Article

Educational Justice Due to More Education? Requests for a Solution Strategy

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Abstract: Why does education fail to realize educational justice? Why does religious education not play a part in contributing to educational justice to some degree, as it is technically located in the logic of its handed down biblical message? On the one hand, education is socially testified as being at a crucial moment of educational justice, on the other hand, it is not only political and institutional determinants that seem to be opposed to that. In class, there are moments that counteract the abolition of educational injustice. Because of its complexity, confinement of interest and inner differentiation, the pressing problem of injustice in educational processes can only be processed in the complex access at the macro-, meso- and micro-level. The concern of the thoughts at hand is on their interpenetration of analytical, hermeneutical and pragmatical factors and, in that respect, we look to outline the demands on religious educational processes in religious education in schools.

Keywords: education; educational justice; justice; didactics; appraisal; habitus; performance evaluation

1. Introduction

Times get harder, at least when one does not belong to the decreasing class of the economically privileged. This is the conclusion that the Paritätische Wohlfahrtsbericht extracts from its analysis of the Armutsbericht der Bundesrepublik Deutschland of 2015. According to that, poverty has reached a record high that has never been paralleled before. Significant regional differences are to be established as well. "The jagged republic", demonstrated by a poverty rate of 15.5%, is displayed by an almost nationwide growth, where—besides the Ruhr Area, Brandenburg, Berlin, Bremen and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania—the wider area of Cologne/Bonn distinguishes itself negatively as well [1]. This depressing diagnosis seems to be transferable to the European States [2].

For education contexts, it is downright controversial that questions regarding poverty on the one hand correlate, while being brought together with education in a very characteristic way on the other hand. For one thing, educational sociology and social science show the intrinsic nexus of poverty and education. Poverty involves educational poverty. Then again, education is designated as a way in which to more away from exactly this educational poverty and educational justice. Education is meant to enable participation and therefore social as well as cultural alignment ability. Does the debate about educational justice—seen as the capability of participation in society and as a part of individual autonomy—thereby reveal the deepest possibilities of education? Would education therefore be the crucial factor to heal social frictions? Or is education thus overestimated? Is education socially and politically instrumentalized and therefore very prone to ideology? The relevance of these questions for educational theory as well as educational processes is irrefutable. However, religious pedagogy should also be a concern. Religious pedagogy, which is engaged in problems about religious education, serving the purpose of a religious formation of opinion and autonomy, has every reason to form

part of this debate. The human right of education thus becomes a topic of religious pedagogy itself. However, the question concerning the justice of education is not only of high religious pedagogical relevance. Also, with regard to subject matter, learning justice is "the religious pedagogical task", as religious educationalist Norbert Mette emphasises (Mette, Norbert, Gerechtigkeit lernen—die religionspädagogische Aufgabe; in: RpB 27 (1991), 3–26; hier: 3).

This complex problem will be pursued using short strokes: (1) by analyzing the connection between poverty and education more precisely; (2) by posing the question of education as a way out of educational injustice; and (3) by analyzing possible obstacles, right before the fourth section which will outline the outlooks and the perspectives from religious education. Although arisen from a religious educational horizon, these reflections especially assess school pedagogy and educational sociology. A religious educational theory stays in the background nevertheless.

2. Poverty and Education: A Complex Relationship

According to poverty researcher Christoph Butterwegge, the problem of poverty is revealed in a multidimensional structure. Different factors are important: In addition to an extensive destitution, a prolonged deficit of essential assets and services, dependence on subsidies, the lack of possibility to develop an extended life plan and the coherent loss of prestige upon a fellow citizen, poverty is understood as massive deprivations "regarding accommodation, residential environment, budget management, diet, health, education, recreation and culture that lead almost necessarily to the exclusion of the persons concerned from participation in social life that everybody else is able to partake in" [3] (pp. 17–18).

This involves the discrimination of these people concerned who, provided with a negative labeling, get excluded, stigmatized and above all are held liable for their situation because economic-structural reasons for poverty are marginalized [3] (pp. 17–18). The poor are excluded socially through missing social and cultural participation.

