

WHAT IS WRONG? GOVERNANCE IN EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL POLICIES IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Dr. Tudor Stanciu

Tudor Stanciu, PhD, is currently working at College of Education,
Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and Northampton Community College, PA, USA,
based on a Fulbright SIR 2012-2013 scholarship, administrated by IIE.

Comments can be sent by e-mail to:
tus200@lehigh.edu

O que está errado? A governança na educação e nas políticas de educação em tempos de crise.

Resumo

As várias crises no mundo, causados por conflitos armados – locais, regionais, nacionais ou internacionais – desastres naturais, doenças ou situações econômicas que agravam a distância entre pobres e ricos, têm colocado pressão na educação nas instituições de ensino superior. Que consequências têm os diferentes tipos de crise na educação e que papel podem as instituições de educação desempenhar nestas situações?

Palavras-chave

Educação; Educação Superior; Crise; Governança; Globalização

What is wrong? Governance in education and educational policies in times of crisis

Abstract

The various crisis in the world, caused by armed conflicts – local, regional, national or international - , natural disasters, diseases, or economic situations that increases the gap between poor and rich, have also put education and higher education institutions under pressures. What consequences have different kinds of crisis on education and higher education and what role educational institutions can play in these situations?

Keywords

Education; Higher Education; Crisis; Governance; Globalization

Qu'est-ce qui ne va pas? Le gouvernement dans l'éducation et politiques éducationnelles en temps de crise

Résumé

Les diverses crises dans le monde, causées par des conflits armés – à niveau local, régional, national ou international – des désastres naturels, maladies, ou situations économiques augmentent la différence entre pauvres et riches, mettent aussi sous pression l'éducation et l'éducation supérieure.

Quelles sont les conséquences des différentes sortes

de crise dans l'éducation et l'éducation supérieure e quel est le rôle des institutions éducationnelles dans ces situations?

Mots-clés

Éducation; Education Supérieure; Crise, Gouvernement; Globalisation

¿Qué está mal? Gobierno y políticas de educación de la educación en tiempos de crisis

Resumen

Las diversas crisis en el mundo, causada por el conflicto armado - local, regional, nacional o internacional - los desastres naturales, las enfermedades o situaciones económicas que agravan las diferencias entre ricos y pobres, han ejercido presión sobre la educación en las instituciones de educación superior. ¿Qué efectos tienen los diferentes tipos de crisis en la educación y que papel pueden jugar las instituciones de educación en estas situaciones?

Palabras claves

Educación; Educación Superior; Crisis; Gobernanza, Globalización

I Introduction

Within minutes, 26 people were dead at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut, United States - 20 of them children. The shooter, a 20-year-old man, also killed himself. His mother's body was also found at a Newtown residence. The *shooting* is the second-deadliest school shooting in U.S. history, behind the shooting at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (popularly known as Virginia Tech), in 2007, that left 32 people dead. (CNN US, 2012)

In Congo, the southern Pool region, devastated by a decade of bombardment by the national army during its war with local "Ninja" rebels, lacks basic infrastructure including roads and health centers. *Continuing banditry and violence* have forced even the most tenacious international agencies to make temporary pull-outs. The United Nations calls the health situation in Pool "catastrophic". (AlertNet, 2012)

On April 2012, an earthquake of 8.7 *magnitude* struck off the coast of Indonesia sending residents there and

in India dashing out of their homes and offices in fear. A tsunami warning was in effect for the whole Indian Ocean. (AlertNet, 2012)

The Horn of Africa is in the grip of a *major food crisis*, which has affected millions of people in drought-stricken areas of Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti since April 2011.

A highly contagious and potentially *fatal fever* touched thousands of people in Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania in 2006 and 2007. The most vulnerable were refugees fleeing the Somali conflict. The virus was spread through mosquito bites and contact with infected animals. In a few cases people vomited blood or bled to death.

The various crisis in the world, caused by armed conflicts – local, regional, national or international -, natural disasters, diseases, or economic situations that increases the gap between poor and rich, have also put education and higher education institutions under pressures. What consequences have different kinds of crisis on education and higher education and what role educational institutions can play in these situations?

