THE DYNAMIC OF THE ACADEMIC MERIT RELATIONSHIPS – SOCIAL POSITION

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1. School merit, diploma and social destiny

"Merit" is a concept that we meet or we use frequently in your current life. We talk about a student that deserves a prize, deserves a scholarship, deserves to win a competition deserves to pass the baccalaureate exam etc. In the same way we talk about an adult that deserves to be promoted, deserves a job, deserves to earn better, etc.

The conceptualization of the notion of "merit" has not benefited and does not benefit from consistent, systematic approaches, although the realities of past decades would justify the orientation of specialists to investigate issues of this theme. Colloquially "merit" is cited quite frequently. So we talk of increased popularity of this type of statements on the one hand but at the same time we find fundamental ambiguity of the notion in question. Beyond its very common and very popular invoking it has not received special theoretical treatments. From the teaching perspective, which are the "merits" of a student who is in school that can and must be rewarded? Here are some situations where a student "deserves" to be rewarded: studies every day, participates in extracurricular activities, participates in activities in various fields: art, culture, sports, science; promoted with remarkable results an examination/a summative assessment; has achieved remarkable results in national assessments and international comparative ones; has passed the baccalaureate exam; passed capacity examinations etc. Therefore "merit" is an intuitive notion, always related to clear, concrete contexts related to school life.

On the other hand, the reasons for which an adult "deserves" to be rewarded are very different: "because he worked well, because he is intelligent, because he proved to have will, because he performed well ..." (Elise Tenret, L »*Ecole et la croyance en la meritocratie,* PhD dissertation, Directeur de these : Madame Marie DURU-BELLAT (Text presente en vue du l »obtenir du titre de DOCTEUR EN SOCIOLOGIE, le 3 decembre 2008, General Introduction page 1).

Merit and education are two interrelated notions that are in close interaction. The notion derived from "merit" – "meritocracy" is or should be the object of pertinent study. In the collective mind "meritocracy" is most often associated with the reward of "academic merit". Because it is stated that "a society will be meritocratic if academic achievement determines social positions for each individual based on merit", the "school merit"! Therefore, it is observed a great association, almost natural, between "merit" and "school universe". We will understand why school "meritocracy" also enjoys such a popularity

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analyzing social and psychological functions of "merit". And, further, deciphering the impact of education, specifically the school socialization, on the representations of "meritocracy and merit".

2. School merit, winners and losers

We can analyze the school "merit" school from two perspectives or dimensions. It is about the size of its objective and subjective dimension. Adherence or lack of adherence to the "meritocracy" shows inter-individual variations; it is obvious that in the two groups/classes/categories there are "winners" and respectively "losers". The "winners" internalize "meritocracy" and its values. Some individuals internalize "meritocracy" ... join meritocracy ... which means they realize that they have a certain place in society due to academic merit. Moreover, in perspective they might be the ones that value the hierarchies in which losers do not believe. In this way there is a hiatus between the two groups.

The objective dimension of the "merit" is represented by the direct correlation between the "degree" and the "social destiny" of the individual. A society is considered to be "meritocratic" if the social background of the individuals has no connection with the degree obtained by them and if their social destiny is entirely determined by degrees. Most scientific papers in the field evaluate "meritocracy" through the degree. A society is indeed "meritocratic" if social positions are obtained as a result of the merit of each individual and do not arise from social origin, are not obtained by birth (Tiberiu Bogdan, Studiu introductiv, Copiii capabili de performante superioare, Caiete de pedagogie moderna, nr 9, EDP, 1981, page 25).

But the "merit" is also a principle of social justice. Nowadays societies strive to promote increasingly this social justice principle which is strongly supported by the theory "Increased Merit Selection". This theory, advanced in 1992 by Jonsson, proposes that "in modern societies merit must be the determinant principle of access to education and education to be the main determinant of access to various social positions".

Meritocracy is a desirable thing. What is more beautiful and fair in a society than being promoted on merit! To win your place in society and profession through merit and not through any other tricks ... helped by gang membership ... circumstances ... other criteria than those that are based on "merit" ... What it is more damaging for others, for the community you live in, for the society than to occupy positions or jobs, to have the advantages that you do not "deserve"...

The subjective dimension of the "merit" is in itself very important. Is it fair/just for outstanding academic merit, validated by the school to determine remarkable social positions? There occur naturally, questions like: social inequalities caused by academic merit/validated through school, materialized in a degree, are considered fair by all social actors? Does school merit truly

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determine social position always deserved? It is about the correspondence between school merit and social inequalities, thanks or discontent of individuals. Is this correlation real?

The society based on meritocracy is based on implemented merit logic. The term "meritocracy" was advanced in 1958 by the English sociologist Michael Young. The history of the word "meritocracy" begins with the publication of Michael Young's work entitled *The Rise of the Meritocracy*. The word resulted from the Latin root "*meritum*" (win, hoard, salary, which of course is worthy) and the Greek root "*cratos"*, which means "strength". Its author, Michael Young, chose to invent this new term, that of "meritocracy" to denote a society where everyone's positions depend on his/her talent and efforts (Elise Tenret, op. cit).

3. You learn, you have benefits!

School is the main determinant of the acceptance of meritocracy. Through everything that promotes confidence in meritocracy. One of the objectives of the activity of the teachers is definitely the development of metacognitive skills of the students. The teacher has a multitude of tasks and responsibilities. In this context it is the duty of every teacher or primary school teacher to invite students to ponder whether the grades they receive are given on merit, if they are correct in relation to the effort and the manifested results. Following the same logic, it would be natural for each pupil or student to wonder whether the degree, certificate or other school document he obtained after evaluations are deserved. Finally, everyone should ask his question to what extent the obtained/owned social position is in correspondence with the merit, primarily with academic merit. Free access to education generates increasingly more questions about the school meritocracy. In other words does the classic adage "You learn, you have befits" really work?

It seems that the pedagogical, sociological, philosophical research of the interdependence between "merit", the principles of social justice and social inequalities must be reconsidered. In Romania of the last decades there have to be reconsidered the relationships between the three concepts because they have been created conditions for equal opportunities in education, but it must be seen to what extent was assured also the equal access. In theory, all students have access to education but have they had equal chances of success? "The liberating effect of education has not been well understood, it has not been accepted or even exploited by certain families ... or maybe free access to education happened to be promoted" but the access was not free, it was restricted by various factors and conditions: social, cultural level, material resources etc. It would be interesting to see the effects in terms of education, to what extent they are right, or rather how they are perceived by educational actors.

At the same time, we have to admit that the Romanian school has strong meritocratic traditions. There have always been exams, competitions and, consequently, awards given, classifications, hierarchies etc., all of which actually

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being recognitions of the "school merit" of pupils (Alexander Vitzu, 1888 Study on secondary education in Romania, Printing Royal Court, Bucharest).

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