EDUCATION AND SOCIAL COHESION: RETHINKING THE RELATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the relation of education to social cohesion in sociology, and more particularly in the sociology of education. The text provides a short overview and discusses the implications of the underlying views on cohesion to societal preservation or transformation.

The concepts of cohesion express political as well as scientific concern with intergenerational social continuity through, inter alia, the functioning of institutions. Cohesion is a highly abstract concept pointing to numerous processes taking place at different levels of social life that produce the relative stability observed in society. Recently, the concept has gained momentum; and while an all-inclusive definition is still lacking, it is being used mostly as a self-explanatory concept that radiates at the same time an ideal worthy of striving toward.

The education system is viewed historically as serving the purpose of societal continuity by preparing the new members for their adult roles in society. For this purpose, new members are socialized, selected, taught, and trained. In this way, education contributes to reproducing the current organization of social relations for future generations. Social relations, however, are characterized both by equity and inequity. Thus, discussion and theorizing on cohesion involves and raises questions more implicit than explicit about social preservation or social transformation. In addition, though views and arguments supporting the relevant approaches may differ, these still show that the relation of education to society is also a political one.
1. **Introduction**

This article focuses on the relationship of education to social cohesion in sociology and especially in sociology of education in order to provide a short overview and discuss underlying perspectives and implications for social preservation or transformation.

Currently the concept of cohesion is increasingly employed, especially in documents of government related institutions, nearly all over the world, as a quick search of the internet shows. The term usually denotes the existence of social ties that keep society together, integrated, and stable. Therefore it is also implied that it constitutes a noble aim worthy of striving toward. Thus, statements relating to achieving or retaining cohesion are framed accordingly. Cohesion is a highly abstract concept, lacking a precise meaning or an agreed upon definition. Nonetheless, it is being used as a self-explanatory concept, especially in policy documents.

In social sciences and especially in sociology, cohesion has been conceived and framed in terms of social continuity; this is achieved furthermore if there exists social equilibrium and stability. Extreme conditions posed by serious conflicts such as wars are considered to be dismantling for a society. Since the inception of sociology as a discipline, theorizing on the constitution of society made visible the ties and structures that underlie a collectivity. In addition, the relationship between education and society has been a main field of study in the sociology of education since its inception; theorists had raised the question what education achieves in relation to society and in what way.

In relation to education, it is well known that since the institutionalization of the education system, in the 18th century and onwards, providing training and knowledge went hand in hand with preserving society and the prevalent social arrangements. It is thus no coincidence that today education is overtly related to

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1 Thoughts and arguments in the text are further elaborated on from an article published in 2011. The text is also based on a paper given during the European Sociological Association, 10th Conference, *Social Relations in Turbulent Times*, in Geneva, 7–10/9/11.

cohesion, viewed mainly as societal continuity and preservation in conditions of peace. The questions that arise and I shall attempt to answer in this article are: “How has education been related to societal continuity and cohesion so far? What are the underlying perspectives and how these are related to social preservation or transformation?”.

The text here is based on an overview of the scholarship in the sociology of education and a current short review of the relevant literature. Moreover, the article attempts to unravel aspects of this relationship and raise questions from a critical perspective that are important but still are not clearly articulated in the ongoing discussion of social cohesion. It has been some years now that I studied, and continue to do so, the relation of education to society in the foundational and classical writings in the sociology of education³.

The text that follows discusses, firstly, the relation of education to society in the classical writings in sociology of education; secondly, a short review follows that deals with the relevant discussion today. The third section analyses the underlying perspectives in the relevant approaches, and the text concludes with a summary and some concluding remarks.

2. Social Functions of Education

The institutionalization of the education system in 18th and 19th century aimed to provide general education, training, and skills to the general population. Setting up schooling to provide learning, however, reflected the stratification of society at the time. An example of this is to be found in the largely stratified distinction between technical-vocational and general education that has informed educational institutions. These structures permitted access to students coming from lower or higher social strata, respectively.