The exclusion study dedicates itself to those mechanisms that are responsible for the exclusion of participation and rights. Exclusion is "therefore understood as a simultaneity of inside and outside. It means to be a part of a society but yet having to experience not being part of it" [4] (p. 256). More specifically, it is possible "to be not part of the game (based on) certain criteria of exclusion that correlate with the status of legality, social skills, educational achievement or cultural affinity, then again it is also possible to be dropped out of the game due to certain circumstances of stigmatization, demotion and ignoring" [5] (p. 255). Such experiences of exclusion can happen in widely different aspects of life: exclusion from social and cultural networks; exclusion from the minimum of prosperity; exclusion from the employment market. Sociological exclusion studies have thus analyzed mechanisms of exclusion in the field of education; in such experiences of exclusion which Avishai Margalit calls 'humiliation' occurs. With that, "all behavior patterns and conditions" are meant to "give a person a feasible reason to see oneself violated in one's own self-esteem" [6] (p. 21).

That leads to the main thesis of this article: Educational injustice as a lack of participation in education correlating with humiliation, exclusion and poverty. To prove this thesis, it is essential to see that education is an essential moment in poverty. Education and poverty are interdependently related [3] (pp. 17–18). There is talk of educational poverty [7] (pp. 35–50), of a massive educational injustice [8,9]. This is about a form of "collateral-exclusion" and therefore about a structurally enrooted authority [10] (p. 47). This relates to the fact that the educational injustice that children and adolescents suffer from, is a component and consequence of that exclusion through poverty and missing social and cultural participation that has already shaped their parents. Proportions of children in poverty run the risk of experiencing disadvantages in their school career to a greater extent. On the contrary, minor education reduces the chance of upward mobility and social participation ([11] (p. 147); [12] (pp. 301–319)). This is reflected in the school system as well as the science system ([13] (pp. 143–153); [14]).

According to educational sociology, a close connection between social background and educational success exists that is very problematic regarding justice theory: In Germany, school success crucially depends on social and economic status of the parental home. Children from academic families are more likely to transfer to a Gymnasium than working-class children. "In Germany, the social background of a pupil has a significant impact on the likelihood of transferring to a Gymnasium subsequent to primary school. This applies to all federal states in Germany, but to a varied amount. Thus, the nexus between Gymnasium attendance and family background is less marked in states such as Bremen, Brandenburg, Berlin and Hessen. Primary-school pupils from upper social classes have a 2.5-times higher chance of attending a Gymnasium. By contrast, in Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Lower Saxony, things look different. Here, the difference between the chances of attending a Gymnasium are 6.1-times higher ([15] (p. 18); [16]). According to a variety of empirical studies, the characteristics of social background and educational participation interact strongly, so the following can be ascertained: "The school system in Germany is unfair" [17] (p. 30).

Hence, the problem of educational injustice is extremely pressing because education is highly relevant on different levels [18] (pp. 9–17).

1. Education is considered to be essential for social prosperity due to economic reasons. Education functions as human capital that is to be developed and whose potentials are to be fathomed. Employability, as the target, is an important keyword to remedy the skilled worker shortage. Thus, well-known educational researchers stick to a report that was compiled for the Bavarian economy: "If the establishment of educational justice were not already desirable for other reasons, at least the economic benefit of education could be indicated. Empirical evidence for the economic significance of education, for instance in the form of employment opportunities and earned income, is overwhelming" [8] (p. 114).

2. Education is regarded as indispensable for health reasons: High-school graduates and people with higher education are less frequently affected by illness than lower secondary school graduates. Mathematical, reading and language literacy is quite often accompanied by health competence and therefore a healthier lifestyle.

3. Education is an indispensable basis for democratic participation ability and civilian social commitment, for cultural and social participation.

4. Education is an essential requirement of personal identity and conduct competence. This is where cultural techniques, personal resources, competences and skills are initiated that subserve the human humanization. Humboldt's educational ideal of the most proportional elaboration of human vigors puts education and subjectivization in an unanswerable, tighter correlation through acquirement and examination of the world [18] (pp. 211–340).

