

Dilemma's History Education at the Beginning of XXI Century

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This caption represents the paraphrase of a famous sintagm that belongs to Guizot and is adapted to our study. The history of education has nowadays a paradoxical status. It is formally considered by the academic history as a research area that does not have either a specific approach, its own paradigm or a scheme characteristic to education sciences. From a traditional point of view, the epistemological legitimacy of the education sciences (especially that of pedagogy) is one of the aims of this scientific effort. Obviously, the educational function of the history of education and/or pedagogy for the initial teachers training process is not missing. The dispute between modernism – postmodernism in the historiographic area is not taken into consideration by the history of education or pedagogy writers.

A relevant example is the introduction of "The History of Education in Antiquity", in which the purpose of historical researches during this period is described, this purpose being applied to almost all historical writings. "Our study does not have only one aim, that is to learn to know each other better, making us aware of our origins...the fecundity of the historical knowledge results from the dialogue between That and The Other. We became quite different from our parents because their education took the form of The Other: a lot of things that do not correspond to our practices or aspirations can surprise us in a positive manner.

The informed reader will be able to meditate upon our assertion"¹. In this way, the theme of dialogue – or alterity – established by The Annales School in the general history studies is introduced in the history of education studies.

The historical writings have their own history. From Thucydides, Herodotus or Ibn Kaldun to numerous doctrines and orientations in the historiographic area, there has been many changes that influenced the scientific history of education. The case of Ibn-Kaldun (1332-1406) is relevant: he is the first historian who improved the reflection about specific educational themes (regional inequalities and their origin, the professionalization of teaching function). Later on, after almost five centuries, G. Monod and K. Pomian thought that the social changes were too rapid to avoid a new attitude towards the past that could contribute to this accelerated pace. In this sense, Monod stated that the past must be studied and perceived as different from the present, this being possible by detachment from the analysed events. In turn, at that time, Pomian analysed the historiographical changes, emphasizing the transition from an immediate knowledge, in which the historians recorded the information, accepting an eye witness testimony or the orally transmitted stories to a knowledge in which the historian, based on historical evidence, wanted to become independent. In essence, the intelligible is not visible right away.

All these facts are accompanied by transformations of time representation. The oldest conception about cyclicality, made the historian look for present similar patterns. By contrast, the new time representation based on the linear and cumulative conception, raised new problems in terms of a method or techniques

suitable for a new theoretical construction. The notion of a linear and cumulative history introduced the idea of progress which governed the human activities in the 18th century. Between 1776 and 1788 the English historian Edward Gibbon wrote "The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire", a very important book at that time. The Antiquity was not that world closed to a golden age anymore but it continued beyond its end and in this way the ancients joined the moderns driven by the idea of progress. The sense of continuity was embodied in an acute sense of similarity between epochs. Referring to the object of our study, Fustel de Coulanges said: "Our educational system, which sends us among the Greeks and Romans even from our childhood, makes us compare and judge their history according to ours, explain our revolutions using theirs. Their legacy makes us believe that we are alike; it is hard somehow to perceive them as foreign peoples; in them we almost always see us".²

It is necessary to look back at the past, due to the rapid transformation of all the living conditions that has taken place in the recent decades. The decline of Europe caused by demographic, cultural and economic factors determined some reorientations in history studies. The field of research has enlarged and a new set of research tools was created. There are various objects of research and historical sources (fiscal registers, textbooks and documents, the teacher's status, the emergence of universities, significant breaches in the development of educational institutions etc). Jacques Le Goff, one of the famous French historians, wrote a synthesis study that included many of the aspects mentioned above. He states that in Abelard epoch the schools were "like workshops which exported the ideas", having multiple missions but isolating the idea according to which "a person is taught in school to defend against the opponents' insidious attacks"³, with reference to Hermann Dalmatin's letter.

The academic corporations, the moral and religious environment which dominated the academic community, the scholasticism, seen as a method, all these are points of interest for the French historian. The breaches are also very important in this new approach of the history of education in the Middle Ages. In this respect, the gap between science and education that took place at the end of this period is eloquent. When the humanists lose contact with the masses and the thinking spread is characterised by a decreasing trend, this gap appears. The image of the "medieval intellectual, embodied by the teacher, surrounded by pupils and beleaguered by desks and crowded auditorium" is also changing. The humanist has become "the solitary scholar who sits comfortable and quietly in the middle of his large furnished study room"⁴. Besides the novelty of this approach, Le Goff acknowledges in his work, the presence of new research orientations in education, emphasizing the processuality of a new socio-professional category (academics) and new educational institutions (university). Furthermore, new pieces of information are added to the works about the education in the past, explaining the connections between the academic environment and the political power, or the "high politics", as the author himself names it. "The urban and erudite intellectual of the Middle Ages disappears, being meant to govern a Christianity in decline"⁵.

