

SOCIAL CAPITAL

AND

SCHOOL

AGIS European Program

Police in the schools, students in the street

Alicante. April 2005

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SCHOOL

Timoneda Association. Alicante. April 2005

I. A HAPPY WORLD?

Almost always when one tackles, in recent times, whatever aspects shape the world of education, one clearly senses a feeling of crisis or a state of worrying on the horizon. It seems more or less accepted that something has been deteriorating in the global sense of the educational system, without which means the social agreement in the diagnosis of problems. In effect, all the reflections tackle, with more or less rigor, determined needed elements of change though in the majority of cases the analyses only center their focus on the quantifiable results that raise the fear of the incidence of the celebrated schooling failure of the population.

The valuation of the greater or lesser quality of our educational system usually goes bound to a vision centered in the academic performance of students, an aspect without doubt is substantiated in all that concerns education. Though not exclusive, one can have in mind some of the newer challenges that are planted by our complex society, in which it seems that learning is not only an activity of the transmission of information.

II. A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

In only thirty years, and at a dizzying pace, Spanish society has converted to a good distinct from which we have lived as the natural protagonists, that today we are implicated in education. It is not this place to extend the description of such a complex process, but it can't happen from above if it wants the commentary about some new elements that influence decisively the world of education.

In our opinion, there are four factors that deserve to stand out: the heterogeneity of a continually more extensive middle class, the incorporation of

women into the work world, the increase of the period of the academic life, and the transformation of Spain into a developed country, a receiver of immigration.

During the past few decades, the lines of a homogenous country have been blurred through its political circumstances. The uniformity of the educational style was very similar to what was presented in all the spheres of our culture; although never left to produce bold exceptions, the social discourse was characterized by the homogeneity of the subjected society.

Now, with the necessary historical perspective affirming that education constituted a positive value, not all Spaniards could agree to general training; school then had a differentiated task and so, was perceived as an institution whose service could provide the citizen with opportunities for progress. The development of an urban middle class favored in the same way the positive consideration of the “studies” that converted to a source of destiny towards modern society.

The new model of the family, less extensive, more consuming and still with a greater hope for life, has created the model of the “working woman” that provokes, in turn, a few changes in the educational model. Kids are sent to school earlier and stay for more time. Some of the limits of the functions begin to dilute in a way that goes on producing a “transfer of competencies” not very defined although so real that it drops at a intersection of multiple demands among those responsible for education.

Who should be charged with teaching in the first years of life? Should children arrive at school with some acquired habits? Which are the wishes that school and family should share?

It does not seem exaggerated to contest that the creation of a mutual distrust begins quite early between those that one supposes dedicate themselves to hard work, and in consequence, this can promote in the children the perception that not all of what one hears at home corresponds with what they are told at school and vice versa.

At the same time, along various legislative reforms (too many of them) an educational system goes along defining itself in that it seeks to embrace the

greater part of the population, provoking indirectly the “devaluation” of academic training, while it loses its differential value in the professional market. As strange as that seems, the school loses social prestige at the same rate that it goes universalizing itself.

There would still be more to talk about the concurrence of many other elements, like that new mass culture invites new agents in education; television, publicity, internet and a large category of supposed competitors, which animate even more the busy stage of our work.

All of these factors remind us that heterogeneity, that rhymes with complexity, and also with liberty, has settled in our culture, as a consequence of the rise of a country that now confronts the situations of a democratic state. But nothing reminds us so much as this profound transformation like the fact that the children who do so little saw their parents go to France or Switzerland in search of a better life, have now in front of them, in their classrooms, a varied mosaic of nationalities, of young adolescents whose parents also search for a better life within our country.

The extraordinary path that Spain has taken in such a short time and that has been known as an example in other countries has provided, like it could not be in any other way, a certain perplexity before the magnitude of the novelties. But as affirms D. Federico Mayor Zaragoza: *The future is our great challenge. Our great compromise. Look towards the front each day...and be alert of time, contributing solutions.*

III. THROW THE WEBS

The point of departure that joined us to professors (25) from different places (12 IES and 1 CC from the province of Alicante) is the conviction that our training as specialists from distinct areas is not sufficient to tackle the difficulties with which we encounter in our classrooms in a society as complex as our own.

Many of the situations before which we place our profession, nowadays, create the need to be aware that they occur in distinct spheres in which we know our own abilities. They require the handling of tools with which until now we

did not count, claim a training that gives light at the hour of unravelling what is happening in our classrooms, what we are ceasing to do, and what we are doing poorly. In what moment we have abandoned understanding ourselves with the adolescents, is to say, tools that help us, as much students as professors, be a bit happier in our classrooms.