According to Wikipedia, a crisis is any event that is, or expected to lead to, an unstable and dangerous situation affecting an individual, group, community or whole society. Crises are deemed to be negative changes in the security, economic, political, societal or environmental affairs, especially when they occur abruptly, with little or no warning. More loosely, it is a term meaning ‘a testing time’ or an ‘emergency event’. What is a testing time for Romania or other Eastern European countries that have had to face on average 45 years of Communism regime? How deep transformations took place in these countries- where changes were in education as well, and one can question if there were always the good ones.

In situations of crisis – isolated or persistent – education and higher education is not among the first ones to come in mind but the scientific progress, the technology, the multitude of serious challenges (such as natural or intended disasters, diseases, wars, armed conflicts, critical levels of natural resources, the increase of the gap between poor and rich) have had dramatically influenced the field of education.

Education and specially Higher education can become a subject of political contestation even in the absence of an armed conflict as the one in Connecticut or Congo. For instance, one of the issues that highlighted the politically build ethnic conflict between Romanians

and Hungarians in Romania in 2012 was the demand of ethnic Hungarians parties for a separate university in their own language.

It is known that the main mission of educators is to build a better and safer life for society. This goal can be achieved only by cooperating with the governmental and socio-economic environment and by applying theoretical knowledge for transforming resources in products and services.

The educational system can be compared with a big mountain site (Ph. Favre, 1998). The ascent is not a job that is available to anyone. The difficulty of routes requires special training for both who want to try their strength with heights (the students), but also for the specialized guides (the teachers), and for those who design and implement educational policies.

The road can sometimes be common, but the effort is mostly individual. The mission of educational leaders and of educators is to provide differentiated and customized routes, based on the capabilities and features for those who want to assault the peaks of knowledge and learning and be ready to face the World and Its change. Postmodern pedagogy discovers the emergency of the subject (Stanciu M, 2010), which „does not separate the individual subject to its social roles.” (Pourtois, J.-P. and Desmet, H., 1997).

The concept of globalization emerged in various disciplines, and it has also become part of education. Moreover, globalization revolutioned the new technologies and methodologies of education and have generated multidisciplinary approaches. Many authors consider globalization as being beneficial for humanity, other also show its negative effects which require institutional adjustments. (Zyman, 2010).

In these conditions good governance predicts and overcomes a crisis and the benefits are (adapted from Uriel consulting, 2012): 1.You are viewed as credible and people trust your educational institutions; 2.You know where you’re going; good governance amplifies the strategic thrust of an educational institutions; 3.Your board or exco is connected to your the heartbeat of the educational organization; 4.You get and make good decisions; people value your work; 5.You build core that gives you the ability to weather crises; 6.Financial prudence; 7.There is a growing body of evidence linking governance and overall increased organizational performance.

II A Romanian case study

Through the history of education, there are many efforts meant to increase consciousness of the importance of the field at all levels: individual, local, regional, national, and international.

An example is a small successful community involvement in the education of 30 orphans from a foster home, where higher education took the lead.

“We were happiest when we could take another loaf of bread when the bread truck came. Then we believed that bread was the best food”.

Under these circumstances, several kids prove to everyone that not only scientists make inventions. Self-cleaning cooker, sound disk, anti-cellulite tights, flower pot with artificial rain, wiper blinds, energetic socks, interchangeable toys, chalk stand, rucksack sweater, inflatable sports shoes, foot knob – these are just a few of the imaginative inventions presented by a group of 25 children aged between 10 and 14, from the “Primaverii” Foster Home, in Romania, together with some children of the academic staff of the Technical University of Iasi, in the Invention Halls for youngsters, organized in Bucharest, Suceava, Iasi, Brussels, and Geneva.

The inventions were made within the non-formal education projects “Steps to the world” and “Starting with the Young”¹ - “Ron Brown Fellowship Program Alumni Small Grants Program”, funded by the Bureau of Education and Culture Affairs (ECA) of the State Department of the Government of the United States of America. For almost two years, the children attended these programs that stimulated their creative skills.

The children took part in interactive classes of teamwork, leadership, swimming, skimming, mnemonic techniques, journalism, photographic art, negotiation and communication, English language, tourist orientation, and creativity. One of the most spectacular results was represented by the sixty inventions made by the kids, registered in the State Office for Inventions and Patents.