Scholars thought at the time that providing education would alleviate social problems, most notably extreme poverty. It was believed that combating illiteracy would eradicate these problems, as students would be equipped with knowledge and skills that could be put to use in employment. I am referring to this for this

idea has survived *mutatis mutandis* till today and often informs educational policy. The point here is that schooling with its differing structures, curricula, and teaching methods, as well as employment perspectives, reflected in general terms the division of society into higher and lower strata⁴.

Despite the intense class character of the education system, the provision of education to numerous young members of society has been considered a democratic if not a radical change in society. Historically, being educated has been viewed as the method by which knowledge is acquired and skills are trained. Educational titles became gradually more important than social origins, and paraphrasing Weber, educational titles replaced at some point in history the aristocratic titles. Additionally, pursuing the “good life” as well as preserving and cultivating culture is closely related to education. A target that is more specific to the modern world is striving at social prosperity through education. In a few words, the provision of education has been closely related to the organization of social relations in social, economic, and political terms. Some authors have viewed education as a means to preserve society as it is, while others to better it, through the application of equity principle that express ideas of social justice.

The study of the relationship between education and society has been a field of inquiry in the sociology of education, as already mentioned above. This relation was studied based upon the theoretical framework set out by the founding theorists of sociology, Durkheim, Marx, and Weber. For this purpose the concept “function” was employed in order to study how institutions are related, as well as the influence or the impact these have (and in this case education) on society⁵.

Among the most important social functions educational systems share, according to the literature, are the *socialization, reproduction of society* and *exercising social domination*⁶. These functions are significant for retaining current social ties and securing social continuity. These are also relevant for our discussion here.

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⁶ E. Drooglever Fortuijn, op.cit.
2.1. Socialization

Durkheim, as it is well known, is the proponent of “methodical socialization” as the main mission of education and its function in order to contribute to social cohesion. Durkheim is considered the founding theorist both of sociology and the sociology of education; he systematically dealt with the constitution of society and the relation of individuals to this collective entity in his work.

The disastrous effects of the First World War influenced his thinking on education as he witnessed it in France; at the same time, the French state had attempted to secularize education in order to diminish the influence of the Church. Durkheim was asking: how could society be held together? And what is the role of education in this? To answer these questions he first had to answer the question regarding the constitution of society. Durkheim pointed out that a division of labor, more or less extended (the famous distinction between “organic” and “mechanical solidarity”), and a collective consciousness (“conscience collective”) constitutes society. In his view, the latter entity consists of learning common ideals, beliefs and of morality. Schooling prepared young members of society in both domains.

The morality or ethical dimension did not mean to distinguish between right and wrong, but the ways by which individuals achieve becoming a part of a whole and at the same time act independently. Socialization commonly means the internalization of social norms and values. In the work of Durkheim, socialization takes another dimension. Drawing on the work of Kant, Durkheim argued that socialization implies that the young pupil learns to discipline himself, attach himself to groups and learn to do all these by his own, acquiring thus a sense of autonomy and independence.

A second point Durkheim accentuated is that a society is held together also because people learn to react to social stimuli in a certain, patterned manners; in doing so, individuals’ reactions become similar and thus predictable over time. Thus, similarity in behavior, i.e. acting alike, but not necessarily thinking alike, makes social relations possible.

Later on, in the 19th and 20th centuries, socialization included the attempt to forge a national identity to pupils and was expressed in civic education. In practice, it meant that schools strived to socialize their pupils, so that they would identify with the institutions governing the society of which they were members. In an-

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other work, we showed that this attempt at forging a national identity was not only the effect of colonialism, but also the impact of increased migration during the interbellum period, for instance, in the USA\(^8\).

In short, socialization points to processes that take part inside pupils’ personalities so that these are created and cultivated according to social ideals and interests. In doing so, education ties pupils internally as it were and also structurally to the society they are part of and/or live in.

Authors subsume under socialization two more functions: qualification and selection (or sorting out) of students. The first means preparing students to fulfill their social roles, most notably in employment; for this and other reasons pupils are selected (or sorted out) all along their schooling career through exams or tests.

