SOME STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES

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1. Three concepts of inequality.

Unfortunately it is impossible to have a serious discussion
of this major social problem, and a growing one at that, without
at least some conceptual clarification. This is due to two
major confusions in this field: one is between learning,
education and schooling, the other between (un)equal opportunity,
social (in)justice and (in)equality. In both cases debate,
research and action have been impeded by confusing these concepts
with each other, often collapsing all three to one, talking
about "education" on the one hand and "(in)equality" on the other.
Actually, when the word "education" is used it usually stands
for "schooling" - meaning number of years and kinds of schooling
succesfully completed. And the word "(in)equality" often stands
for "(in)equality of opportunity", thereby narrowing the focus
for the debate much more than the terms used should indicate.

As a very minimum of conceptual groundwork for this paper
an effort will be made to keep the concepts in the two triples
apart.[1] Thus, learning will be seen as a new modification of
attitude and/or behavior in the widest possible sense; education
is a social relation aimed at producing learning; and schooling
as an institutional process aimed at producing education, but
also status in the form of graduates with diplomas. Education,
incidentally, may be between one person and him/herself (self-
education) - and when between two or more it can be horizontal
("learning together") or vertical ("teacher-pupil","professor-
student" relation). To link the concepts more together it may
be useful to see learning as non-formal education, and education
as non-formal schooling, or, conversely: schooling is formal
education and education is formal learning. [2]

Then, there are the concepts relating to socio-political
issues of long standing, particularly in Western countries with
their concern about equality. Just for the sake of the argument
let us agree to start with to use these three concepts as some-
thing relating to schooling rather than to learning and education:
schooling is so much more concrete whereas to talk about
"equality of learning" seems rather meaningless. It is easy
to imagine a society where everybody has the same amount of
schooling, but a society where everybody has exactly the same
amount of learning, or education for that matter, would have
to be regulated and programmed to a point that not only is
abhorrent, but also defies imagination (thus, not only would
the environment have to be equal, the genetical make-up of twopersons
would also have to be identical for the learning that takes
place when human beings rub against the environment to be equal).
In societies where such issues could meaningfully be raised,
they would probably no longer be issues.

It should now make good sense [3] to distinguish between

equal opportunity: equal <u>access</u> to the institution of schooling,

social justice: how much schooling a person <u>has</u> does not
depend on who the person <u>is</u> (eg., as many
male as female PhDs; in general proportions
in the population reflected in the proportions
at various levels of schooling),

equality: equal <u>attainment</u> of schooling.

It is easily seen that equality implies social justice, for if
all have the same level of schooling then there cannot be any
difference between social groups. But the opposite is not the
case: there may be social justice and yet more difference
between high and low in terms of education than ever. Corres-
pondingly, equal opportunity stands in a contingent relation
to either concept: it is neither a necessary, nor a sufficient
condition for social justice or equality, strictly speaking.
Thus, equal opportunity is like lining all up for a race:
starting at the same point (in space and/or time) does not
guarantee that they will end up equal. Indeed, if it did
there would be no race, and if the function, perhaps even the
major one, of schooling is to serve as a social race, then any

guarantee here would be counter-productive. On the contrary,
handicap would probably be needed for disadvantaged groups,
and is - increasingly? - practised -- seeing unequal opportu-
nity as a necessary condition for social justice and/or equality.
If social justice or equality come about it is more likely to
be as a result of such policies, and the equal opportunity
strategy can then be seen, optimistically, as a strategy between
an inquality of opportunity favoring the privileged and an
inequality of opportunity favoring the underprivileged (so far).

Hence, the relation is a complex one and that is a major
reason why the concepts have to be kept apart. When they are
confused and collapsed, people may unwittingly be led to the
conclusion that there is an automatic relation between them,
eg. that equality of opportunity guarantees the other two.
But life is not that easy, indeed! So let us have a look at
some strategies in all three fields and discuss their possible
interrelation.