The youngest participant in the Invention Salons was Andrei T., only 10 years old, who imagined a pair of

¹ The projects “Starting with the Young” and “Steps to the world”, which lay at the basis of the case study in this article, took place in 2001-2003, through two grants - Ron Brown Fellowship Alumni Small Grants – of the Bureau for Education and Culture Affairs (ECA) of the State Department of the United States Government, for the Support of Democracy in Eastern Europe.

energetic socks and, together with his elder brother, Mihai T., the wiper blinds. Here is how Mihai describes his invention: “I was looking out the window, and there were the blinds; I thought some people don’t like to clean the windows, so I imagined some blinds that have a washing device attached, built from a sponge that has inside some feed lines with a cleaning product.”

Gabriela B., only 12 years old, who comes from a six-children family, had, together with her brother Ciprian and with Roxana C., three inventions: interchangeable toys – an invention that she describes as follows: “that is, when you have a teddy bear and you’re bored of it, you can change its paws, its head and so on” – the chalk stand and a radio ball pen. Few of these children would have imagined, one or two years ago, that they would become real inventors. However, this became possible due to the alternative education programs “Steps to the world” and “Starting with the Young”, whose results were presented and enjoyed real success with the State Department of the United States of America. For the good development of the mentioned activities, the programs received the support of the community: The Students’ House of Culture, the Faculty of Automatics and Computers, and the Department for Training the Teaching Staff - “Gh. Asachi” Technical University of Iasi, the City Hall, the Department for Fast Intervention, and the Firemen’s Group.

The projects finished with some remarkable results: participations and prizes in invention salons, a non-governmental organization received the European Label award for 2002, the Technical University of Iasi granted the “Excellency Diploma” to the project “Starting with the Young”, and many trash bins in Iasi, Romania changed the city’s atmosphere through the paintings with which they were embellished. Besides the inventions and the mentioned results, the most important was the fact that for some children, the way to Bucharest was the longest trip in their life; the fact that a 12 year old (Gabriela B.) confessed that the most beautiful moment in her life occurred during the program; that several beautiful, open, and intelligent kids learned that life can also have a happy future. (Stanciu T, Proiect.Edu, 2010, p. 11-13)

Higher education is essential for social, economic and cultural health of a nation. HE contributes to the development of students, knowledge creation, and development of culture and values that characterizes it:

„the concern for riguriosity, respect for individuals and their point of view, and research of truth” (Dearing report, 1997).

Higher education institutions do not only reflect the dominant ethos of a society; they also create and reproduce it. (Jana Bacevic, 2012).

This is why, reforms in higher education must be made having in mind the development of a better world by cooperating with the public and private sector, with NGOs and governmental organizations, aiming to reach an equilibrium in recourses usage and needs of future generations, by maintaining in the same time the environmental balance for sustainable development, by applying of technologies that minimizes the waste of resources, reducing pollution and protecting human health and wealth.

In order to reach these objectives, governments must promote and sustain education and higher education. This is the most important factor for the development of public understanding. The main priority is to satisfy the need to educate people and to train competent professionals. Performance of the entire educational system is the aggregate performance of each educational institutions separately and quality orientation to ensure minimum standards for each of these institutions. Only in engineering education in the last 15 years 8 consortia involving 40 universities were set up for the reform. Five years ago, the participants at the World Convention of Educators adopted the Shanghai Declaration regarding Engineering and the Sustainability of the Future.

As part of the engineering education, innovation and creation have a decisive importance. In this respect, curricular and pedagogical reforms are needed in engineering education and professional development in order to cover a larger area of social and ethical problems. In this way the interest of engineering among young generation will be increased as well.

III Conclusions

Good educational governance (institutional, local, regional, national, and international) is the main response to challenges in times of crisis because poor governance often results in resource leakages, corruption and chaos. Among factors that have a significant impact on the performance of education and higher education are the educational policies developed by

governments, the entrepreneurial behavior, and academic leaders. These factors are related to change, and the ability to manage efficiently and effectively any situation in times of crisis.

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