Parsons, the American sociologist, founded his approach on Durkheim’s theory arguing that education has to create “needs dispositions” in pupils, such as the need of achievement. Individuals that attempt to succeed in socially designated fields of achievement operate towards society’s equilibrium since they have to use the accepted means of success, reinforcing all the rules on their way and strengthening current social relations. At the same time, Parsons argued that education has to teach students to feel responsible to fulfill the role they undertake, hoping that students will do the same later as adults in their work related duties. In acting like this, again people help with their actions to sustain existing social order\(^9\).

Critique to the approaches mentioned so far has been addressed by the Marxist perspective; it is argued that preparing for labor is done in a twofold manner: socializing students according to their class origin, and by structuring positions in labor hierarchically according to the hierarchy of educational titles. Bowles and Gintis, two economists who greatly influenced theorizing in the sociology of education have put forward the thesis of the “correspondence principle”. According to this, the world of labor is similarly patterned as the world of schooling: hierarchy, control, fragmentation of work and of knowledge, and educational titles that refer to different, hierarchically structured positions in labor\(^10\).

Marxist approaches set the discussion on social reproduction in the theoretical and research agenda in social sciences.

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2.2. Social Reproduction and Exercising Social Domination

A second set of functions revealing that education partakes in the field of social reproduction, as it is referred to in the literature. Here, I sum up two different functions, social reproduction and exercising social domination, as these are closely related.

Social reproduction is a term originating from the work of Bourdieu and Passeron, who published a similar title in the 1970s. Bourdieu showed with his work the various ways that society is reproduced so that existing power relations continue to exist in the next generation, either by teaching the culture of dominant social strata, or by selecting the few that will rise in the educational hierarchy\(^\text{11}\).

Collins’ approach is based on the work of Weber, who showed that education is related to the dominant type of power\(^\text{12}\). Collins argues that educational titles are increasingly becoming a “currency” in society, as these can be exchanged for rights (e.g. access to labor) or privileges; at the same time an educational title is used as a “credential”, because it replaces former nobility titles that accredit the kind of personality an educated person has acquired that makes him fit in the existing available highly valued positions. Furthermore, high status groups use these credentials in order to control the entrance of new members in their group\(^\text{13}\).

Today, both basic arguments of Marxist and Weberian approaches are not clearly visible in education, for all positions seem open to fair competition, while it is assumed that those who occupy such positions are more capable than those who do not. The various schools and curricula that link students from certain social origins to their prospective role in society are masked, among other things, through the lens of the so-called different ability. So how one can prove that education is not functioning neutrally?

The answer to this question came unexpectedly from Turner, a sociologist, who showed that the education system is patterned after promoting two types of social mobility, the competitive and the sponsored one. Competition is a characteristic of an education system where students are selected before passing the gates of the university. The educational systems in the United States of America, in France, and


\(^\text{13}\) R. Collins, op.cit.
in Greece, to name a few countries, operate according to the competition principle of mobility.\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{Sponsored} is the system where from a very young age pupils are selected and from thereon are promoted in a way to follow the beaten track, which “accidentally” goes along their class origins lines. One finds such systems in Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, to name only a few countries.

Still, it is not again apparent how certain mechanisms or processes are at work in a way that inequality inside schools persists and is reproduced generation after generation. Education is considered socially to be an impartial institution serving the interest of no particular social group, but of society at large. Goals, as well as the training education provides, refer to the all the members of society preparing the future citizens; the institution of education has no vested interest to let people not succeed. Thus, how does education contribute to inequality? This question till now forms a field of study and theorizing continues. The space here does not suffice to go more in-depth on this subject.

To sum it up, critical voices towards education have shown that not all has been well in schooling and that behind shiny windows inequality lurks. Maintaining existing social ties implies the continuation of existing inequality, which in the long run poses a problem to sustaining social cohesion. Some of the extensive changes that education underwent meets some of the criticisms and points to a mediating role that this institution plays in societies today, trying to retain social stability and at the same time attempting to monitor, in my view, social change up to a point.