At a closer and more careful analysis, this diverse issue becomes dominant on a global scale, at least for the second half of the 20th century. This is proved in a comprehensive study written by Antoine Leon "The History of Education Today" published by UNESCO in 1985 from which we select some essential aspects. An important movement of ideas manifested in the 60s of the 20th century. According to W.W. Brickman, in USA, this period was characterised by two phenomena: a slight decrease in historical contradictions and the growing importance of the discipline in the teacher training programs⁶. At the same time, the presence of a radical movement was felt during this period. This movement of ideas had modernist roots and was related to the fact that the development of the public education, far from contributing to the development of the quality of the American democracy, represented an instrument of control and domination for the middle classes and elites benefit. For almost three decades, J.D. Wilson analysed in a case study the connection⁷ between the education development and the current problems. Comparing his three books about the history of education in Canada written in 1957, 1970 and 1975, the author made a few valuable and important assertions. While the first one

had relevant features of the egalitarian and democratic spirit under the auspices of the conflict between "the good reformers" and "bad reformers", thirteen years later, Wilson quoted a research paper in which the history of education was connected with the social history, promoting the theories of the previously criticized conservators.⁸

In USA, the term "human" history is synonym with the revisionism movement for which teaching was a substitute for family, church, community and traditional institutions. On the other hand, the school became responsible for maintaining the national cohesion, the social order and stability. Lawrence Cremin, making reference to the purposes of the history of education, disapproved the conservative character of the educational reform, emphasizing the uncertain connections between education, political relations and social structures. After analysing the school functions, the author formulated a serie of precise questions about students' selection, the number of new classrooms, schools and universities and last but not least, about the individual and collective effects of education.⁹

One of the main contributions of the "new history " is the inversion of the chronological framework that was frequently used by historians and the fact that it brought back to the public opinion attention a period which had not been valued for some time: for instance, the literacy was considered an organized process in the 19th century; nowadays, the history of education sends us back to the 16th century, when the church and local community played an improtant role in this process. The historians' interests take into consideration the traditional themes and the conclusions of the "Nouvelle Histoire" representatives are not entirely new. Thus, in the History of Pedagogy published by Gabriel Compayre in 1866, he considered that the mission of science in this context should encompass the whole field of intellectual and moral culture at all times and from all countries. A contemporary phychologist claimed the existance of an "ambiguous mixture between education, the cultural environment, race or customs, social condition, religious and political institutions". The school rule, denied by revisionists and the new school partisans, is subject to a postrevisionist reexamination. In this respective, C.J. Lucas advocated for an impartial opinion, between the revisionist cinism and the optimism of those who considered school an instrument in the development of American democracy that cannot be replaced. In another chapter of his book, Lucas denounced the "presenteeism" from the revisionists papers which were translated with indended similarities between very distant periods of time; using the past in order to defend the modern causes etc.¹⁰ M. Greene also considered that the image created by the revisionists to represent the negative meaning of "the social control inviolability" reflected on passive individual characters" was exaggerated. In order to exemplify, he brings into discussion one of the fundamental paradoxes of the educational action: to create his identity, an individual needs a framework and a proof of the social control existance. Under different conditions, this would mean to meet the demands of society and the desire of the self to be independent and the only solution for educating the individual would be to accept a simultaneous conflict between these two forces, a conflict that puts in contrast and at the same time connects them both.¹¹

First of all, the revisionists' methodology has some weak points: they underestimate the importance of erudition, do not apply the rules specific to historiography and make baseless generalizations. The author intensely criticized the pseudo-historians who drew conclusions based on prejudices, ignoring the rules specific to documentary research.¹²

Given the evolution of the American educational historiography, the experts think that the "revolution" of the 60s was too weak to change the historical approaches. The international competitive environment that was to follow and the need to improve the educational policies led to the emergence of new theories about history. In essence, it is about projecting the current issues into the past, seen as a cooperation between the educational and "scientific and social" historians. New approaches to the historiography of education demonstrate that people were ready to make some changes during the slack period of the 1960s. We can include here the works of the Belgian historian, Henri Pirenne. An expert on economy, the social and

demographic history of the Middle Ages, Pirenne was also interested in the history of education. The Annales School, founded in 1929 by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch was the main source of historiographical renewal.

