

## **Educational challenges in the time of Covid. A systemic view.**

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For a long time children will remember this Pandemic, the distancing from friends, the elbow greetings, the use of face masks, being in the classroom with a jacket because it is very cold outside and you have to open the windows to get fresh air, the closed schools, studying from home. However, talking about education in times of pandemic, isolated, it is very simplistic, or better it is not enough. Next to a student, there is his or her family and, consequently, the emotional, economic and affective state of this couple that will directly influence the socio-emotional-educational development of this student. Alongside the student and his or her family there is an economic and political system that must be questioned. In this sense, this text expresses a brief and systemic vision of the educational challenges in the time of Covid-19.

These are difficult and, above all, unpredictable times. Since March 2020, Germany has been on "alert" for the spread of Covid-19. And the truth is that no one thought that this situation would extend for so long, many even protested against the government's actions to prevent the spread of the virus. The truth is that no matter how much effort and investment has been made (or promised), the scenario we live in today, at the end of January 2021, is far from optimistic.

About the question: How is education in the German Republic?

Well, clearly and consistently. Badly. Every day, every week and every month we hear politicians and scientists give explanations about the data collected (counts, incidence and deaths), and decisions are made on the basis of these data. For many, the decisions are a real pain, not only because of the uncertainty of the continuity of their children's schooling, but also because of the financial burden on families, a factor that generates a lot of stress.

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School is undoubtedly a fundamental part of children's lives; it is in this environment that they learn academic content and, above all, make friends and learn to live together. Closing schools, as has been done in several countries because of the pandemic, comes at a high price for children and their families. The effects of the absence of classes in schools is already a reality verified by several studies, pointing to increased inequalities in educational outcomes (Saavedra, 2021; UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, 2020).

Learning is expected to continue digitally. However, how can learning be effective if teachers in schools themselves have no knowledge of didactics with technological tools? Part of this problem, which is always present, is the lack of equipment (both in the school and in the homes of underprivileged students), problems related to networks, servers and connectivity.

An alternative for many schools is to prepare small packages with the activities to be worked on. They are sent by post or parents collect them personally from schools. Children who live in a large

household, and have parents with academic backgrounds, are the ones who are doing best in their learning during this pandemic. But the reality is that many parents with low incomes and low levels of schooling are unable to help their children with homework. It is worth remembering that many parents are also at home doing "home-office". In other words, it is a really stressful situation for everyone and seems to be unsustainable in the long run, so much so that this problem is increasingly reported in the German media.

How long are we going to continue in this situation? Will there be a solution in the short term? Will this whole situation strengthen us as human beings? What will change in the world economy? Will we continue to live with the socio-economic discrepancy that we are seeing growing?

There are many questions posed by the pandemic, the exact answers to which no scientist can give. That is why I prefer to focus on some more personal questions:

Why are we so tired?

We lack more presence. We are social beings and, as such, it is difficult for us to distance ourselves from the people we love, with whom we share our time at school, the people we play with, the people we admire. The colleagues at work, the coffee break, the conversation that inspires us. We lack the freedom of a spontaneous visit to a person we appreciate. And all this, this physical limitation, tires us more than we can imagine.

What can we do about this situation? Some ideas are:

Develop a new home/family routine, be aware of the little things that are important in our day to day life, talk and be aware, so as not to hurt or assault the people around us, sleep, watch comedies, meditate, be selective in what we watch and listen on the internet, do physical or musical training with the different tutorials that the internet provides us with (many of them free of charge).

The question we are also asking ourselves after so many months of pademia is: how do we take care of our children, the people around us, the old people and ourselves? The truth is that "care" - as a matter of "market" - is a predominantly female issue, which is still undervalued in society. I remember the cleaning ladies who worked in the hospitals where I worked in Brazil and Portugal. In general, very humble people, working for a tertiary company, with miserable salaries. And how important is the cleanliness of a hospital environment for the recovery of patients!

Why should a hospital cleaner, an educator, a carer of the sick, earn so little, to the point of being marginalised in society? Will we learn the value implicit in these jobs and will the market reward that value?

The Corona pandemic represents a milestone in human history: For the first time since inequality has been statistically recorded, this pandemic threatens to increase inequality in virtually all countries at the same time.

Inequality also manifests itself in other areas of life during the crisis. Education is one of the central areas for combating poverty and inequality. Now, according to the World Bank, we are facing the biggest education crisis in the last hundred years (Saavedra, 2021). Especially groups that were already disadvantaged are falling further behind: In 2020, more than 180 countries temporarily closed their schools as a result of the pandemic, leaving almost 1.7 billion children and adolescents out of school. Children in low-income countries thus lost almost four months of schooling, while children in high-income countries lost only six weeks (UNESCO, 2020).

In another survey, Revollo (2021) asked 295 economists from 79 countries about rising inequality. Among them were leading global economists such as Jayati Ghosh, Jeffrey Sachs and Gabriel Zucman.

Eighty-seven percent of respondents expected income inequality in their country to rise, or rise sharply as a result of the pandemic, only economists from two countries believed that income inequality would not rise. More than half of the respondents also thought that gender inequality would increase, or very likely to increase, and more than two-thirds thought the same of racial inequality. Two-thirds also felt that their government did not have a plan to combat inequality.

Although the conditions and consequences are laid out, we are all aware of what is happening globally, so we now have information and data that we can collect, analyse, interpret and access thanks to connections and technologies. If educational, social and economic disparities are not through together. Many people stand to lose from this situation and I imagine that we will ignore a phrase attributed to Socrates that calls on us to remember more than ever:

"Only the knowledge that makes us better is useful".

## References

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