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The Role Of The Social Class And The Family In The Formation Of Values In The Context Of The Democratisation Of Education

Gabriela MOTOI

Lecturer, PhD, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Craiova,

gabrielamotoi@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

In this paper we are trying to analyse some important theoretical approaches that explain the role of the family and the social class on the formation of children's values. The analysis of these theoretical perspectives is based on the process of democratization of education, a process which aimed at precisely diminishing the role of social classes in building children's educational choices and, thus, promoting a better equality of chances, through the weakening of the link between social origins and educational outcomes. The theoretical sociological perspectives analysed in this article (M. Kohn and D. Alwin) are similar and they start from the same idea, namely that social stratification is important for understanding the values of both children and parents. Also, we have tried to see whether the views of the two sociologists are still applicable and can be used to explain social, economic and educational realities in the last decades.

Keywords: *democratisation of education; social class; value; level of education; parental role*

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A SHORT INTRODUCTION ON THE DEMOCRATISATION OF EDUCATION

The twentieth century was a century in which democratic or totalitarian societies placed a special emphasis on education. The first (*democratic)* have done so to increase the economic and social efficiency of the members of society, and the second (*totalitarian)* have done it in the name of an utopian ideology, but, undoubtedly, having an economic purpose and, especially, a purpose of image and manipulation (and an argumentative example of this idea can be the analysis of the Romanian totalitariat society and the 1948 Education Reform).

Regardless of what type of society we are talking about - democratic or totalitarian ones - the democratisation process has had overall positive consequences: it has contributed to the increase of the the population's confidence in education systems, contributed to the reduction of the illiteracy rate and, most importantly, "has strengthened the sense of equality in education, supported also by the accelerated economic development" (Neagu, 2012, p. 24) from the 50s and the 60s. In fact, this period of democratisation of education coincides with the post-World War II demographic period, called by the demographs the "baby boom" period, a period when the number of children who had to be educated increased a lot.

During the last five decades, thanks to the democratization of education, we have witnessed an incredible increase of number of pupils, which has led in many cases to an artificial increase of illusions, in relation to the social success of young people who have a degree of education superior to the "uncertain finality and which finally prove to be not so very useful" (Pulouauec, 2010, p. 11). This situation can be seen also today, and we can call it an effect of this democratisation process: a lot of youth who are entering the higher education systems (all over the European countries) and who, after the graduation, don't succeed to have a job, according to their level of education

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and/or qualification. And this "artificial increase of illusions", that Pulouauec was writing about, led them to be under-employed (in 'Big Mac' Jobs) or even unemployed. Briefly, the educational expansion induced by the democratization of education has led to a devaluation of diplomas, an increase in unemployment among young graduates, and a precarious integration into the labour market and other problems that youths are facing in today's society.

The phenomenon of democratization of education is related to the problem of equalizing the chances of access to different forms and levels of education. In some scientific papers on this topic, it is mentioned that this process has two dimensions "a) a quantitative dimension – which refers to the development or increase of participation in education and b) a qualitative dimension – which refers to the effective reduction of inequalities in education" (Duru-Bellat, 2002, p. 20; van Zanten, 2003).

When describing and explaining the process of democratization of education, E. Păun specifies that the quantitative aspect of the education determines a "democratization of the participation in education", while the qualitative aspect determines a "democratization of the success" (Păun, 2017). The term "quantitative democracy" is also used, for example, to describe an increase in the schooling rate of a category of pupils; at the same time, the term "qualitative democracy" refers to the diminishing or "weakening of the link between social origins and educational outcomes" (Merle, 2002, p. 79).

There are "two ways of analysing at the relationship of the school system to social classes. Education can be considered as a good, just as health, leisure or domestic comfort; it can be seen that the different social classes do not have equal access to it. On the other hand, we can consider the school system as an active and discriminating institution, which sorts out the children and generates social differences. In the first

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case, it is about the inequalities in the consumption of education; in the second, it is about the role of education in the genesis of inequalities" (Prost, 1981).

Since the 1960s, the participation of pupils in education has undergone significant changes (has increased a lot), regardless of the type of family they belonged to; but the most important changes have occurred among the children of the working class. If, in the 1960s, getting a high school diploma (graduating high-school) was considered to be a difficult target, it is now a minimal ambition of parents for their children. For example, according to the results of some surveys in France (INSEE, 2003) in 1962 and, for comparison, in 2003, it was found that, while in 1962 only 15% of working-class parents considered that it was very important for their child to graduate high-school (Baudelot and Establet, 2000), in 2003 this percentage had reached to 88%. This introductory mention to this report emphasizes the fact that the level of educational ambition (of children and, also, of parents for their children) will always vary according to social class and, thus, the democratisation of education did not succeeded, in its qualitative dimension. So, parents form middle or upper classes will always want the best and highest schools for their children and they will try to offer them more educational opportunities than working-class children cannot benefit.

