

Committee IV
Crises in Education in the 1980's:
A Survey of Educational Values and Systems

Second Draft --
for Conference Distribution Only

ECOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN EDUCATION AND GEO-PERSONALISM

by

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Discussion Paper

on

Klaus Schleicher's

**ECOLOGICAL VS PURELY FUNCTIONAL CONCEPTS
IN EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY**

The Thirteenth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences
Washington, D.C. September 2-5, 1984

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Discussing concisely the paper of Prof. Schleicher, I would like to choose for the following threefold approach namely

- 1) agreeing
- 2) discussing
- 3) searching for an alternative.

1. Agreeing

Prof. Schleicher's paper is in my opinion mansidedly documented and refers to the most important and relevant literature.

In general I agree with both the diagnosis of the crisis in Western European educational systems and the main elements proposed to solve this crisis.

1.1. Concerning the diagnosis of the crisis I will agree particularly with the following aspects :

- that the identity of man is fragmented because of the given reasons (p. 1-2);
- that religious, scientific and humanistic dimensions are generally no longer interrelated (p. 2);
- that education is challenged by the conflicting situation of radical loneliness on the one hand and the hubris of the economical and technological evolution on the other hand (p. 3);
- that more attention should be paid to the individual and human needs (p. 3);
- that school subjects are largely dominated by paradigms of the past (p. 3);
- that the amplitude of educational crisis is intensified and influences all areas of education at the same time (p. 4);
- that educational research and policy is not enough oriented towards the current educational problems (p. 4);
- that educational crises are strongly provoked by incongruent social demands on education (p. 5);
- that there is a significant gap between the educational output and the changed social expectations (p. 5);
- that there is a big need for media literacy and for media education (p. 6-8);
- that educational crises are strongly influenced by differing concurrent value concepts as well as research paradigms (p. 8).

1.2. Concerning the solution of the crisis I would like to agree particularly with the following aspects :

- that educational strategies have to change so that they can deal more adequately with social complexity and dynamism (p. 11-12);
- that broader and more child-oriented goals have to be formulated and followed (p. 12);
- that educational sciences should pay more attention to the media as a socialization and as a teaching agent (p. 13-14)
- and that media education should be an integrative didactic principle throughout all subjects (p. 15);
- that the educational research paradigms should be more interdisciplinary and comparative in their approach and more longitudinal and ecological in their scope (p. 16-18);
- that either a new educational common sense will have to be developed (p. 19);
- that "it is this missing macro-frame of reference however which is really at the heart of today's educational crisis" (p. 20);
- that in education we have to focus on "an integrated personality", on "a personal identity", on "a global human identity";
- that we have to go searching for criteria for an "ethic of survival" (p. 22), for a reintegration of man into the unity of nature (p. 22) and for a human-ecological dimension (p. 23).

2. Critically

I would like to develop my critical remarks based on three questions whereby I try to level some elements of an answer.

2.1. First question : Is everything said about Europe typical only for Europe ? Why couldn't it be typical also and even more for the U.S. and other industrialised countries ?

E.g. : - The too partial and short-lived attempts to adjust education more continuously to technological, social and political developments (p. 3).

- The amplitude of educational crisis is in my opinion not only European transnational (p. 4) but has worldwide characteristics and is a problematic phenomenon on the back of the industrialisation of the world.

2.2. Second question : Is "the underlying crisis" (p. 26), as mentioned by Prof. Schleicher, sufficiently related to and based on a critical analysis of the maybe alienating characteristics of our western culture ? In other words : is he criticizing enough the socio-economic characteristics of our western society and the presuppositions and paradigms of our dominating economic model ?

- Reading carefully the text of Prof. Schleicher I can rather scarcely find some criticism on our current societies in the western world. So on p. 2 it is said that "it is expected to 'safeguard' children against utilitarian and alienating forces in societies and in the politics". And on p. 23 one can read that "any education will somehow fail if it simply falls in line too much with social and economic demands...".
- But many times I have the impression that education is focussed as a system wherein there is a crisis and wherein this crisis has to be solved, and that the other subsystems of our societies are not or not enough suspected as both causes of and solutions for the current educational problems.
In my opinion Prof. Schleicher is too quickly agreeing that on the one hand there is a "grandiose success of highly industrialised societies" (p. 2) and that on the other hand there is an educational crisis and that "education has to come up with new strategies" (p. 15).
- I have a lot of questions about the explicite and particularly the implicite message of our current educational crisis. One of my questions is : what is the educational crisis telling me about our society, about the crisis in the other subsystems of our society, about maybe the fact that our so-called highly industrialised societies are not so successful as we generally like to believe ? What about the human quality of the main characteristics and of the non criticized presuppositions of our industrialised societies ?
- Asking these questions, I would like to know better what we call and when we speak about an "educational crisis". Do educational reforms have to be able only to adjust education more continuously to technological, social and political developments ? (p. 3) And do we speak about "educational crisis" when this "adjustment" does not "yet" happen ? Could "educational crisis" not also and maybe better be seen as an aspect of a whole socio-cultural crisis ?

Almost always I have the impression that Prof. Schleicher is starting from the presupposition that the educational system has to be able to meet public expectations (p. 6). If not, then there is a so-called educational crisis. But the question whether these public expectations are "valuable" or not is not critically asked.