Contact with specialists from other disciplines has permitted us to tackle our profession with distinct perspectives. The training coming from sociology, psychology, or clinical psychology has come to provide us with some of those keys to interpret in a more clear way the complex relations in which we find ourselves the teachers. Teamwork, the styles of learning, the resolution of conflicts, or the theory of systems are theoretic models among which we have found a common language that permits us to analyze distinct problems and tackle paths of exploration to incorporate practices in the classroom that improve our work as educators.

In education centers, breaking up effect is being produced equal to that which occurs with the families of certain troubled children. This disintegrative conflict dilutes the feeling of identity and belonging to a group. This feeling of belonging is important, independent of the group to which it pertains. When we started as a workgroup in the CEFIRE, we had in common that fact that we were professors or were tied together in some way to the PDC. We had a common objective and that made us group together. Professors, as any group, needed to have a feeling of identity and belonging. With the Timoneda Association we have found it. Now our objective is to go on spreading this feeling of identity to more professors from each one of the educational centers to which we associate. We must also go on recovering the feeling of identity of a collective that has an influence as important in the social development of the environment where we have come to live.

With SAF and therefore with the provincial government (diputación), we have found the professionals that have gone on training us in that systemic perspective necessary to make us realize the importance that our actions have in the present society.

In the world that we live, we cannot fulfill the acts of teaching and educating alone, for we need collaboration with other professionals. The professionals of SAF are for us the professors, a crux in that network of support that we need to go on weaving for the development of our work as professionals of education.

Fulfilling work in a network, one therefore creates a space for interaction where they have the capacity for, not only the new focuses of the problems, but new solutions to the same.

We ask ourselves if an intervention in the network would be capable of modifying the situations to tackle determined questions in which all, in one form or another (including not intervening), of us participate.

IV. ONE MAKES THE PATH TO WALK

During these years that we have carried on as an association, we have worked to achieve that our reason for being professionals continues to enrich and adapt itself to the new profile of the teaching profession that society demands of us. Like people and like professionals involved in education, we have risen in a spiral, supporting ourselves in a series of people that have gone on training us and providing us with our “new tools for the workplace.”

V. WHERE ARE WE?

The same as us, Timoneda as an organization also has that sensation of growing in a spiral. That sensation of finding oneself at the point of departure of the beginning where we pretended to have a more systemic vision, a more global vision of the reality of our centers. A vision of the collection that permitted us to integrate all of the available information and put it to use in our work: to educate.

We continue wanting to learn to look in the systemic way. We understand that that way of looking offers us more resources in the work that worries us; precisely those resources that do not teach us the skills that we lack day to day in the classrooms.

If our objective was before to include the greatest number of teaching professionals in this new *way of looking*; if our goal was including all of the educational community (families included) in the educational process of our adolescents, we now want to go even further.

Our progressive depth in the system has permitted us to arrive to go as far as here; it has provided us with a panoramic vision with which we can see that our objective should not only be to include the rest of the teaching professionals and families. We have become more ambitious, with the security that gives knowledge that this redefinition of objectives permits us to position ourselves in a more frank way before the challenge of educating.

We want to “wake up” the rest of the community to the fact that we are together in this; that we are together since the beginning and that we should learn to find spaces of exchange that facilitate the incredible mission of coming together in the training of citizens and the adults of tomorrow. Everyone. Fathers and mothers, local governments, neighborhood associations, security forces, social services, legal services, health services...because it is said best in an African proverb:

“The whole town needs to educate a child”

VI. SOCIAL CAPITAL

The World Bank establishes five categories of capital:

1. **Natural Capital**, that is made up of natural and biological resources, which can be used in economic processes.
2. **Physical Capital** which is constructed by man to facilitate the process of development. It includes infrastructure works, machinery, tools and tools and fundamental services like the financial system.
3. **Human Capital** is represented through the level of training and education of a human conglomerate that determines the capacity of production of each individual in terms similar to the physical capital, and to add economic value and improve personal income.

4. **Cultural Capital** is identified with the cultural profile of a human conglomerate, in terms of norms, values, popular and religious beliefs, language, institutions, fashions and customs.

5. **Social Capital** is attached to the values of association, the civic conscience, moral consent and the ethical values that, together, generate within a society an environment of confidence and an appropriate social fabric so that the members can work together in groups and organizations to achieve common objectives.

OTHER DEFINITIONS

Putnam affirms that social capital is understood through the factors that one encounters within a community and that facilitate coordination and cooperation to obtain mutual benefits.