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL CLASS ON PARENTAL VALUES. THE PERSPECTIVE OF M. KOHN

Even if the factors that influence the values of the children are multiple and include not only the parents, but also the education environment, the community, the media, the friends, it is useful to analyse also the theoretical paradigm that tries to explain how the social class/profession/parents level of education are forming the social values of their children.

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The educational and professional aspirations of adolescents are considered as outcomes of the socio-economic status of their parents. The most common explication is that children from high class families have higher educational, professional and personal aspirations, than children with a lower social status. Sociological studies that have analysed this problem focus mainly on the father's influence on the son's acquisition of a certain social status (see, for example, the studies elaborated by Mortimer et al. 1986, or Alwin, 1984).

All of these studies start with the same question: *Does the family have some influence (it does or does not have some advantages) on children's access to better schools, to better social contracts and, implicitly, to obtain better economic resources?* From there, there is a second question: *does the socioeconomic status of the family affect the self-image, life-image, career orientation or the values of children?*

It is a theoretical paradigm that puts forward the idea that people who occupy privileged positions in the social structure value self-perfection and their children social development, more than people occupying less privileged places, in the same social hierarchy. This paradigm, which emphasizes that social stratification is important for understanding the values of both children and parents, has been extensively developed in the work of Melvin Kohn (in studies that the American sociologist has published, especially, between 1959 and 1990).

One of the conclusions that Kohn has proposed by his works (especially those published in 1969 and 1986) is that working conditions shape the value of the worker and they are also reflected in parent-child relationships at home. More specifically, the American sociologist argues that "middle-class people usually have a job that emphasizes self-reliance or self-orientation and, thus, promote the same value in their children's education; on the other hand, people of the working class have jobs that require compliance or obedience and this is reflected, therefore, also in the family guidance of their children" (Kohn, 1969).

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The contrast between autonomy and conformity for different social classes is then extended from the generation of parents to that of children; it's a model transmitted from a generation to another. The serial development of parents' social classes - parental values - parental behaviour - will also be transmitted to children, especially (intergenerational process) with regard to their educational values. (Kohn, 1986).

In explaining how this is the social class that distinguishes values, Kohn, but also other researchers of this topic, have focused on jobs as one of the most important concerns of the social classes. They concluded that "blue-collar" occupations are devoid of complexity and most of the time, they are routine jobs. In these jobs, success is determined by the respect for the rules. On the other hand, in "white-collar" professions, success is determined by individual initiatives. This difference between professional conditions gives rise to adaptable values. These adaptive values, in turn, affect children's educational and professional orientations.

In his studies, Kohn analyzed how fathers and mothers transmit values to their children and found that there was a correlation between social class and the desired parental characteristics of children. For example, he concluded that the higher the social class is, the more the parents had to appreciate their children's things such as responsibility, common sense and good judgment, things related rather to autonomy, than to obedience to parents. He also found that the lower the social class was, parents were more interested in evaluating good manners to their children, to obedience-based characteristics, than having a a self-development or to be attentive to others (characteristics to autonomy and independence).

For Kohn, the impact of social class on parental values is not impressive in terms of scale, but rather in terms of coherence, meaning that the relationship persists across a variety of elements that measure parental values and across a variety of national and temporal contexts (Kohn, 1969, p. 51; Kohn et al. 1986). Kohn has tried to

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evaluate the applicability of the inter-generational transmission hypothesis by transnational data (in the United States, Poland and Japan) that he has analysed during the period 1986-1990. The conclusion of these data reports was that the occupation of the parents influences the values of the education of the children, and also, the values of their children (Kohn et al. 1986; Kohn and Słomczyński, 1990). Middle class parents usually develop recreational activities, such as sports or travel, and Kohn finds that these activities represent an important cultural capital (like Bourdieu was mentioning) that will help teach children and give them confidence that they will succeed later in life.

The conclusion that Kohn advances in his work is also found in other scientific papers, published in the mid-20th century, claiming that as one person moves up the social ladder, he wants his child to pursue higher education, and, later, to practice a profession that would give him a higher social status (Stendler, 1951, pp. 37-45).

In fact, studies in the sociology of values have shown that there are differences between social classes, in terms of conditions and ways of life, which, in turn, translate into different points of view and values, specific to each social class; at the same time working-class parents are more concerned about the conformism of their children (*survival values,* in Inglehart's view), as middle-class parents are concerned about the autonomy of their children (*self-expression values,* in Inglehart view). Although Kohn is the one who has conducted the most field research on this topic, there are other authors who came to the same conclusions developed by the American sociologist, for example Alwin (in 1989); Gecas and Seff (in 1990); Mortimer et al. (in 1986) etc.