5. In Judeo-Christian tradition, education is a fundamental moment of cultivation of man's promised creation in the image of God. Since every human is in God's image, every human holds the God-given possibility to unfold to God in freedom and autonomy. The human, as an autonomous subject, as it has resulted from the traditions of enlightenment, in the legacy of humanistic (Paideia) and Judeo-Christian roots, can be recovered through educational theory ([19] (pp. 34f.); [20] (pp. 209–225)). From a theological perspective, it has to be the aim of educational efforts to make education possible for everyone and to do everything necessary to prevent exclusions, social and cultural disadvantages and to compensate disparities depending on the given circumstances.

Considering the conspicuous significance of education for society for social and cultural participation and individuality, the problem of educational justice shapes "the social question of the present age" [21] (pp. 13–28). Educational injustice, as a lack of participation in education, constitutes a massive social, societal, political and individual problem and as such provides an essential element of poverty and exclusion.

3. Education as a Way out of Educational Injustice

However, how should educational justice be enabled? What can contribute to its realization essentially? How could poverty be resolved eventually? It is very remarkable that the poverty report quoted at the start labels the route of education as a way to overcome poverty and exclusion. Regarding the individual level of education, it has an important impact. It is seen as a way to obtain the skills and formal qualifications needed in the economic sphere but also as a path to cultural and social participation. Modern knowledge-based societies need special qualifications. Without that, the individuals are condemned to work in low-wages jobs or are threatened by unemployment and social isolation. However, also on the level of economic contestability and social solidarity of a country, education is seen as a decisive factor [22].

The poverty report does not stand by itself with this empathetic vote for education as an escape from poverty and exclusion. Many prominent representatives of educational policy and educational science tend in that direction. Quite often, in diverse calls for educational offensives and participation, an education euphoria is spread that can be read downright like an education-related promise of salvation. Education seems to be a way to destruct the deep connection between social background and individual perspectives and to gain the qualifications and skills to gap the social disparities [23] (p. 58). Considering social injustices, an educational awakening is an indispensable contribution to educational justice in the educational system; educational disadvantages of children and adolescents from less educated parents and even disadvantages of handicapped children and children of immigrant background can be weakened [24] (p. 197).

Therefore, in the education system, mediated competences are a basic contribution to the prevention of participation risks as well as an indispensable, integral base of social and cultural participation. This inculcates ecclesiastical publications as well [25].

At the same time, thoughtful voices already indicate the limits of such an educational euphoria. Seen from a socio-ethical perspective, education has to be interconnected essentially with socio-, educational or labor market policy for the attainment of educational justice [26] (pp. 8–13). A cooperative educational responsibility that brings together learners and teachers, parents, adolescents, providers of educational institutions and education policy especially in the sense of "educational governance", appears to be very urgent [27]. Besides, the limits of educational institutions regarding lifelong learning are indicated consistently. Education is not able to produce educational justice by itself. It is referred to politics, civil society but principally to family structures and peer-groups [28]. It is not just that: in the phenomenon of education itself, in its theory and in the processes of its realization, there are aspects that are opposed to the assumption that especially an improved education could ensure social participation.

4. Education as a Way out of Educational Injustice?

The assumption that education is considered as a key to overcoming educational injustice is opposed by several insights. One could differentiate the macro-level of socio-political structure, the meso-level of the educational system and the micro-level of lessons without overlooking that these levels interact and are able to intensify each other.

4.1. Macro-Level: Systemic-Structural Reasons

When putting oneself into the framework of a structural-systemic theoretical perspective, the limits of an educational euphoria are quickly recognizable. In the light of a theory of functional differentia, one subfunction cannot determine the whole. There is no proof that material poverty could be compensated by education. Instead, each factor of exclusion tendencies in education, economics, unemployment and cultural participation occurs side by side or they intensify each other mutually with the risk of an accumulation of poverty-problems in several dimensions [29] (p. 37). Hence, it is not possible to change the whole society from a single field of the functional fully differentiated society.

"That is one of the reasons why education cannot serve as the sole or central 'key' for the explanation of poverty in the sense of limitation of participation possibilities. Thus, the 'school as a system' always involves, for instance, a distinction according to the pupil's performance and therefore according to talent. Talents should be promoted. However, talents are always what children bring to school with them initially. The circle closes" [30] (p. 161). With this structural view, a social perspective is opened that reveals the aporias of a focus on education. These foster a Matthew-effect of an illegitimate privileging of the already privileged. Parents invest more in education; the more talk there is of the educational sanctification, the more education is functionalized with regard to employability [25] (p. 194). Education that is defended as good against the educational demand of others, is increased through investments. The economic competitive pressure and rivalry is thus carried into educational institutions. In the light of PISA, Richard Münch spoke of a deflation of school education and warned that "academic capitalism" undermines the university sector [31]. Moreover, as industrial sociology teaches us, the privatization of education as well as its economization through management methods in terms of new public management increases once more the adjustment and selection pressure of the subjects through internalization and individualization [32].