The next section shall focus on more current research on the link of education to social cohesion.

\section*{3. Linking Education to Social Cohesion Today}

Social cohesion is a notion that took momentum towards the end of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The term seems to explain how society is held together despite its great differentiation and complexity or, as some authors argue, maybe because of this.\textsuperscript{15} In


\textsuperscript{15} Among such authors I consider is Edgar Morin, the French sociologist, who argues that education should teach that the world, culture, and individuals are highly differentiated and the existence of the human species depends upon this (see: E. Morin, \textit{Oi Efta Gnoseis Kleidia gia tin Paideia tou Mellontos} [The Seven Keys in Knowledge for the Education of the Future], Athens 2000).
social sciences, research has been done, as one could expect, in an array of themes and analytic levels\textsuperscript{16}.

A common difficulty for any researcher is to find an all encompassing and agreed upon definition of social cohesion; and secondly to find an account for this phenomenon at the same time that is not self-referential. This is not to underestimate the scientific endeavor; on the contrary, our point is to accentuate that cohesion is a highly abstract concept, referring to numerous, as well as diverse, social processes that operate perhaps simultaneously in order to produce the balance and relative stability perceived in a society. The concept of cohesion points to a level of analysis that is customarily called macro\textsuperscript{17}.

In general, and to put it simply, the term cohesion denotes that though modern societies are complex and highly differentiated, the whole, i.e. the collectivity, has acquired a balance and continues to do so generation after generation in a more or less stable manner. This phenomenon, named “cohesion”, is ascribed to the existence of social ties that, according to theorists, bind or hold people together. The purpose of institutions and social structures is to sustain social ties and the bonding between individuals. The existence of networks is viewed as sustaining individuals so that they may avoid exclusion from society.

In the literature, cohesion has been defined metaphorically as the “glue” that holds people and/or structures together (see the relevant article on Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). Dewey, a philosopher and a pedagogue, argued, using a mechanical metaphor, that school functions “as a cement in the social structure”, as he himself admits the effect education has on society\textsuperscript{18}. Other authors define cohesion as “the forces” that keep people together, or the “total field of forces” that act on people to stay in, for instance, groups. Some authors are irritated by these kinds of definitions, because, according to them, scientific inquiry ought to identify the “forces” and explore how these operate\textsuperscript{19}. The concept of cohesion, moreover, has in the meantime acquired a “feeling good flavor” that, according to some authors, actually covers up the lack of a “precise meaning”\textsuperscript{20}. In a few words, cohesion has


been defined in terms of perceiving that a society is held together. The conditions under which certain processes or structures most contribute to such an effect are still to be theorized.

In terms of studying cohesion, studies in social sciences focused in general on three levels of analysis: individual, group, and structural, or the macro level as they are customarily called\textsuperscript{21}. It is not within the scope of this article to review extensively the literature in various disciplines, so it will suffice to mention the following main points: at an individual level it is viewed that when people enter in relations with one another (within associations, for instance) they sustain the collectivity of which they are an integral part. At a group level, the literature considers the factors that facilitate group membership; for instance the notion of “relational cohesion” was employed in order to explain the conditions under which a group continues to exist even if some of its members leave it\textsuperscript{22}.

At a structural or macro level, it is argued that democracy, equity, tolerance, trust, and social justice all contribute to societal cohesion as well as institutions (such as education) that are working according to these principles. Education is considered to be contributing to cohesion by socializing and providing students with credentials and cultural and social capital, which are viewed as important means for them to participate fully as citizens in society.

However, to theorize about the macro level one has to have figured out how processes leading to cohesion work at the micro level of analysis. In a way, the scholarship is making a circular movement, returning to the beginning in order to reconsider Durkheim’s theory on socialization that, in my opinion, can account for initiating individuals to the collectivity of which they are part.