- These and similar questions lead me to the problem of the so-called "ideology of educational innovation". Is Prof. Schleicher conscious enough of the fact that education cannot be used to solve problems which did not originate in the educational sector and that consequently other sectors in our society (e.g. the economic system) have to be indicated and criticized as effectors of crises, even the crises in our educational systems? It is my belief that education could be more effective in the attempt to change the society if we succeed to establish a not only society-serving and instrumentalistic-oriented educational system but also a society-criticizing and a more ethic-oriented educational system.

This rather optimistic view invites me to put a third question, namely :

2.3. Third question : Do we find safely enough criticism concerning the presuppositions (paradigms) of our sciences, including the educational sciences, and also concerning the presuppositions in looking to one of the main concepts in human sciences and in education, namely the concept of the "individual" ?

- In Schleicher's paper a lot of attention is given to the analysis of the research paradigms in education (p. 15-18) and also to the insights coming from other sciences as e.g. the natural sciences (p. 19-20). But, in my opinion, this criticism on our paradigms and this listening to the lessons of other sciences (e.g. the critic of sciences) could go much further. The concept of "paradigm" is used when a particular science is focussed. But one could speak about a more or less homogenous cluster of paradigms when we consider the whole network of current sciences. So we could go in search of a meta-paradigm and, if we find it, we could question it. In my critical opinion, I see a very important and many times used non-criticized concept where all human sciences are based on, namely the concept of the "individual". Also Prof. Schleicher gives the impression to start from the evidence of this basic concept. Many times

he is referring to this notion, both in his analysis of the educational crisis as well as in his proposed alternatives. On p. 3 he says that "more attention should be paid to the individual and human needs..." and in his "starting points for a value-oriented education" he is writing that "it is the individual alone who can realize responsibility..." (p. 21).

- My fundamental question is : what do you mean by "individual" ? And how do you relate this notion to other (analogue ?) concepts used in your paper as e.g.
 - an integrated personality
 - a personal identity
 - a global human identity
 - self-realization ?

And how do you relate all these concepts to, what you called, a "macro-ethic" ?

I not only ask questions to Prof. Schleicher, but I will take the risk to level some elements of an answer on these questions. This I will do in my last point, namely :

3. In search for an alternative

Speaking about education we should have in mind a definition of what education is. In my opinion it could be defined as "a critical-creative integration of the whole personality into our current dynamic and complex society and culture".

This integration could be seen as a proces of socialization, which, in pedagogical terms, has to be situated between facts and desirability.

Studying educational problems, many times we have been confronted with the almost too quickly supposed but rather difficult proces of "internalization". Particularly in the theories on reproduction it is said that we internalize our outside world. Seen from the sociology of education and also based on the more philosophical "structuralistic" approach (Lévi-Strauss, Foucauld, Lacan...) I strongly tend to argue that a human being is not an individual as we usually think and say but has to be seen much more as an internalized society, as a reflecting and acting bio- and sociotype, or as a subjectivized structure. In my opinion our traditional concept of individuality and personality has to be deliberated from the mystifying liberalism and has to be enlarged and enriched by the recent empirical results and interpretations of

an educational science which is more in touch with sociological, economical and antropological research.

Of course if we think in such a way, we are provoked to formulate new answers on eternal questions as e.g. about freedom and determinisme, etc. But we shouldn't turn away our mind from the new facts about our current existence because we don't like to review our most valuable concepts as e.g. freedom, responsability, values, religion, etc.

As far as I can register my existence in this technological world, and also listening very carefully to what the current sciences can tell me about man, I am forced to say that my feeling of being an individual is enlarged. I feel to be so large as everything that is influencing me and as everything on what I can have an influence. In our technical and cybernetic world the range of influencing and of being influenced is much larger than some decades ago. Our so strongly changed existence is provoking us to give a significative other interpretation of our essence. The eternal question "who I am ?" has to be answered in a different way.

For me the answer is concisely the following : I do not only have relations, but I am relation. I am past, present and future. I am a bio- and sociotope. I am an eco-psychic relationship. I am an internalized environment and society. I am subjectivizing the structures where I am living in...

In other words I have to change the traditional personalistic view on my individuality into a geo-personalistic one.

In such a new paradigm, we should of course reexamin our concepts of education and, maybe started from an other approach, I am sympathizing with the same view as Prof. Schleicher when he is tending towards a more ecological estimation of educational concepts. But consequently then, reading carefully Schleicher's paper, I have some difficulties about the vague way he is using very important concepts as e.g. "individual", "outer world", "inner world", "self-realization", etc.

I would like to go further : if a human being is an internalized society, then education is a critical and ethical ennoblement and elevation of all aspects and dimensions of such a "person". It means that I cannot separate, and even more, that I cannot focus only on the potentialities of the person, such as e.g. the intelligence, but that I have to integrate immediately both the aspects of the person and the dimensions of his environment. A human being,

seen as a reflecting and acting bio-sociotope, obliges me for example to analyse critically the socio-economic quality of his environment so that education has to be always linked with a critical analysis of social and economical life.

In this (too short) discussing paper of course it is not possible to explain more on this, what I would like to call, "geo-personalistic alternative". The consequences for education, both practice and theory, have to be analyzed more fundamentally. Also for our view on ethics and religion considerable implications could be derived from.

Any way it is my belief that this concisely explained geo-personalistic alternative could be served as a possible contribution to solve the crisis in both education and in our current society and culture.