must teach an individual how to overcome a *Krisis* that is a context in which the perceptive power is the only factor that can eliminate a tension and the only foundation to build a good life on. However, Dewey set his sights on a higher goal: how can we 'institutionalise the process of this revolutionary thinking'<sup>8</sup> in schools? It must be stated that in American pragmatism 'philosophy is not one of opportunism', given that we are interested in what we choose in certain specific conditions of our experience in order to work towards a goal; 'experimentalism' and 'hypothetical thinking' form 'the broader policies and the more sustainable goals of our conduct'.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, in light of these considerations, Childs assumes that 'educational policies are integrations of social interpretations'<sup>10</sup>, which is precisely why, when Dewey proclaims 'schools are, in many ways, the most conservative institutions of all social institutions, perhaps even more conservative than the family'<sup>11</sup>, what is expected is, in fact, the opening up of educational systems and their policies towards a more inclusive approach to good life: social life and individual life interrelated.

At the same time, we know that Dewey distinguishes between the so-called 'stationary' and 'progressive' societies, where the difference is made by the education specific to each and every one of them: 'a progressive society more and more paves the way for individualism in education: it educates young people for change'<sup>12</sup>. For Childs, Dewey does not make this difference in order to be able to introduce an operational distinction that would have been much more useful in trying to understand the relevance of the philosophy of education in the design of educational systems and policies, that is the one between a desirable and an undesirable society.

As far as I am concerned, it was not even necessary, as what escapes his argument is the fact that both conservatism and progressivism are politically-driven attitudes in educational environments by mentalities and ideological beliefs of governments that support a particular educational system and, implicitly, a certain policy of their own. Yet in keeping with the observations of this intertextual

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 65.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

controversy, we should admit that Dewey offers a perspective which, although launched in 1916, is still valid today: 'the conception that education is part of a process and of a social function makes no sense as long as we do not define the kind of society we have in mind'<sup>13</sup>. Dewey's theory, which is set forth in 'Schools and Society' suggests that an undesirable society is one where subjects present many vulnerabilities and deficiencies in communication.

Therefore, the role of education is to improve the communication between these in order to stimulate democratic participation in the construction of our society. What pragmatism pursues thus is, above all, 'education as adaptation', in accordance with the impulses, behavioral patterns and desires of the subjects as civilizational actors. On the other hand, in Dewey's view, education must never be additive, that is, to be added to an experience or to some values: it must simply create them. Education is the reconstruction of an experience at the moral level through the right combination of means and goals in the pursuit of welfare, as well as of the scientific principles underlying the methods of discovery and testing of means, and, respectively, of the democratic ideal according to which any rational being is capable of developing himself/herself in accordance with standards and well-established<sup>14</sup> principles. For Dewey, education is not a simple augmentation of experience, but a 'qualitative reconstruction' of it, without isolating its social and psychological implications.

Therefore, we should keep this 'pillar' in our minds, as it is necessary in shaping an almost ideal version of the process of building educational policies for the management of pre-university institutions.

### **Axiological imperatives for the building of educational policies according to educational paradigms**

Therefore, we have these two classic lines, which I prefer in the building of educational policies: the Aristotelian-inspired one and the Deweyan-inspired one. We are, at the same time, aware that 'what is possible for us, here and now, is not possible in the same way as it could have been for Plato, Rousseau or Dewey'<sup>15</sup>. For Griffiths, the 'place' and 'culture' on which educational policies are built represent determinative coordinates of fitting the ideal dimension with the real-empirical one in the development of these tools. Without philosophy, the development of educational

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 67.

<sup>14</sup> See Childs, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>15</sup> M. D. Griffiths, *Facebook addiction: Concerns criticisms and recommendation*. In *Psychological Reports*, p. 520.

policies can be a 'stifling and inconsistent field, preoccupied with the tangential and the trivial'<sup>16</sup>.

What the philosophy of education imprints on the process of building educational paradigms and policies is rather 'a criticism of beliefs'<sup>17</sup>, but also a background for the conceptual clarity and precision of the sets of conditions that determine educational policy. Ethics in educational policy, but also the philosophy of education, are 'areas connected to the idea that in society the ideas of fairness, equity and social justice matter'<sup>18</sup>.

Therefore, from this point of view as well, the configuration of educational policies will have a philosophical legacy. The final opening of this research consists in identifying some key concepts that each philosophically-inspired educational paradigm inventoried in this paper authentically reflects them as relevant for the building of educational policies.

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Fielding, *Education policy and the challenge of living philosophy*, in "Journal of Education Policy", 2000, Vol. 15, no. 4, p. 377-381.

<sup>17</sup> J. Macmurray, *The Philosopher's Business*, "University of Edinburgh Journal", XVI (2), Summer, p. 86-92.

<sup>18</sup> Tesar Marek, *On ethics, politics and philosophy of education*, in "Policy futures in education", Vol I 4 (6), p. 593-6, 2016.