2. Strategies for increasing equal opportunity

If it is a question of access, then there seem to be two
classes of answer to the problem of bringing schools and poten-
tial students together: bringing the schools to the students,
or bringing the students to the school (or both, of course).
In geographical space the former is a question of a dense net-
work of schools, so dense that it is within reach of everybody;
and the latter is a question of subsidized geographical mobility,
transporting students to central schools, including residential
ones. Obviously, the former is more compatible with a status quo
in habitat distribution; the latter will almost inevitably have un-
settling effects, lead to decentralization, depopulation of peri-
phery districts and for that reason often be used as an instrument,
not of equal opportunity, but to bring about such effects. One
factor favoring the second strategy would be the increasing costs
of schools per pupil being used as arguments for economies of
scale, the evaluation horizon being sufficiently limited so that
the "diseconomies" or generally counter-productive consequences
do not show up. The counter-strategy would be to base schooling
on already existing networks that are sufficiently dense, eg. by

tying the whole idea of schooling more firmly to work.
Pupils/students live where they or their families work, and
education in the formal and non-formal sense seeks them -
in the form of ambulating teachers ("barefoot teachers"), students
at higher level of schooling who stay where people are to help
them through the lower levels ("alphabetization brigades"), or
schooling at a distance, by means of radio/TV.

It might be noted that most innovation in this field in
the last years are made by Third world countries; some of them
doing what First world countries were doing in earlier phases of
their history (the ambulating teacher being an example). Given
the present critique of schooling, above all the concept of
schooling fatigue, of "schoolitis" to try to coin a term, it is
hard to see that   the pedagogical arguments should favor a
higher level of centralization. Hence, these tendencies should
rather be seen as one more example of how modern technology
(including schooling technology) tends to be capital, research-
and administration intensive, and consequently to lead to settle-
ment patterns mirroring the densities of capitalists, researchers
and bureaucrats - in other words the bigger cities. [4]

Everything said so far sees equal opportunity in terms of
geography. Of course, geographical space is usually correlated
with social space: nations within a country not to mention
classes and occupational groups tend to be separated geographi-
cally. But sex and age groups are not, nor necessarily IQ groups,
if there are such things. But this means that a program designed to
achieve equal opportunity in geographical space may fail in
social space: it may elicit from all points in geographical space
the same types of human beings (young, predominantly male, not
too low in IQ), excluding others -- and present an illusionary
image of equality because factors that vary geographically have
been equalized, at least at the access level. What about this
problem?

It is interesting to see how these categories are "discovered"
- those defined as mentally deficient have their schools, girls
used to have theirs, and adults still have their own. The female
part of the population is now in the process of being integrated

with the male part in common institutions; comprehensive schools seek to build borders across interest and capability barriers, imagined or real, in intellectual fields, but the adults are still discriminated against! They do not in general have equal opportunity, among other reasons because of the <u>myth of lineacity</u>: that there is a relatively clear progress of education through age, that stages left behind do not have to be revisited, etc. Actually, this presupposes both that people, society and that which is the subject of education change very little - but leaving that aside the major social effect is to uphold strong lines of demarcation in the division of labor between age groups. When a whole family can sit together in a school and participate in education, an important step forward in the direction of equal opportunity will be made.

Thus, it is not only a question of a dense network or good transportation/communication, but also a question of penetrating into all corners of social space. As these policies are usually initiated from one corner (male, middle-aged, university educated), other corners may be only very imperfectly visible and easily defined away. Consequently, it is hard to believe that this type of change should come about without fight. In general it should also be remembered that schools are usually administered by a ministry of education which is a part of the governmental machinery of the state, a powerful organization in any country. For that state geographical space is usually the dominant mode of administration - the units being territorial districts rather than sex and age groups, classes and professional groups (except for the corporate state). Consequently equal opportunity in geographical space will be more easily administered than the corresponding equality in social space - because the administrators of all territorial units may have the same prejudices against, for instance, older people - no doubt rationalized by the tendency to see education as an investment in "human resources".

3. <u>Strategies for increasing social justice</u>.

Again there is the problem of how all groups in society can benefit equally from the educational resources of society, above all schooling. This is more than a question of (at least) equal

access; it is a question of total scholastic achievment/attainment. As for equal opportunity, however, it certainly calls for political action and generally by the underprivileged groups themselves, others are unlikely to do it for them unless pressed into doing so. Hence, like for all political action, it becomes a question of consciousness formation, of mobilization and organization, of confrontation and real struggle. And that raises a number of questions, on either side of the power equation, for the powerless and for the powerful alike.