Theorists who argue that equity in society is an important attempt to identify some measurable variables, for example: “distribution of skills” and “income”. The conclusion they reach, however, is that these variables taken apart cannot account for social cohesion, for there are countries that are perfectly held together without equal distribution of skills and income. Authors also draw the conclusion that equality in education, as it is being applied in comprehensive systems of schooling is more important in promoting social cohesion than in highly selective educa-


\textsuperscript{22} Geographers at a community level, exploring the inclusion of individuals or groups, also study cohesion. Geographers argue, for instance, that the sense of belonging to the community and being respected as two mechanisms that contribute to cohesion. On the other hand, exclusion has been targeted as the force that threatens community cohesion. See: O. Lizardo, Relational Cohesion Theory [in:] Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology, G. Ritzer (ed.), 2009, www.sociologyencyclopedia.com [access: 18.10.2011].
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tional systems. The argument seems plausible, though the authors did not measure the relation statistically.

The above approach attempts to link social justice, democracy, respecting rights, and equity in education to social cohesion. It is assumed that educational systems that promote equality in, for instance, access to studies and among their students are more likely to preserve current social ties. Education is viewed as a valuable source that when it becomes available to many people, has an effect of binding them to society and its institutions. This process then ideally fosters individuals’ commitment, if not a sense of belonging to the collectivity of which they feel they are an integral and valuable part.

Returning to an individual or micro level of analysis, factors contributing to cohesion had been identified as the degree of tolerance and acceptance of others in society, and the degree of trust in the functioning of public institutions and/or in other people. Though these factors seem to be important socially, it is not certain exactly how these contribute to social cohesion, as there are examples in which the opposite relationship is existent as well. Social capital has also been seen as contributing to cohesion and education has been viewed as “the most powerful generator of social capital” in our society.

For a time, it seemed that the concept of social capital was the answer to the question of what constitutes social cohesion and how to study it or promote it with certain policy measures. Social capital is a notion that attempts to depict the interconnectedness of individuals and the mutual beneficial effect these relations may have upon one’s social positioning and/or life chances. In a discussion note addressed to a meeting of an international organization, Putnam, (who, except from Bourdieu, has extensively theorized on social capital) identified two forms of social capital that are important for social cohesion and are generated by education. He calls them “bonding” and “bridging” social capital. Bonding capital refers to a form capital that facilitates the development of relations between people. Most important, according to him, is the bridging social capital that refers to capital facilitating relations that are developed across the “cleavages” in society, that is, across strata on the social hierarchy. Education is thought of providing such a bridging capital to individuals. It is considered to be a capital because of its enabling effects in certain contexts. Furthermore, educational titles are considered to be a form of

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23 A. Green, J. Preston, J. Germen Janmaat, op.cit., p. 52–54.
24 A. Green, J. Preston, op.cit., s. 247.
cultural capital that endows individuals with rights and provides access to social goods and services. Educational titles are valued in society and may compensate for “low” social origins permitting and facilitating upward social mobility.

Reviewing some of the literature, the rationale behind the discussion and theorizing on cohesion is as follow:

a) It is generally thought that individuals who enter in relations with others sustain social ties; thereby, sustaining the collectivity together as well. Therefore, individuals’ voluntary participation in organizations and groups has been viewed as securing the bonding between individuals.

b) Among factors influencing societal participation, education and learning feature as the most important together with democratic principles that promote equality. Thus, equality of opportunities, for instance, has been seen as a principle that unites individuals, as they believe that it facilitates, for instance, their attempt to succeed socially.

c) In attempting to reach goals, individuals reinforce established rules, managing to reproduce society as well, while they refrain from challenging the status quo of which they aspire to become integral part.

d) Exclusion has been targeted as the “enemy” of social cohesion processes; thus, inclusion and related social processes have been seen as the main road to achieve social equilibrium and stability.

e) Some of the views expressed are based on assumptions; for instance, that similarity between individuals promotes consensus and unity, which ultimately leads to social order versus difference (defined variously), which leads to conflicts and social disorder that may endanger social cohesion.

