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Integrality in Multidimensionality- a Reflection on Contemporary Education

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Integrality in Multidimensionality- a Reflection on Contemporary Education

Nadia Laura SERDENCUC¹

Abstract

The present study is a result of a theoretical approach focused on the importance of an integral mode of dealing with a multidimensional perspective in education, following an interrelated configuration, in the context of the contemporary education. The findings can be used in the process of developing teacher training programs as a foundation for raising the efficiency of the instructional practices. The paper emphasizes the contemporary need of an integrality in multidimensional perception on education reality, in order to promote, support and provide the appropriate learning experiences for the beneficiaries.

Keywords:

Education, integrality, multidimensionality, contemporary education, efficiency.

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1. Problem statement

The interest for the human capital in an information society is related to the economic development and to the general evolution of the entire humanity. That is why the desire to raise the potential of the human resources is often connected to the investment in the quality of education. Educational policies and programs need to face the challenges of the twenty-first century: an increased heterogeneity of beneficiaries (determined by different cultural backgrounds and various cultural heritage), the accelerated changes in all fields, the effects of globalization, the development of the information and communication technologies, the extension of formative landscapes beyond the educational institutions. The traditional education benchmarks are no longer a match for these trends because new types of approaches are required in order to sustain the perspective of life-long learning.

The selection of an appropriate mode of analysis for the educational reality, in order to determine the genuine criteria for understanding and acting according to the needs of the learners, involves, on the one hand, different dimensions of the approach (associated with multidimensionality) for a variety of explanation angles and, on the other hand, a holistic scene (associated with integrality) to configure the interdependencies of the components of the educational process in a systemic view.

We are interested to find out what is the relationship between multidimensionality and integrality in the context of today's education challenges. Is there a way to link them in the intention to build appropriate opportunities of learning and personality development?

2. Theoretical foundation and related literature

There are various approaches related to the contemporary education. Some theoreticians view it as a process in crisis (Felman, 1995; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Purpel & Mc Laurin Jr., 2004; Van Damme & Kakkainen 2010; Berliner & Glass, 2014), even though the crisis perspective in education does not belong exclusively to the recent period (because every set of accelerated changes in society or in the economic field can generate turning points in education, being related to the variation of expectancies and to the need of finding the appropriate means to deal with the new components of the reality). Others theoreticians choose a moderate position (Holmberg, 2005; Palmer,

2002), while some express their optimism regarding the power of education in contemporaneity, as long as we talk about an information society, and about the capacity of education to foster the knowledge management at the individual level and at the level of learning communities (Tight, 1994; Apple, 2003; Middlehurst, 2001; Morley, 2003).

What does multidimensionality mean in education? The structural complexity of this process and the methodological need to examine its component units generate the necessity to adopt a perspective that makes possible to describe, from the different angles of analysis, the reality of the personality development and formation.

Whether it is a matter of process dynamics, or it is an issue of a structural arrangement, multidimensionality of facts, components, factors, variables or points of reference brings into focus the possibility to broaden our outlook on the educational reality in a perspective of a permanent expansion of our empirical and scientific knowledge.

In education the concept of multidimensionality is often related to the concept of *diversity*: we are dealing with different groups of study-considering their level of training, their training needs, their cultural background (Banks, 2016); with different learning contents (Verbert, Duval, 2004); with different types of communication (for a better understanding of the educational message); with different contexts of learning.

The curriculum structuring can also be viewed in a multidimensional manner: the variety of perspectives regarding its evolution meets the need of building a bridge, that links the past with the present, having the intention of shaping the future learning experiences, in an appropriate manner regarding the personality development. Some studies, focused on the curricular practice, highlight the relation between history, education and politics in a multidimensional manner, emphasizing the external links of the concept (e.g., Goodson, 1997), while other studies determine the main components of a “truly educational curriculum”, focusing on the internal multidimensionality (e.g., Kelly, 2009).

The crisis in education has also a multidimensional perspective: “crisis of authority”, “crisis in schooling”, “crisis in educational reform”, “crisis of morality”, “cultural crisis” (Purpel & Mc Laurin Jr., 2004). The preoccupations of the educational systems with finding solutions to the

above mentioned problematic areas require a connected plan of actions, a receptive attitude from the educational actors and from the stakeholders, and their openness for a multidimensional involvement.

The multidimensional approach in education research is also used regarding the measurement of the different factors that influence the perception on teacher effectiveness (Marsh, Hocevar, 1991) or the perceptions on learning (Kember, Biggs, Leung, 2004). Moreover, there are studies focused on the content multidimensionality and its impact on “shaping education” (e.g., Bazerman, 2006) and we can relate this orientation to the variety of sources that sustain the situational interest as a curricular component of education (Sun, Chen, Ennis, Martin & Shen, 2008). A multidimensional view of the instructional situations is also sustained by the type of media education tools that empower learning environments and contribute to the enrichment and the accessibility of the didactic process (Tella, 1997). Sometimes not only the educational process is viewed in a multidimensional perspective, but the quality of education itself becomes an interesting subject for a multidimensional analysis (Sarrico, Rosa, Teixeira & Cardoso, 2010; Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2015). It is possible that the reason for this kind of approach is the need to underline the structural importance of the investigated reality or to identify the type of its components’ hierarchy (Kember et al., 2004).