Thus, what if the powerless are not interested in participating in this social game? They may, for instance, discover that the equal opportunity approach is one that gets them on a certain social hook, that the price for equal access is to undergo schooling and then, if attainment is unequal, be subject to the final judgment, "He gave you the chance, but you did not live up to it - -". That the chance given was to play according to rules set by others under the guise of universitality, like IQ tests, is then conveniently forgotten. The group is left behind with the feeling of being underachievers rather than simply marginalized, and of having given up something of their own in an effort to be fully accepted. The example that comes to mind in Europe might be gypsies, but there are numerous cases like this all around the world. Often they may be easily discerned by noting who took the initiative, the powerless or the powerful -- if the latter, it may not be too rash to assume that the strategy is used to co-opt and integrate.

A counter-strategy here might be to insist on a pluralistic concept of schooling, designing different types of schools for different groups, and making society such that they are all about equally valid. The latter can be obtained in a pluralistic society; the obvious example being a linguistically pluralistic country. Also one would expect nomads to need different types of education from that demanded by more sedentary peoples. But the problem with this approach is rather well known: even in the most pluralistic society some groups are more equal than others, there tend to be center-periphery gradients, the periphery tends to gravitate towards the center and to be divided within, between

and among themselves as to whether they shall educate themselves
for a more valid life within their own socio-cultural matrix or
prepare themselves for center life including total socialization
into center idiom. No easy formula seems to exist where this is
concerned as already seen in the case of women's liberation:
is the education of women to serve further development of a
women culture, or to prepare women for entry into male dominated
society by socialization into that idiom? Or both - and in that
case, where is the balance point?

One answer may be that there need not be any balance point;
that the contradictions are of a kind that do not permit any
stable solution. But there is another approach that can be
attempted: to request of the powerful group that they also learn
the idiom of the powerless or less powerful so as to make either
group conversant with two idioms, eg. with two vernaculars.
If thos who talk "New-Norwegian" in Norway have to learn "Norwegian",
why not also the other way round? If the Catalan speaking have to
manage Castellano, why not also the other way round? This can be
seen partly in terms of making schooling equally burdensome for
either group, partly in terms of creating a basis for a more
diverse, more pluralistic future of that country. One problem is,
however, that it works better with one dominant and one sub-
dominant than with more complex compositions: there is a limit
to how much can be acquired (eg., Norwegians do not generally
learn Spanish, nor Spanish the Basque language). Also sub-
dominant groups will tend to be more interested in their symmetry
with the dominant groups than with each other -- and this will
tend to perpetuate the power of the dominant (for they may pick
up all sub-dominant idioms, more or less, whereas they only tune
in on the dominant group).

If the zoom in on the powerful group, the crucial distinction ,
it seems, would be between "soft" and "hard" elites. The soft
elites will tend to yield to such demands for social justice;
the hard ones not, whether out of sincerely believed-in self-
righteousness or simple ruthlessness in employing the means of
opression. From this it does not follow that the powerless are
best served by facing soft elites. The hard ones, by offering
resistance, contribute to polarization which may be consciousness-

raising as opposed to absorption in soft embraces. Thus, one would expect more working class schools and colleges with a militant orientation in hard than soft climates, and hence more of a basis both for status quo and for transformations - as opposed to the slow flow of social "evolution". At any rate, the relation is a dialectical one and a conflictual one regardless of how this conflict may be masked.

4. Strategies for increasing equality.

The most obvious strategy for obtaining educational equality is clear enough: to give to everybody the same quality and quantity of schooling. This splits into two: raising the bottom till it reaches that general level, and lowering the top; the "bottom level up" and the "top level down" strategies, respectively. The cultural revolution in China may be said to have used both, and one conclusion so far may be that the second, "top level down" strategy will generate tremendous social tensions. This would partly stem from individual frustrations in having social career opportunities blocked for lack of schooling status than can be converted along other status dimensions; partly from the obvious class interests of the overeducated elite; and partly from society at large because goods and services generated by not setting any limitation on education will no longer be forthcoming like before, even if they are mainly available to the social elites. [5]

Since there is no argument, it seems, against the "bottom level up" part of the equality equation, let us focus on the other half and see how it can be made more meaningful. Here is a list of possible approaches:

First, there may very well be an upper limit of schooling, but no upper limit of education. Thus, one may agree that college or something else is the highest level of schooling in the sense of conferring a diploma and a title on the graduates. Whatever else comes after (in the life of a person) or on top (in the sense that it more or less presupposes the type of learning supposed to take place at the last schooling level) could take the form of self-education and horizontal education, often also with vertical components, but the focus would be entirely on learning, not on status-production and diplomas. This is already

happening: the plethora of courses found in First world societies
today are certainly educative, but usually not diploma productive.