Additionally, several approaches view cohesion as something positive without asking themselves that if one strives to retain the same society, what about inequality, does it have to be retained too? Additionally, in quantitative research, there is a tendency to reduce the relation of individuals to collectivity to a set of variables, which are then measured, but at the end, one finds oneself unable to measure the whole picture. At the same time, there is a lack of theorizing about societal participation and non-participation of individuals as two facets of the same phenomen-

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26 Conflicts are usually thought of as problematic and idiosyncratic of human nature. The social nature of conflicts, however, is accentuated in Weberian and Marxist perspectives. According to Weberian perspectives, conflicts arise from the struggle to acquire access or keep control over (valuable) resources. From the Marxist perspectives, conflicts constitute the “midwife” of history, especially when conceived as “class struggle”.

27 See also critique in: A. Green, J. Preston, op.cit.; A. Green, J. Preston, J. Germen Janmaat, op.cit.
enon: for example, some inclusive processes function properly and are of value when these exclude others. Such an example is to be found in university entrance exams or other selective processes. In addition, if people participate in networks and sustain relations, there is still a lack of theorizing about its inherent value, because networks do not have per definition a positive effect (whatever this may mean) on society, but also a negative, as power could be exclusively gathered in few hands that also form a network. Tolerance or democratic institutions could form indicators of cohesion, but this is again questioned, as there exists societies that are perfectly held together though they lack both tolerance and democracy.

From the outline above, it seems that education serves as social cohesion for it is a valued source used by many for various purposes. In a way, education binds individuals to society on the basis of the educational titles they acquire. Individuals are tied to the collectivity, one would say, externally as well and not only as cultivated personalities.

The next section attempts to relate different aspects, focusing on the underlying perspectives in the approaches mentioned so far.

4. The Transforming Powers of Education: Some Theoretical Notes

From the previous analysis, it seems that cohesion has been defined and framed as societal continuity. Education contributes to cohesion at various levels and in various ways that are structurally embedded in the institution and learning processes.

Founding theorist, as previously mentioned in section two, accentuated the structural aspect of education and the permanent effects socialization has on a person's life. The most current theories accentuate the instrumental side of education that is as a resource that can be used for purposes relating to citizenship and the rights accrued to it. A third aspect that, in my opinion, is important to link education to cohesion is related to cultivating reflection and critical thinking in students. These broadly defined perspectives do not operate separately in education, but are rather co-existent and sometimes contradict while others are complementary.

4.1. The structural perspective

Founding theorists in sociology tried to figure out the elements by which society is constituted and make it visible to scientific scrutiny. Durkheim, as mentioned above in section two, postulated that the division of labor and collective conscious-
ness are structural elements in every society, no matter its complexity. The mission of education was to make individual be part of it, part of society. So the function of schooling was to direct students so that they fit into the existing society.

The structural-functional paradigm, which was founded on Durkheim’s work, continues to think more or less in these terms, i.e. adjusting individuals to the existing structures. This view has fuelled discussions on the power of schooling and its more or less coercive nature, as it may considerably limit students’ freedom of action and consequently cultivation of personality.

The Marxist perspectives do not depart from this structural perspective that framed scholarship at the end of 19th and during the 20th century. Marxist approaches criticize education for it functions in a way that legitimizes current social arrangements, by teaching the dominant ideology and sorting out students according to their social class of origins. According to the familiar formulation of Althusser, the French philosopher, education as an institution is an “ideological mechanism” of the state, teaching good manners and some skills.28

The Weberian perspective also points to structural connections between education provided and power. Historically, learning, conceived in terms of Bildung (including cultivation of personalities), values personality traits of those who occupy positions of power. Education prepares students to occupy such positions while, as an institution, it can be used as source of power itself. Historically, education is used by social strata in their quest for participating in the field of power, as the work of Archer has shown.29 This perspective, based on Weber’s work, accentuates the instrumental aspect of education, both in political terms and in terms of school culture and learning in general.

4.2. The instrumental perspective

The authors mentioned above in section 3 argue that democracy, tolerance, trust, and the fairness of the institution all contribute to social cohesion. This aspect points to, from my viewpoint, the political aspect of education being used as an instrument and as a resource.