In 1970s, many French historians sought inspiration in a movement called "the new history", movement that summarized the trends in the recent decades. In essence, it aimed at broadening the historian's scope of interest, heading towards the total history (social, psychological, educational etc.), a trend initiated by Fabvre; the trend towards a thematic history that would replace the narrative history ascends, reversing the order of research: the historian had to study the object of research before starting to collect and analyze the data; unconventional evidence such as oral reports, auditory and visual recordings, documents that had as source the imagination were expanded and extended.

In France, after R. Chartier, it emerged a new history of education, signaling the movement towards the institutional, ideological and monographic historiography which was based on a different approach that undertook the historians and sociologists' common efforts.

The analysis of the relations that established the connections between the educational institutions and the structure of the society, led to the emergence of new topics subject to debate: the students' state of mind during the studies, the success rate of the professional qualification process and the social mobility.

Gaston Mialaret's work "Histoire mondiale de l'education" is one of the most relevant examples in the educational environment that stands for the renewal of the historical science. In the fragment previous to the chapter about Reform and education, it is stated that: "the artificial and conventional part related to the historical time is significant only if it deals with chronological facts, but it will be used according to the determinant factors of the history"¹³. A significant change of opinion is traced in a paper written by the same author, Gaston Mialaret, after almost 15 years.

On the 50th anniversary of the launch of Langevin-Wallon plan (June 1947), a reform project of the French educational system, the historian stated in a retrospective approach: the reform project was a tremendous paradox "considering the short time in which it was compiled and the fact that the country was in a reconstruction period, supervised by a society never willing to educate in order to develop practical skills". It is a paradox that "generally influences the major pedagogical doctrines - as Durkheim also admitted - because they impose ideas, have an impact on mentalities, create beliefs, mould spirits and force the social recognition. But at the same time, we must not miss - though Durkheim and Bourdieu thought that we might - the measures imposed in a coherent and systematic manner."¹⁴

In fact, this approach was imposed as long as "a large number of textbooks contain the chapter dedicated to the history of discipline after its scientific character, objectives and methodes were emphasized. Thus, this history is not very useful for laying the basis of this discipline."¹⁵

Given the above mentioned ideas, at this stage of the historical science development in the educational environment, some assertions can be made. The first one is rooted in Antoine Prost famous statement that "we do not make institutional history because it would be useless, as this history had already been made in a very good way"¹⁶.

By broadening the research area, founding and assuming new functions of the institutional history, the idea of the institutional history futility was induced. These "challenges" raise a few questions such as: is it dangerous or useless to study the history of education? Under the current conditions and in a dynamic context, aren't we at the risk of taking some inefficient solutions influenced by the past?

The history of education in the contemporary epoch is "not only a school of wisdom but also of optimism - to the extend that the educational institutions progress results from their study - the unyieldingness of the individuals or groups to find new solutions when facing challenges similar to the current ones."¹⁷. Depending on these questions, a scientific program was designed, this being divided into a few stages,

as follows:

To provide historical documentations that will monitor the transformations in different educational institutions over a period of time; To research the reasons of these developments and to assess the role played by different sciences and also of pedagogy which is and has been inextricably linked to this matter;

To inventarize the various practical (pedagogical) models designed according to the dominant ideologies or the disciplines involved; To outline the future of education in relation to the validated historical achievements;

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To explain the current educational crisis and to design some desirable schemes/projects for the next period (in the short, medium and long run)¹⁸ obvious that the general trends of the contemporary movement is relation to general history are not found in the history of The plausible explanations could be found, especially in the need to exploit only the educational function of the general history and, in particular, the history of education. The above mention statement about the educational phenomenon is even more sustainable if we look over the goals encountered in the majority of Romanian historical writings about the educational phenomenon.

In the opening chapter of one of his books, I.Găvănescul stated that: " For a science to be understood, we have to know its history, the moments it went through, all the circumstances that determined the human spirit to act in its benefit"¹⁹.