Second , there can very well be inequalities in level of
schooling attained (leaving aside the social justice aspect of
these inequalities), but they may be harmless because they are
socially inconsequential. Thus, the problem is not so much
educational inequality as the many social correlates of educa-
tional status: power, prestige, income, etc. A comparison with
artists is useful here: they may have more training than anyone
else in their skills, practically and theoretically, but their
artist performance is not easily converted into more than at
most two of the three correlates just mentioned: power, prestige
and income. And precisely because the hand is not full, so to
speak, the missing element may become even more evident and
underline how incomplete the correlation is. It should be noted,
in that connection, that this may have been what the situation
of intellectuals used to be before they became experts and
helpers of states and corporations, flowing through them till
they float up till the very top of either.

Thus, the strategy would be to regulate the access of the
highly educated to positions of power and the coffers of gold,
leaving them with the glories of prestige to avoid that their
total social configuration should become too magnificent.
In a country practising this, a person may be a professor and
rich, but then not in a position of power (or powerful, but not
rich); in a country practising the opposite, the professor
will almost automatically also have power and riches given onto
him.

Third, in addition to this structural approach there is
also a cultural approach that may be used to equalize even in
societies with considerable differences in educational attain-
ment. Much can be done to secure dialogue across levels of
education by avoiding esoteric language, by having members of
society belong to the same communitas of knowledge and search
for knowledge. The methods are well known: people's high
schools and courses bringing the high and low on education to-
gether in informal settings, wide distribution of popular science,
participation of the population in amateur research and art and

other forms of cultural expression, and so on. Total equality
is not obtained this way, but extremes of inequality can be avoided
and that is already something. Needless to say, the role of the
press of the country is crucial here, as is succesful application
of the "bottom level up" strategy.

Fourth, there is the possibility of extrapolating from the
first point on this list by making schools more like education,
and the first step would be to abolish grades - - -, reducing
them to a mere pass/fail. In doing so the focus could also be
much more on horizontal education, on learning in groups and on
helping each other and on self-education, not to mention on pre-
paring people for effective self-education after they have left
school. To have been through this type of exercise, then, would
be something like learning to talk which everybody does anyhow,
not conferring much status on people precisely because it is
shared by everybody. And - maybe these are the basic human needs
in the field of education, to be able to have dialogue with
others and also to grow through own efforts?

5 . Conclusion.

In listing and commenting on these strategies there has been
an implicit intention: to show how disparate they are. These are
not strategies that necessarily belong to the working routines of
one particular ministry, nor in any particular ideological bag.
Their disparity reflects the disparity between the three concepts
lurking under the surface made artificially smooth throug undiffer-
entiated talk about "equality", and - indeed - relate to the
complexities of human society. And yet what has been mentioned
in this article mainly refer to Western societies, for which
reason it would be of major interest to understand better how
these problems are reflected and refracted by the social prisms
of other societies around the world.

N O T E S

Paper prepared for the International Institute for Education, UNESCO, Paris. The responsibility for the views expressed is my own, they do not necessarily coincide with the views of the institutions with which I am associated.

1. For an excellent book in this general field, see Walter Feinberg, ed., Equality and Social Policy, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1978.

2. See Johan Galtung and Veslemøy Wiese, "Measuring Non-formal Education". Papers No.14, World Indicators Program No.3, Chair in Conflict and Peace Research, University of Oslo,1974.

3. See Johan Galtung, Christian Beck and Johannes Jaastad, "Educational Growth and Educational Disparity", Papers No.1, Chair in Conflict and Peace Research, University of Oslo, 1974.

4. For a theory of technology in this perspective, see Johan Galtung, Development, Environment and Technology, UNCTAD, Geneva, 1978.

5. The most popolous country in the world, China, is certainly going through the various phases in their gigantic experiments with education at a speed which is astounding. And what is currently happening (1978) is certainly not the last chapter in that book.