In a previous work, I analyzed the changing role of education on the basis of the changes education went through after the Second World War.30 Education,

28 L. Althusser, Theseis [Theses], Athens 1978.
30 V. Kantzara, Ta Oria tis Ekpaideysis..., op.cit., p. 130–177.
I argued, has been used to “govern society from a distance”. This idea drew on work by Smith, who argued that education is being used to “monitor” society\(^{31}\). This is possible because education is considered a resource and a neutral one for that matter, for individuals, attracting their interest to participate. Neutrality means in this case impartiality, i.e. education works for everyone the same, regardless of social origin or other characteristic except ability to learn.

In addition, education has been viewed as an institution that facilitates social and economic development, or it has been argued to do so. The request for more education by the population at-large during the second half of the 20th century went hand-in-hand with an unprecedented expansion of providing educational services, on the part of government in western countries, at a variety of levels and for a wide variety of purposes, though, at the end, all are related to one common target, i.e. labor. Today, education is most commonly used to learn a craft and receive expertise in order to secure employment. Today, tertiary education is characterized as “massive” due to the unprecedented increase of student population, more than 90% internationally in the last couple of decades\(^{32}\). Though the term massive obscures the workings of education, it shows a tendency to include more students and for many more years of schooling than a few generations before them.

Currently, education is considered a social good, access to which should be unhindered to the many up to a certain level; the selective few, who exhibit extraordinary talents, are permitted and even encouraged to continue studies at postgraduate level; the symbolic value of education has risen in western societies, though many more individuals study today than, for example, a generation before. Education, as Bourdieu, showed in his work, is a form of capital as it confers valuable rights, if not privileges, of access to labor, and, furthermore, access to highly valued positions in society.

A major aspect of a resource is its neutrality socially speaking. Education, as an institution, managed to be considered neutral in its functioning, grades and other tests are viewed as depicting the ability of students, but not the suitability of teaching or provision of educational services in a paradoxical reverse logic. There is even a hint or a suspicion that education is not functioning “properly”; its image as – non-class-related-not-having-a-vested-interested institution remains intact. Due


to its long history and the various meanings it carries with it, education manages to incorporate in its functioning different views without exploding from within as it were.

Retaining a neutral character, education functions on two principles that put into practice and translate the ideal of equality, namely equal opportunities and meritocracy. Equal opportunities, however, as a principle, does not imply and does not guarantee equality of origins or living condition each student or teacher lives in. Thus, while schooling seemingly responds to pleas for equity, at the same time, it retains its selective character, backing up and sustaining existing social hierarchies. I do not suggest that education is not impartial, but rather the class and gender character is incorporated in teaching and learning and it is not always visible and is not always so intense.

In short, education is considered a resource by individuals and groups and lately by governments. Today, many more people go to school and study for longer periods of time than a generation or two before. In this way, they are bound to society and its institutions. Unhindered access to this resource together with retaining its high value is the challenge education faces today.

4.3. The transformative perspective

The above two perspectives accentuate what education does in relation to society. Without an underlying assumption that being educated somehow changes the person in question, education would not have a social value even if viewed as purely instrumental. Learning is associated with enriching and cultivating personalities and enhancing dexterity in relation to the mastering of the environment in order to better the conditions of survival as well.

In social sciences, and especially in pedagogy and philosophy, approaches have accentuated the liberating aspects of education conceived more in terms of learning and content of learning than in terms of educational systems that provide educational titles. Approaches subsumed under the term critical pedagogy point to and teach reflection and critical thinking, a well-known example is Freire’s “pedagogy of the oppressed” approach.

In the sociology of education, I would mention Morin’s approach explicated in a work that he was invited to write by UNESCO. Morin links the dominant paradigm of learning with current social affairs and he argues that if we want to have a sustainable future for society we need to transform the dominant thinking paradigm. Learning should direct students to discover the unity of the human
species under its immense differentiation and, based on this, an ethics of global solidarity.  