All in all, social capital is:

The network of interpersonal (family, school, work, friends, neighbors, local authorities...) and inter-group relations that form within a society and are based on relationship and sociocultural values (confidence, reciprocity, solidarity, tolerance, honesty, etc.)

VI. 1. COMPONENTS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL:

Different factors exist that shape and compose Social Capital

1. Norms and values

Norms and Values within a community make reference to the attitudes among the citizens that facilitate their interactions. If all of the citizens in a community, for example, believe that every person should be treated with respect and valued as a participant, the community is going to involve all of the people in discussions about the issues that affect the entire citizenry. These attitudes will be obvious in the norms of that society.

The norms equally refer to those common practices within the communities and organizations. The people can have certain practices that are culturally determined.

2. Networks

A second factor that composes social capital is the system of networks. Every society has its own networks. These can weave around work, the church, sports and whatever existing club or group is in that society.

The social networks have been vibrant. Studies demonstrate that when the social networks are vibrant the crime rates are lower, the children are looked after in a better way, and political corruption is reduced; for this, it is fundamental that all of the social actors work within this network.

The networks involve a great number of people who identify with a cause, interest or common objective.

The networks appear to create agreements and spaces for exchange between the member of the same community.

3. Mutual confidence

That which facilitates interaction between citizens is confidence; this is something that permits us to feel secure enough to fulfill an exchange with another person (be it ideas, experiences, actions, among others).

4. Association, solidarity and civic conscience

Robert Putnam, in his pioneering study of social capital, demonstrated that social capital is expressed through the confidence present in the diverse social actors, the degree of association prevailing among them and the respect of the norms of civic behavior, including the care of goods and public services, all of which contributes to the promotion and maintaining of collective well-being. In a society where values of social capital prevail, according to Putnam, confidence in social relations is stimulated and the internal and external flows of information speed up, favoring the development and functioning of norms and consensual sanctions and collective public interest standing out above individualism, which is stimulated in the formation of human capital. These values reverberate favorably in the cohesion of the family, the community, and the society.

For Putnam, a society with a high level of social capital is based in the civic tradition that generates an efficient performance of the local governments, to which active community organizations owe their existence. Furthermore, a

high level of interest towards public issues, respect for the law, horizontal social and political networks, little clientelism and a high valuation for solidarity also are key components of society enriched with social capital.

5. Greater participation in the community

When Social Capital is low, citizens tend to act in an individual and isolated manner. The greater interest is the particular, and not that which implies acting in a collective or group-oriented way.

VI. 2. POSITIVE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

In this sense, there is generally a coincidence, in that the perspective of social capital allows one to visualize the positive effects that can be hoped for from the creation and use of social capital. These include social control, the creation of confidence among individuals, coordinated cooperation, the resolution of conflicts, mobilization and management of community resources, legitimization of leaders and generation of spheres of work, the prevention and sanction of those who abuse the system and the production of public goods.

This means that if one works in a community where there is confidence, values, networks and similar aspects, the result is going to be more efficient than the work realized within a community where these factors do not exist.

VI. 3. SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SCHOOL

1. Generate social capital among students

M. Nussbaum argues that students learn more among themselves than from professors.

The challenges of educating for the global citizenry require 3 abilities:

1. Ability to question oneself and one's own traditions
2. Ability to think as a citizen of the world
3. Ability to put oneself in someone else's place; empathy

2. Among the teachers and school personnel

One tries to create compact educational communities. There must drive confidence and cooperation, participation among the collection of professors

and school personnel to contribute to create social capital and therefore create compact educational communities.

3. Involvement of families

When families are involved in the school, the students do not lose and they are better. There must be the reinforcement of school advisors and the AMPAS.

Families, in turn, count three types of capital:

Financial capital (economic resources)

Human capital (education of fathers and mothers)

Social capital (quantity and quality of the relationships that they maintain with the community in which they live); the passing on of this capital contributes to the training of committed and participating citizens that continue to enrich the social capital of the community.

4. Involvement of the local community

There must be an increase in the value of these relationships, knowing the difficulties that they entail. There need to be more politicians so that the people can find them and can express their opinions and start relationships. The most difficult neighborhoods need resources and the support of the more favored neighborhoods. The mix is important to generate networks of social compromise. We have more solid generations with the ambition of doing things. This is the fruit of the school world. It is necessary to strengthen the relationships within the local community with the rest of the institutions that form part of that community (other schools, health centers, neighborhood associations, police, local governments, and libraries...).