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Education in our time: competency or aptitude? The case for medicine. Part I [☆]



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Abstract This paper on the role that education plays at our time begins with a statement: to be able to understand the education's core; it is necessary to characterize its society. Distinctive features of today's world, lead us to perceive it as the ruin of civilization. Based on the limitless financial gain, education has a passive quality, responsible for maintaining the *status quo* as well as preserving the degrading attributes of actual societies: individualism, passivity, competitiveness, consumerism and high vulnerability to control and manipulation. Competency or aptitude are not synonyms; they are concepts pertaining radically different approaches to the practice and understanding of education. Competency represents the current tendency of passive education, where knowledge is just about acquiring and retaining information. Aptitude refers to participatory education, described in the second part of this essay. Passive education is present in the professional competencies model, specified in curricula, profiles, levels, school activities, evaluation, the concept of progress and social consequences. The argument is that this paradigm does not foster real progress defined as the primacy of values sustaining spiritual, intellectual and moral development- and is instead accomplice of the civilization's collapse.
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PALABRAS CLAVE

Colapso civilizatorio;
Control social;
Atributos degradantes

La educación en nuestro tiempo: ¿competencia o aptitud? El caso de la medicina. Parte II

Resumen Este ensayo (en dos partes) acerca del papel que juega la educación en nuestro tiempo inicia con una afirmación: para captar lo medular de la educación en boga, es preciso caracterizar la sociedad respectiva. Así, se identifican los rasgos distintivos del mundo actual, que llevan a definirlo como “*el agotamiento y la ruina de una civilización basada en el lucro*”

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Educación pasiva;
Conocimiento;
Competencias
profesionales

sin límites”, del cual se infiere el carácter *pasivo* de la educación “realmente existente” que mantiene el *statu quo* y preserva los *atributos degradantes* de las sociedades actuales: pasividad, individualismo, competitividad, consumismo y alta vulnerabilidad al control y la manipulación. En la disyuntiva: competencia o aptitud no son sinónimos, sino conceptos propios de enfoques radicalmente distintos de entender y practicar la educación. La *competencia* es lo actual de la *educación pasiva* basada en una idea de conocimiento como consumo, acumulación y retención de información. La *aptitud* es emblema de la *educación participativa*, motivo de la segunda parte. La *educación pasiva*, presente en el modelo educativo por *competencias profesionales*, se especifica en términos de programas, perfiles, niveles, actividades escolares, evaluación, idea de progreso y consecuencias sociales. Se argumenta que, lejos de ser palanca de progreso auténtico y primacía de los valores que sustentan la superación espiritual, intelectual y moral de la condición humana, es “cómplice” del colapso civilizatorio.

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“The hell of the living is not something to come; there is one, the one that exists here, the hell we inhabit every day (...). There are two ways of not suffering it. The first is easy for many: to accept hell and become part of it to the point of not seeing it. The second is risky and demands continuous attention and learning; to seek and recognize who and what, in the middle of hell, is not hell, and make it last and give it space.”

Ítalo Calvino (1972)

1. Introduction

This is two-part essay about the role of education in our time starts from an essential question: How is education at the historical moment in which we find ourselves? To answer this question, a journey that begins with a characterization of the path followed by modern societies is made, under a dissenting perspective of the dominant one (which proposes an unstoppable and ascending human progress), that leads to qualifying the present moment as the *exhaustion and ruin of civilization based on profits without limits*¹. It is because of this “diagnosis” that it can be inferred, with some objectivity, that the characteristics of education that actually exist (and not those that each educative tendency speaks for itself), far from being a leverage for authentic progress (based on values that sustain spiritual, intellectual and moral improvement of the human condition), have “peacefully coexisted” with the collapse of civilization.

As for the dilemma of the title between competence and aptitude, these are concepts—and not synonyms—typical of two radically different perspectives on understanding and practicing education: passive and participatory, respectively.

After arguing and characterizing the deepest and most distinctive features of the present human world that support the diagnosis of a collapse in civilization, it is possible to infer that the prevailing form of education, which maintains the *status quo* and reproduces what I call the *degrading attributes* that underlie such collapse, which justifies to name it as *passive education*, whose detailed

characterization and exemplification with *professional skills* is the main component of this first part. The aptitude, cognitively based on criticism, is the emblem of *participatory education*, whose implications at a general level and particularly in medicine, and its desideratum: authentic human progress indissociable from the care of the planetary ecosystem, are the reason for the second part.

2. Current society as a mirror of existing education

Penetrating the educational systems of today’s societies, to assess their scope and limitations, merits and demerits or strengths and weaknesses requires robust and objective criteria that cannot be based on what each program states of itself. If there is something that characterizes most of these, particularly at the higher level, is the gap between the profile of graduates, usually charged with “almost superhuman” attributes and the effective results in their professional and social performance (where these attributes are absent or hardly insinuated). Hence, the need of going beyond what is placed in the formal document of any program (a priori) and scrutinizing its social effects (a posteriori). To focus and guide this search, it will be necessary to stick to this formula: “*the distinctive features of a society in a certain historical period are the most revealing indication of the type of education that prevails.*” According to this formula, to grasp the essence of the current education, it is necessary to characterize the particular society. In a globalized world ruled by the economic politics of the unrestricted opening of markets, financial deregulation, flexibility in labor contracting, and information and communication technologies², it is necessary, as a starting point, to identify the most *profound and distinctive features* which mark the societies and states of our time in many different ways, and infer and value prevailing education, with its infinity of variants and manifestations. Therefore, by giving priority to some features over others in this identification, a *dissident interpretation* is used with the so-called “negative

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