4.2. Meso-Level: Exclusion Tendencies in the Educational System

The category of cultural capital articulated by Pierre Bourdieu as part of his principle of habitus reveals the mechanisms in the educational process itself through these social implications. His analyses of the educational system allow him to come to a conclusion of a mere "illusion of equal opportunities" that could not be resolved through another such strained educational reform [33]. The more inflationary the awarding educational titles would become, the less worth they would have for social and employment market-oriented participation, with the result that a social reform through education alone would be impossible. In the end, all the achievement efforts of the pupils do not help to increase the chances for social participation. Both the recent changes in the relationship between social classes and the educational system—including related consequences of a pupil explosion and transformation processes in the educational system itself—and also (at least partly) the changes of the social structure resulting from a shift of the interdependence between title and position, are the consequences of intensified competition for academic qualifications. This has been contributed to, to a great extent, the fact that now even those fractions of the dominant class (industrial and trade entrepreneurs) as well as of the middle-class (craftsmen and merchants) who are richest in economic capital, have had to make greatly increased use of the educational system in order to ensure their reproduction [34] (p. 221).

Thus, the educational system serves as a place for the symbolic accumulation of social inequality reproduction capital. What is more: In the educational system itself, social inequalities are cemented through a lack of awareness and pedagogical consideration of heterogeneity. By treating all pupils as equal in their rights and duties—as unequal as they may be in reality—the educational system sanctions the primal inequality in the face of the culture [35] (p. 39). To put it pointedly: School does not integrate but exclude and purge, to the extent that the critical awareness of the subjects is undermined. At the end, they even feel responsible for their exclusion. The school system functions from the bottom up, as if its function did not consist of education but rather elimination. Or rather: to the extent that it eliminates, it succeeds in convincing the losers that they are responsible for their elimination themselves [35] (p. 21).

This way school reproduces social hierarchies but at the same time it disguises and conveys this ideology: "By imposing an unbiased behavior and as such a widely acknowledged sanction on socially induced skills that can be traced back to its ability distinction, it transforms actual equalities into legitimate inequalities, economic and social distinctions into a qualitative gap and legitimizes the conveyance of the cultural heritage. As a result, it wields a mystifying function. The talent ideology—a prerequisite of school and the social system—offers not only the elite an opportunity to see themselves

justified in their existence, it also contributes to leaves the fate of the members of the underprivileged classes—a fate that was allotted to them by society—seem inescapable" [35] (p. 46).

Thus, the concept of education—like the educational system—has to be understood as "the key vindicatory-factory of social inequality in modern society" [18] (p. 155).

4.3. Micro-Level: Didactics and Teachers Practice as Disparity Promoting Factors in Class

In addition to structural questions and questions regarding the educational system, factors in class itself hereby emerge in a reciprocal interaction that was underestimated in its inequality furthering view until now, especially in religious education. Even the underlying tension between "socio-structural reproduction and operative self-rationality" in school ensures that disadvantage- and exclusion processes are inherent in the internal logic of the school, as it can be recognized in the selection function and allocation function ([36] (pp. 137–159); [37] (pp. 163–202)). Thus, school effectiveness research in particular shows that school and class have a significant meaning for educational justice. Admittedly, research on the performance before and after the long American summer holidays showed that school also has a disparity-decreasing function. Primarily exposed to the family influences, students' competencies developed apart more strongly in the summer break than during school time. Children of the upper social classes were able to uphold their performance capability or even expand it, whereas children of the lower classes fell behind ([38] (p. 190); [39] (p. 251)). Nonetheless, according to the findings of empirical educational sociology, school is involved in the formation of inequality through its inner mechanisms.

In this light, teacher behavior as well as class behavior, with its didactics and methods, enter the limelight.