In the same context, Găvănescul also underlined the "practical importance" of the pedagogy history that "serves as an inhibitive remedy in its tendency to believe that newest is better. It moderates the tendency towards those innovations, reforms and regenerations inspired especially from the life and the endeavours of other countries. It shows us how and to what extent the plausible combinations of theory are applicable, what are the circumstances in which the institutions arise and live and which is their organic connection with the entire cultural life of the age and of the country." This long quote excerpted from the work of the great educator reflects exactly the function given to the history of pedagogy during the age: the right measure in the application of the pedagogical innovations considering the expansion of the pedagogical initiatives during that period. Almost all the great Romanian educators followed this trend, the result of their work being massive and illuminating volumes on the education facts and their chronology, the personalities or education institutions which in the meantime became an inspiration source strictly necessary for any specialist who wants to initiate into the field or to go deeply into a research. The role of such a history is a passive one, in other words intended for the collection, verification and classification of information about a long gone world, rediscovered and transformed into a veritable museum. The events that disrupted country's political, social and cultural life during the inter-war period determined the overcoming of this level of the education's historiography.

It is obvious that the issues regarding the functions of the historiography of education circumscribe to the above mentioned general picture. In addition to the cognitive function, history's educational function was approached by the historians of the educational process. Unfortunately, in our opinion, the history of education, a well-delimited cognitive space in the historiographical picture, is deprived of a complex theoretical reflection in relation to the above mentioned ideatic dynamics. The study of the education's past is found in a particular posture which confers a series of advantages and a high degree of immobilism deriving from the fact that it is part of the whole which is History, dominated by the modernist – postmodernist dispute and also part of the Education Sciences, a space where pedagogy has priority being dominated by the philosophical and actional discourse. In this bipolarity we find the source of the high degree of conservatism of the education historians who, for the most part, continue the traditional and factual approach of the education facts with direct consequences on the determination of some specific functions. Subjected to some double

requirements, the history of education presents today the picture of some science with functions limited to the explanation of the pedagogy from an epistemological point of view or to the role of regulatory norm, by exemplarity, for the pedagogical innovations that are implemented in the education process of the young generation. Therefore, we tend to reiterate Pascal's thesis according to which the history of sciences, hence the history of education involuntarily takes a strange role: "During a couple of centuries, sciences were thorny and imperfect. The futility dominating them, with few connections and correspondences between them, took long time to only learn things not relating with spirit, justice and clarity...."²⁰

As for the predictive function of the history, it is necessary to mention some preliminary definitions. First of all, it is worth mentioning the fact that the prevision focuses on the causal connections on which this rational operation is based. The prevision is obstinately assimilated to the prediction, a concept that brings into discussion the irrational element which, according to the Romanian historical thinking, it totally lacks.

Along with positivism, all sciences take, as an essential attribute, a predictive function, according to Auguste Comte's enunciation: "Science, d'ou prevoyance; prevoyance d'ou action". Beside the fact that the statute of the historical science does not change if the prediction is not achieved, Comte's assertion has been contradicted by Fernand Braudel: "We notice today that no social science, including history, is not prophetic and therefore, according to the old rules of the game, none of them wouldn't have had the right to be called science".²¹ As much as a science of change, "history also presents elements if not permanent then at least sustainable ... certain reiterations if not similar then at least following the great lines of development. Analyzing how yesterday is different from the day before yesterday and why it finds in this contiguity the means to envisage in what sense tomorrow is opposite to yesterday." Although it cannot predict specific facts due to the unique and non-recurring nature of the historical fact, on one side, and the inherent presence of contingency in its genesis, on the other side, history, through its universalization, provides guidance as much as valid as useful for the future action."²²

In the economy of our study, we retained some ideas with a conclusion value aiming at a balanced position of one of the best experts of the modernist-postmodernist dispute, Jorn Rusen. "Postmodernism means that we have abandoned the forms of self understanding and historical identification of our own life, of our own social, political, economical and cultural situation which were dominant until now as a clear reflex of the modernity crisis"²³. This is the explanation that the above mentioned author offers following a careful analysis of the actual historiographical field.

First of all, the radical concepts specific to the postmodernist discourse are rejected. The classical example that the author uses in order to sustain his position is the famous expression of Fukuyama, the "end of history". "The generalization of the western liberal system does not mean the end of the history if we take into consideration only the fact that the disputes between north and south and west and east can be settled as long as the western system changes qualitatively, this change being historical in its essence."²⁴

Considering the functions of history, it is clear to everyone that the human beings need specific forms of orientation for their practical life in temporal patterns. "This cultural orientation is achieved through historical narration".²⁵ Moreover, the postmodernist review of history must be taken seriously to the extent it is led against an ideological generalization which greatly happened starting with enlightenment and up to present. However, considering the acceptance of many histories "we need an idea of historical experience unity",²⁶ in order to avoid a complete relativism." Therefore, it is necessary to have historical categories established through logical reasoning and a history concept that responds to the unifying world's concrete experience; to emphasize micro history in a macro historical world is a nonsense."²⁷