The issue here is that the two perspectives above link education to social cohesion in terms of societal continuity. This brings with it the point of sustaining inequality. The transformative perspective links education to cohesion through societal changes, necessary so that the future generations are able to inherit it. Some of these changes refer to the right to access education or in relation to inequality and exploitation in social relations. Here, I do not assume that one perspective is better than the other. Rather, my intention is to hint at the different theoretical departures of different views and perspectives and what these may imply for societal preservation or transformation. Due to space limitations, I cannot but deal schematically with this issue. The perspectives also themselves change. An example of this is to be found in schooling aims. These have changed from creating cultural homogenous students to accepting heterogeneity and diverse cultural backgrounds. Equity is not based on similarity or sameness, but on accepting differences, having as an ultimate target to include as many students as possible in schooling, so as not to jeopardize current cohesion.

In short, analyzing the theoretical base or departures of different approaches exposed in this article, one finds a structural, an instrumental, and a transformative perspective that relate individual students to society and its continuity or sustainability.

5. Summary and Conclusions

Social cohesion is a term denoting that even complex societies are characterized by the existence of ties that keep people together. In doing so, individuals sustain the collectivity of which they are an integral part. Furthermore, society is characterized by stability and intergenerational continuity.

In dominant discourses, cohesion is being conceived more in terms of social continuity rather than change. The question asked is how the various parts constituting society function in such a way so as to produce a coherent, integrated whole. According to the analysis so far, education is related to social cohesion as it links and binds individuals to the collectivity in a twofold structural manner, internally as personalities and externally as citizens. Education cultivates student’s personalities according to socially accepted patterns, who ideally feel attached to social

\[33\] E. Morin, op.cit.
institutions and act according to dominant norms and values; by externally I mean that the educational titles a person earns bind him/her to society. Educational titles provide access to goods and services; most notably to labor and via employment a person is entitled to the benefits befitting a citizen. An aspect that could be studied is how the construction of an institution, which is considered neutral, that is, impartial, and the various meanings it has acquired facilitate its use by different people for different reasons, committing them and unintentionally perhaps binding them to continue to do so in the future.

Underlying the different approaches relating education to cohesion are three main perspectives, namely the structural, the instrumental, and the transformative one. The structural perspective points to intentional and unintentional effects of socialization and selecting students, the two most common functions educational systems share. Durkheim postulated that socialization creates similarity in individuals’ behavior and this makes society possible. Marxist approaches showed that socialization and selecting students is accomplished according to their social class origins. The argument in short is that working class kids receive a working class education and then a working class job. Upward social mobility is very limited. Thus education contributes to reproducing society that is based on inequality.

The instrumental perspective underlies Weberian approaches that show that education is related to social domination because as an institution is related either to the field of power and as learning is related to creating personalities after the characteristics of those who occupy position of power. Today, educational titles are employed as a credential and usually for employment reasons. All these bind individuals and groups to society of which they are members.

The transformative perspective is to be found mainly in pedagogy and philosophy that accentuates the effect learning has on the individual. In sociology of education, Morin’s approach linked the transformation of education to the transformation of society. According to him, the dominant thinking paradigm has to be replaced by another way of thinking and consequently acting, a more complex one that sees common characteristics between people. This kind of thinking will promote understanding and solidarity in order to change social relations that will make possible the survival of society in the future.

Education as an institution has expanded enormously after the Second World War and shows the concern and the vested interest of politicians to avoid extensive social conflicts that are related to access to the resource. At the same time, governments attempt to manage society from a distance through education.

The way we think today about achieving social cohesion through education has changed considerably. From attempting to create relative uniformity and homo-
geneity among people in cultural and ethnic terms, education has moved toward accepting diversity; currently it even promotes an axiomatic claim of accepting people’s difference. It seems as though differences among individuals are not considered a threat anymore to societal survival but as an enriching element instead. In my opinion, this shows that discussions and theorizing on cohesion inevitably involves questions of relations of power and issues that pertain to social change and transformation.

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