At least in Germany, the middle-class hypothesis is put into perspective due to the fact that—partly because of the educational expansion in the mid-1960s—a growing social heterogeneity—even within the teaching staff, and with this a reduction of the heavy dominance of the middle-class—can be perceived; a middle-class orientation in schools is currently very evident. That means that through specific codes of language, communication and social behavior expected in school and in classrooms, structures of appreciation, gratification and sanctioning are installed. Students from different milieus than the middle-class who are not familiar with these structures and cannot match these expectations are deeply disadvantaged [38] (p. 171). The language and mental operations of an elaborated code that are not congruent with the restricted code of the educationally alienated classes and milieus are fostered from the start. Even though this still requires considerable empirical classroom research, it can be spoken of as "institutional discrimination" whose topicality lays precisely in the foundation of its institutionalized rules, routines, practices and conventions ([40] (p. 113); [41] (pp. 241–252); [42] (pp. 17–26); [43] (pp. 314–324)). This becomes clear by the fact that school and therefore also the teachers are completely involved in the construction of achievements which they observe and assess as well as in the ascription of these constructed achievements to individual top performers [36] (p. 141).

Aside from the appraisal of achievement in the narrower sense, this is probably nowhere more evident than in the well-nigh classic called errors of assessment. In light of the educational justice question, they get a tremendous topicality, such as the Pygmalion effect ([44] (pp. 134–136); [45] (pp. 145–148); [46] (pp. 883–904)). "In the case that teachers consider a pupil to be greatly gifted, they give their best attention to him (or her) to nurture his (or her) potential. If the pupil then performs notably, the teacher gets the feeling that his initial assessment has been right and continues to support the pupil. By contrast, if teachers assume that pupils from poor families are less willing to perform and are less efficient, the Pygmalion effect could have a much more negative effect on the pupils" [26] (p. 65).

Further, in the field of didactics, a sensibility for educational justice casts doubt upon some learning methods that are currently being accelerated pedagogically as well as in religious education in the context of subject orientation. Thus, an open, individualized or constructivist didactics with the

favored forms of detected, independent, self-organized learning is highly problematic, with several disadvantages. From a school's pedagogical point of view, the production of equal opportunities in the classroom is by no means to be expected by the individualization of learning [47] (p. 240). Weaker pupils need a tighter methodical framing. Primarily learners with applicable high cultural and economic capital are able to benefit from open lessons. By contrast, learners from a lower economic status have a much higher tendency to achieve higher accomplishments in a traditional classroom lesson than in open learning procedures and are also able to develop a better attentive and purposeful work attitude [47] (p. 242). Self-regulated, constructivistically justified learning ignores that those who are privileged are those that have an elaborated and distinguished self-concept with strong motivation to work autonomously [48] (p. 153). Against this background, it must at least be asked whether the most ambitious best-practice examples of a heterogeneity-sensible pedagogy of educational learning culture and educational system formation, not only do not abrogate but perpetuate the social selection mechanisms [49] (p. 51). Could one not suspect that with a strictly subject-oriented learning culture, an individualization is involved that primarily takes the individuals with their initiative and commitment up on their promise and defers the less well-off that need more support?

In an education sociological perspective, the term of competence thereby gains a whole new topicality. Competence-based pedagogy contributes to an individualization of performance demands and to self-activation in a very essential way. Surely, such a focus on competence is linked to an increased sensitization for individual skills and acquirements. However, through the normative claim of perpetual work on the Self, through the steady mobilization of resources and the strong "emphasis of the self-reliance of the subject, as a consequence, the achievement justice is propagandized and simultaneously—sometimes more, sometimes less obvious—old, socio-structural inequalities are perpetuated". In this sense, "a new rationality of social differentiation" thereby underlies the focus on competence [50] (p. 82). Instead of the shift of social power relations und injustices in education, the shift of the subjects comes into focus [51] (pp. 99–100).