Within the variety of historical perspectives „a unit of history can be obtained only through universal values in the methodical operation of the historical interpretation by a central system of values that claims the differences between cultures."²⁸



The macro-micro history synthesis can be achieved. "A demonstrative micro history must refer to the macrohistorical conditions of the subject or otherwise it tends to de-historize itself."²⁹

As concerns the factual quality of history supported by modernism, the counterfactual possibilities are historically interpreted. "The conceptualization of the historical data conferring to the past the quality of empirical argument and the conceptualization of the historical perspectives conferring to the past the quality to have significance and sense for us in the present world."³⁰ Therefore, for the historical data, it is necessary to extend our concept of sources criticism in order to avoid the way in which we understand the reality of the men from the past. As for the construction of the interpretative historical perspectives where the information acquires the form of a story with sense and significance, the concept of counterfactual possibilities must be accepted and used; it transcends the evolution of the life phenomena from the past towards those from the present; in every moment of the past, there is a fragment of future that needs to be achieved through memory.

Regarding the historical method, the new strategies of hermeneutics are accepted. The new value of the human subjectivity is accepted in the interpretation of the past by transforming the hermeneutics into a structural process. Thus, the "thick description" is not – according to the author – a demonstrative strategy as any "thick description" contains a hidden theory. On the other hand, an efficient strategy regarding history looks like a "hermeneutics that uses the cognitive means of theory"³⁴

In conclusion, one can claim that the modernist historical studies are guided by a conception about rationality, about reason and method being bound by domination and power. The postmodernist orientation insists on the aesthetic quality of the historical celebration, the synthesis between reason and imagination, the practical orientation and the aesthetic fascination being possible only by eliminating the technological mean of the word reason, as well as its impact aiming at domination by means of history, understanding and cognition.

Notes

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3. Jacques Le Goff, *Intelectualii în Evul Mediu*, Meridiane, vol.I, București 1994,p.78
4. Ibidem, p.175
5. Ibidem, p.18
6. W.W. Brickman, *Theoretical and critical perspectives on educations history*, în "pedagogica historica", Ghent, Belgia, vol. XVIII, nr. 1, 1978, p. 42.
7. Idem
8. J.D. Wilson, *Historiografical perspectives on Canadian educational history*, în "The Journal of Education Thought, Calgary, vol.XI, nr. 1, p.63.
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10. C. J Lucas, *Schoolind in American Life:in Search of a Post-revizionist Interpretation*, "Journal of Thought", VOL. Xvi, NR. 10, 1975, P. 284.
11. M. Greene, *identities and Contiuus: An Approach to Educationa History*, în *Educational Research*", Washington, vol. 2, nr. 4, 1973, pag.5.
12. Ibidem, p.10
13. Gaston Mialaret et Jean Vial, *Histoire mondiale de l' education*, Paris, p . 193
14. Gaston Mialaret, *Le Plan Langeuin - Wallon*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1997, p. 115
15. M. A. Pereyra, *La comparacion, unna empresa razonada de analisis. Por otros usos de la comparacion*, în " Los usos de la comparacion en Ciencias Sociales y en Education", număr special al "RE", Madrid, 1989, p. 23
16. Gaston Mialaret, *Le Plan Langeun-Wallon*, p. 181
17. Pierre Caspard, *Guide international de la recherche en histoire de l education*, Institut National de Recherche Pedagogique, Paris, 1990, p.18.
18. Pierre Caspard, op. cit., p.12
19. Ion Găvănescul, *Istoria pedagogiei. Teoriile și instituțiile de educației din timpurile până în zilele noastre*, București, 1912, p.27. 20 Ibidem, p. 28.

20. De completat Apud E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, New York, Vintage Books, 1961, p.87
21. Fernand Braudel, *Ecrits sur l'histoire*, Paris, Falmarion, 1969, p. 20
22. Marc Bloch, *L'etrange defaite*, Paris, 1946, p.127
- A. Pop, op.cit., p.177
23. Jorn Rusen, *Studiile istorice între modernitate și postmodernitate*, în "Litere, Arte, Idei", Supliment cultural Cotidianul, nr.35(216), anul V, 18 septembrie 1995, p.2.
24. Ibidem, p.3
25. Jorn Rusen, op.cit., p.2.
26. Idem
27. Idem
28. Jorn Rusen, op.cit, p.4 32
29. Idem
30. Idem

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