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THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTS' OCCUPATION AND LEVEL OF EDUCATION ON THE VALUES OF CHILDREN. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

By his studies, Duane F. Alwin attempted to separate the intertwined effects of occupation and education (1989, pp. 327-345) and found a support for Kohn's thesis: the career guidance measures explain more the development of parental values than the educational measures. The level of education is an important mediating variable between values and profession. For Alwin, over time, the influence of occupation on parental values diminishes and that of education remains consistent. (Alwin, 1984, pp. 359-382). Indeed, we can say that the influence of occupation has diminished over time because the entire system of occupation (in terms of characteristics, work-values related, earning) has varied a lot over the time.

In fact, in his studies, Alwin shows that at the very beginning of the 20th century, what parents wanted differ much from what parents want in our days – they wanted only to have obedient children. Starting from the point that children are not valuing the same thing and, sometimes the "social class, gender, religion can be also barriers in communication" (Vlăduțescu et al., 2014, p. 274). For pointing out that children 'values are influenced by several factors, Alwin has focused his studies on different people, belonging to different social classes, races and religions. He found out that at the beginning of the 20th century, what parents wanted for their children differed from a social group to another but, over time, the desire to have obedient children declined, as parents wanted more autonomy and independence for their children (postmodern values). It is the same this that we may observe also in analysing the dynamic of the values, from the beginning of the 20th century to it ends.

For example, in an article published in 1988, Alwin "identifies a substantial change in parenting values among middle class members, as well among those from

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working class. Strict obedience and fidelity to the church were the most important traits in 1924 sample, but in 1978 sample they declined sharply". At the same time, the importance of other values has increased (here Alwin is analysing values like independence or tolerance). The author considered that "there were general plausible reasons for these changes. Among them was the evolution of modernization in technology and social organization. The growth of organizational roles required more education, those who contributed to the need for greater independence and autonomy" (Lantagne, 2009, p. 6; Alwin, 1988).

In another paper, from 1989, Duane F. Alwin "examined the changes that have occurred over the past two decades in parental assessments of the qualities valued by their children. Thus, he is pointing out that since 1964, there seemed to be even more preference for autonomy and lower preferences for compliance". Alwin offered many different reasons for this change, one of them referring to changes in composition of the society: changes in the distribution of teaching and employment positions, favouring again the employment of white-collar professions etc. (Lantagne, 2009, p.8; Alwin, 1989).

Also, in a paper from 2002, published by another author, Monica Kirkpatrick Johnson, it is argued that the professions of parents influence the personality of children, having an important role in the process of "polishing" values related to professional success, work, to education and culture. As expected, based on theoretical models of parental influence, youth with more educated parents tend to place less emphasis on extrinsic rewards and safety and feel they have a higher influence than those with less education. Other aspects of social origin also play an important role in shaping the initial values of work. Also, youth from the rural communities give a less importance to extrinsic rewards than youth from the urban communities. This may reflect a global difference in the value of materialism among people in different types of communities. Another argument presented by the author is that young people from

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upper-class are more or less assured of decent compensation and job stability and, therefore, place greater emphasis on job characteristics related to the energy, as, for example, the decision-making authority or the job challenge (Kirkpatrick Johnson, 2002, p. 1327).

Regarding to the transmission of value in the family, two problems arise and are important to be mentioned: inter and intra generational influences. Most researches examine the relationship between parent values and children's values. Viktor Gecas and Monica Seff listed three main mechanisms by which parental values influence children's values: "(a) influences of the professional/social class, (b) perceptions of similarity of values and (c) parenting behaviours /child-rearing practices" (Gecas and Seff, 1990, pp. 941-958).

In their empirical study, conducted on a sample of 228 people, Gecas and Seff analyzed the place that self-esteem occupies in the value system of an individual and its maintenance, according to the social and economic level. Thus, respondents indicated that the variables associated with self-esteem are: the professional prestige, the income and the education. At the same time, the authors present that the effects of social-structural variables on self-esteem depend on the extent to which these variables work: when the social-structural variables are more pronounced, their impact on the concept of *self* is stronger. In this sense, the concept of self is somewhat flexible, providing different information to assess one's self-esteem in different social conditions. In short, other study, published by Gecas and Schwalbe, sought to analyse the relationship between social class and self-esteem, arguing that the effects of social class on self-esteem are largely experienced through the occupational conditions that affect the dimensions of the social class: the self-assessment, self-efficacy and self-esteem (Gecas and Schwalbe, 1983, pp. 77-88). In other words, values have an important role in the process of personality construction and they "might potentially be an important

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variable in predicting the individuals' self-esteem and perceived social support" (Deniz, Dilmaç, Hamarta, 2016, p. 67)

Moreover, from a sociological point of view, this idea represents the expression of the theory of the social nature of self, which we find at the American sociologist William James: according to him, "self-esteem" is related to "the rate of success" of an individual. Self-esteem is dynamic, varies, and is described in the correlation between an individual's success rate and aspirations. So, individuals who have a positive self-image enjoy a healthy, individual and collective lifestyle. Individuals whose image is permanently compromised will be pushed into bottlenecks, sickness and suffering, and "respect" and "self-esteem" will collapse (Bădescu, 2002, 2011).

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