5. Outlooks

By this implicative correlation at the macro-, meso- and micro-level, it should have become clear that through school and education alone, educational injustice cannot be abolished. When action-theoretical-individualistic and structuralist perspectives are strictly correlated, this diminishes the vigor to want to overcome educational injustice through education and through improved educational institutions for that reason alone. Through education alone, the ruling system, structure and social premises cannot be eliminated [39] (p. 261). It can also be proved empirically that educational initiatives have led to social justice considerably [24] (p. 194). What is initiated on behalf of the spread of social justice eventually leads to "less solidarity that will not only cause problems for those who consider less solidarity—regarding economic- and socio-political questions—as an engine of justice" [24] (p. 196). A downright soteriological pointed fixation on education—to all intents and purposes, a 'Hype' condensed educational discourse—as an engine of higher educational justice and social justice in general [24] (p. 199) turns out to be, upon closer examination, compensation of social injustice. That way, the educational discourse threatens to get caught up in an ideological alibi debate.

Nevertheless, education can essentially contribute to educational justice, to participation and therefore to the abolition of poverty. Education itself has an intrinsic, theoretically relevant, educational justice power. Education is oriented towards good living that is only possible in conducive structures. For that reason, this demands a critical orientation from the concept of education. Education should not refer to the self-cultivation of techniques of the Self alone. It has to be skeptical and transformational, to criticize contexts and structures and help to initiate the autonomy of the subjects in it. Educational processes are involved in social, cultural, political coherences that are objects of critical educational processes themselves. In cases where education is shortened individual-theoretically, in cases where it instructs in existing coherences by itself, but where those—such as in poverty, exclusion, and ecological catastrophes recognizable through armament and exploitation—threaten to result in

human self-destruction, it undermines its own impulses [52] (p. 14). That is why education has to correlate, to some extent, action-theoretical, subject-related and structural aspects.

However, this is also the field where the theological aspect, as it was mentioned at the beginning, becomes relevant. Where education articulates itself as religious education, it is in its own case with its orientation on Incarnation before God. Education as a human right is to be justified philosophically; yet again, it is to be sharpened theologically. Furthermore, religious pedagogy would have to pay attention to the fact that a Judeo-Christian term of justice ultimately is a justice which is opened and donated by the Other. Justice is not doable but is donated. It is God's justice, God's zedaka which is to be verified within history in the power of God by human freedom and given evidence. It is there that, as Jürgen Habermas and Dietrich Benner call it, the supererogatory is founded. (Vgl. Benner, Dietrich, Erziehung—Religion, Pädagogik—Theologie und Erziehungswissenschaft—Religionswissenschaft. Systematische Analysen zu pädagogischen, theologischen und religionspädagogischen Reflexionsformen und Forschungsdesideratea; in: Gross, Engebert (Hg.), Erziehungswissenschaft, Religion und Religionspädagogik, Münster 2004, 9–50; hier: 36; Mendieta, Eduardo, Über Gott und die Welt. Eduardo Mendieta im Gespräch mit Jürgen Habermas; in: JBPTh 3 (1999), 190–209; hier: 206).

Religious education calls attention to the option of a partisan God-justice as a justice for the excluded and poor in the struggle for educational justice. As part of a public theology, religious education—as a public religious education—is asked to enter the public debate about justice, exclusion and solidarity, contributing the special Christian perspective and also giving the church a wake-up call for more social commitment [53] (pp. 67–83). To endorse the sensitivity for injustice, for the outsider and sufferer in the light of the idea of God in an educational discourse, requires a political—sensitive in itself—complex, public, religious education [42]. Perhaps one of the key contributions of a public religious education to poverty and educational justice discourse lays in a certain paradoxical turn that relativizes these particular issues through the political dimensioning of the concept of education: the focus on education itself in favor of structural and systemic categories. "From then on, we would trust education and qualifications to have less effects—and therefore, would not overload those for whom we have high expectations and as a consequence excessively overstretch them. At the same time, we would contain the competition for educational advantages in our children's interest—and with that, create the chances for a compensating education policy and thereby more educational justice. However, to remove education and qualifications more significantly from the attention of the justice discourse, there would need to be interest in the public debate about poverty and social injustice in social groups of insufficient income, with less access to healthcare, and who are lacking opportunities to well-paid employment or who suffer inadequate inclusion. The debate about justice would have to be redirected towards other indicators of injustice" [24] (pp. 198–199). With that, the educational theoretical context—even the educational political context—is exceeded. Without education, there is no educational justice but neither is there educational justice with education alone.

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