We conclude that the multidimensional approach in education is a framework developed in the context of the understanding enlargement, with the intention to enhance the significance of the investigated reality.

Beyond the multidimensional analyzes of the educational process, the literature offers also the perspective of a holistic approach in education, related to its multitude of components (Korthagen, 2004). Some studies emphasize the holistic manner of teacher training, as a condition for sustaining a holistic learning (Miller, 1990; Jarvis, Parker, 2006). In a literature review, M. Molz and G.P. Hampson (2010) state that the idea of integral education was given priority in the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, starting from a few French and Russian theoreticians and being related to the concept of “harmonic education” – meaning those educational influences that sustain “the transition from social chaos to universal harmony” (Fouriere apud M. Molz and G.P. Hampson, 2010), taking into account the following principles: education should be perceived as universal, it has to be vocationally oriented, it has to generate an active involvement of the

beneficiaries and it must determine changes regarding both the spiritual and the physical dimensions, in the process of a person's development. The contemporary integral perspective on education adds to the above mentioned dimensions: the social and the emotional component (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg & Walberg, 2004).

The interest of the theoreticians in the holistic approach is sustained by the systemic view of the educational reality, because of the interdependencies between its components that reflect, on the one hand, the natural causality generated by the specificity of the educational actions and, on the other hand, the type of managed causality derived from the intention of putting in relationship the educational goals with the learners' expectancies.

Based on the challenges facing contemporary education presented first, using various types of multidimensional approaches analyzed above and taking in account the significance of a holistic perspective in education mentioned before, we will discuss further the relationship between integrality and multidimensionality.

3. Contemporary education as a context for integrality in multidimensionality

Contemporaneity integrates change as a main component of its development. The challenges determined by this paradoxical, non-static structure are transferred into the educational landscape and influence the process of personality development and formation. Accordingly, teachers' efforts have to be calibrated prospectively, not only for facing the changes, but also for being mentally a few steps ahead comparing to the evolution in real-time. In this regard the multidimensionality of approaches (no matter what curricular component they are related to) helps to develop a set of planning competencies for an effective implementation of the anticipated direction of the process evolution.

Multidimensionality opens a variety of perspectives for descriptions and explanations related to the education process, configuring the possibilities for reflection and for action in the context of expanding the knowledge area. It becomes a way of thinking, a way of doing and a way of expecting things to happen.

If the traditional education built its foundation on a simple determinism (a cause can lead to a specific effect), the contemporary education faces alternative ways of reacting to the same causality (the

same cause can produce multiple effects), because of the multitude of variables and contexts. This is a consequence of diversity, integrated into the educational process.

We can talk about the multidimensionality in teaching and learning, the multidimensionality of assessment, without altering the interdependence between the main components of the educational process: teaching- learning- assessment. The analysis of the multidimensionality in teaching, learning and assessment allows us to develop learning experiences in accordance with the most efficient ways of putting them into an interdependence, generating an improved quality of formation. It also helps future teachers to plan their actions in order to avoid risky combinations in the intention to achieve their goals.

A multidimensional perspective opens a reflective space that sustains the process of finding solutions to the contextual problems of education, in an innovative manner, also facilitating interdisciplinary approaches, in order to improve the quality of education.

We believe that a critical approach of the educational reality, founded on a multidimensional perspective, can help to configure some flexible learning experiences, meeting the contemporary demands of the learners, in the context of delivering a high quality education.

Even if integrality (or the holistic vision) seems to be at the opposite side comparing to the multidimensionality, we believe they build each other in reciprocity. A structure functioning based on interdependencies and oriented towards a set of specific goals (the educational process brings a set of compulsory external goals), although it reveals a multitude of elements, it is subordinated to an integrating principle, that ensures its architectural unity.

We also believe that the integrality can be viewed at different levels: at the level of the structural unity or at the level of a holistic approach, focused on educational goals. Even if these goals are externally imposed, they are also internally oriented, considering the psychological unity of a person: they are postulated in correspondence to the development needs of the learners.

In fact, we consider that the educational goals' dimension is the linking bridge between the multidimensionality of approach and the integrality of reality. It depends at which level we develop our analysis, because the contextualization effort leads to a multidimensional

perspective and the general orientation meets the educational goals embracing an integral view.

4. Conclusions

The impact of the social, political, economic and cultural transformations of the contemporary society generates changes at the level of the education reality, expanding boundaries, intensifying connections, testing relationships. Sometimes meanings are available through the empirical observation and sometimes they depend on the scientific results of the research developed. No matter what way we decide to adopt, there is always a space for reflection founded on definite evidences or based on intuitions. Multidimensionality brings to attention the possible alternatives of exploring things and contribute to the knowledge expansion, but it also needs an integrating vision, to configure its interests and this perspective is given by the integrality of the field. Education integrates multidimensionality as a framework for developing theories and models and, at the same time, for a better understanding of the integrality of the process, focused on the personality development and formation.

The specific interdependence developed this way is important in order to understand, manage and measure the efficiency of the learning experiences, offered in different learning contexts. The teacher training programs should integrate a multidimensionality vision on the education reality, in order to sustain a genuine approach of the instructional situations by the future teachers.

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