
Equality of Condition as a Pre-requisite for a dynamic and inclusive education

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DG-EAC, NESSE and EENEE Symposium on the Future Perspectives
of European Education and Training for Growth, Jobs and Social
Cohesion, Brussels, June 19-20th 2007

How Equality in Education is defined in policy terms in Europe and problems arising

■ Classical Liberal Equal Opportunities Perspective

- Equal Formal Rights – right not to experience discrimination in terms of access to and participation within education
- Limitations of the Liberal approach to rights:
 - Advantages the relatively advantaged among the disadvantaged
 - Inequalities will be distributed differently across groups but not eliminated
 - Individualises the problem of inequality - a personal pathology
 - Not concerned with eliminating substantive **inequalities of wealth, power, status and care** that produce the inequalities of opportunity in the first instance and that reproduce inequalities anew in each new generation
- Constant re-allocations and re-designations are required as inequalities are reproduced anew in each generation-this leads to a **backlash within states against marginalised groups**

The Myth of equality of opportunity without equality of condition

- ❑ ***Equality of opportunity** is about equal formal rights; it is about making sure the rules are fair for distributing educational ‘goods’ or privileges – changing **some of the faces at the top of the hierarchy***
- ❑ ***Equality of condition** is the belief that people should be as equal as possible in relation to the central conditions of their lives. It is about eliminating hierarchies of wealth, power and privilege so that everyone has roughly equal prospects for a good life.*
- International evidence is overwhelming that the more unequal a society is economically, the more unequal it is educationally; this means that there is no meaningful equality of opportunity without equality of condition

Challenges

- Contradictory roles of Education need to be recognised:
 - a) Education is a human right and a site for cultural and personal development;
 - (Education is not only a personal good it is also a public good)
 - b) At an individual level, education is a also site of intense competition for social class advantage as educational credentials are used to select and stratify students for the labour market – employment opportunities are increasingly based on credentialised knowledge
- Inequality in education is as much about the methods that the Middle Classes employ to maintain advantage as it is about eliminating Working Class and other economically-generated social disadvantages

Education as a competition for scarce resources- high grades, valued credentials etc.

- Middle class fears over losing educational privileges for their children is a serious challenge to equality policies in Europe –
- We need to focus on how and why advantage is maintained not just how disadvantaged groups are excluded if we are to address inequalities
 - There is a need to reduce levels of economic inequality and promote social solidarity - for all groups
- Certain GROUPS of people know they cannot win – Why compete and be labelled a Failure if you know you cannot win?
- There is a need to dialogue with children and young people to know how they FEEL about schooling to understand failure/drop out/low attainment etc.
 - – measuring school effects in terms of students' well being (self esteem) not just monitoring narrowly defined cognitive skills

Inequality in Education: a multi-dimensional matter

- Education is not just a preparation for life; it is a huge part of life itself (14 years) - schooling labels and defines people in the public sphere
- Inequality does not only arise from the unequal *distribution of education* as a social good
- It also arises from other institutionalised practices:
 - Lack of **Respect and Recognition** – for language, differences in ability, social background, culture etc.
 - The way **Power** is exercised – Use of traditional authority in a society governed by rational and democratic authority?
 - The failure to provide **Care** – ‘**Educare**’

*Contexts of
Inequality*

- Economically-determined relations
- Cultural Relations
- Power Relations
- Affective/Emotional Relations

*Forms of Inequality:
impact varies across
groups (all interface)*

- Inequality of resources and opportunities: – This is the generative source of inequality for low income groups -A social class issue but also an issue for all low income groups
- Inequality of respect or recognition: The generative source of inequality for those who are linguistically and/or culturally distinctive/who learn differently e.g. dyslexia,/gays & lesbians/ etc.
- Inequality of power: generative source of inequality for children and young people in schools
- Inequality of care – inside and outside of school- e.g. unaccompanied refugee children; all those for who schooling is about being defined as a failure or relative failure

Conclusion:

Four key policy objectives in creating an egalitarian education system

- ❑ **Economic Equality** goal= equality of resources –State's role in education is to eliminate the impact of economic inequality generated outside of school
- ❑ **Socio-cultural Equality** goal=equality of respect and recognition- in curriculum & syllabus design, pedagogical style, modes of assessment, in the organisation of school life: for the language, interests and/or culture of different status groups
- ❑ **Political Equality** goal=equality of power –creating democratic schools by a politics of presence, listening and respecting the views of students as well as teachers; dialogue not dictation- are we still employing 19th century authoritarian methods in schools?
- ❑ **Affective Equality (emotional context)** goal:=equality of respect for caring as a human activity both as an activity for which we need formal education and as an orientation within education itself – Educare= to nurture and to develop