



## EDUCATION AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Miroslav Colić (2022). *Education and Contemporary Society*. Belgrade: Students' City Cultural Center, 21 cm, 154 pages

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The relationship between education and society is a multidisciplinary topic that has captured the attention of pedagogists, psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, and culturologists in equal measure. The dilemma of whether education contributes to the development of society or society and its ruling structures influence and shape education seems to be perennial and still awaits its resolution. In the book entitled *Education and Contemporary Society*, the author Miroslav Colić offers a linguistically clear, detailed, and precise observation of the relationship between education and contemporary society through the prism of critical pedagogy, that is, *liberation pedagogy* and its advocates, including Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich, and Bogdan Suchodolski. The book juxtaposes their theoretical positions with the pedagogy of conformism and consumerism of Edward Bernays and Ernest Dichter. Likewise, in this manuscript, the author invokes the deliberations and prescriptions of other foreign and domestic theorists, including Neil Postman, Noam Chomsky, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, Đura Šušnjić, Zagorka Golubović, Todor Kuljić, Aleksandar Lipkovski, Ljubodrag Duci Simonović, and Ivan Ivić, among others. Contributing to the unique quality and dynamics of the book are numerous quotes, illustrations, and thoughts about education and schooling from the minds of our esteemed writers and artists, including Radivoje Raša Popov and Timothy John Byford.

*Education and Contemporary Society* comprises four chapters: 1) Society and Educational Capital; 2) Knowledge Society; 3) Pedagogy of Dehumanization; and 4) From Public Place to Marketplace. At the end of the manuscript, the author provides an extensive bibliography, which illuminates the author's meticulous, studious, and dedicated approach to the subject.

The keywords that the author discusses in this book are *society*, *cultural capital*, *education*, *pedagogy*, *knowledge society*, and *market*. The author attempts to offer answers to a multitude of crucial questions related to global education and its role in the development of society. Do today's market-driven and capitalist societies

contribute to the development of conformist education or should education contribute to the development of a free society? The author discusses the role of education and culture in a consumer society that destroys natural resources, leaving a wasteland in its wake, both in the human soul and on the planet. Education that teaches us how to live, education that questions and critically approaches our lifestyle and reasons for our lifestyle, education that offers a more meaningful life is the kind of education to which we should aspire. The author introduces us to the conception of education that liberates and involves individual action and productive articulation of human potential. From the viewpoint of learning, this conception involves active and critical acquisition of knowledge, linking theory with practice, implementing and adopting novelties, creatively approaching the process of learning, and having a critical attitude towards reality. Education for liberation emphasized the need for innovative learning with action and participation as universal requirements, not only in the processes of teaching and learning, but also in the general social context. It should be emphasized that within education for liberation, participation does not merely involve taking on roles and actively participating in processes of importance to people and society, but also cooperation with others, dialogue, and empathy.

In the first chapter, the author introduces us to the ways cultural capital has been defined through the years, with a particular focus on Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of cultural capital in the educational context and his explanation of mechanisms within the education system that encourage the reproduction of social inequality through schooling.

In the second chapter, the author discusses our understanding of the concept of *knowledge society* in contemporary education. *Knowledge society* is shaped by the market economy and capitalist society, in the context of which knowledge becomes a commodity. Colić further discusses the commodification of knowledge, which has modified our understanding of the concept of *education* and the roles of educational institutions. According to the conception of conformist or consumerist education, the contemporary education system is based on the same model as entrepreneurship, with a focus on investments and expected profits. Within this concept, children and the youth are educated for a life guided by consumerism and conformism, in which freedom stands for the freedom to choose between different standardized products and not the possibility to reexamine the foundations of the system and have a true freedom of choice or freedom at all. Furthermore, the author highlights the effects of the pedagogy of conformism and consumerism (adapting to the established patterns, knowledge control, control of human perception, and the creation of passive consumers, that is, adopters of the dominant ideology of capitalism) that are used to support the process of dehumanization of society. Referring to numerous sources and examples (e.g., news articles, movies, TV shows, and reports), the author points to the fact that Western societies, under the pretext of promoting democracy and preventing violence, implement the pedagogy of conformism by using different

pedagogical methods to ensure that people blindly follow the rules and norms of the social system.

In this book, the author dedicates special attention to the criticism of the increasingly prevailing corporative, commercial, and army culture in higher education institutions across the US as well as Europe. Since higher education is now intended for a larger number of people and encompasses a wider range of professions, universities around the world have developed new programs to respond to the increasing number of specializations within certain professions. On the one hand, this has led to the massification and expansion of higher education. On the other, it has resulted in the devaluation of education. While the number of individuals with higher levels of education has increased, the quality of their knowledge has dramatically decreased. In addition to the massification of higher education and its devaluation, we are now witnessing the commercialization of education. Higher education institutions and even primary and secondary schools are advertised on billboards, television, radio, social networks, and the internet. As the author states in one of the chapter titles, education has gone “from public place to marketplace”. According to Henry Giroux, the key problem of the marketization, corporatization, and commodification of education lies in the fact that syllabi and curricula are exclusively shaped by market needs. In this context, what matters is only that students are technically skilled and equipped to survive in the neoliberal arena. This leads to the neglect of education focusing on critical dialogue and democracy, which are crucial for sustaining a civic and democratic society. The author concludes that through these processes, a large part of social and humanist education is rendered irrelevant, unpopular, and useless.

We can conclude that this book features a valuable, well-substantiated critique of contemporary education. The unique quality of the manuscript lies in the way the author approached writing and research and shaped everything into a book that is truly worthy of attention. The wealth of information provided in this manuscript stems from a variety of sources, including but not limited to scientific papers, news articles, radio and TV shows, and panel discussions.

Miroslav Colić’s book *Education and Contemporary Society* sends the message that we absolutely need to invest in education that liberates (instead of promoting conformism), so we could encourage critical thinking, value reexamination, and productive action in all segments of society.

The author emphasizes that it is necessary to create a socio-political context that would prioritize values such as freedom, truth, law and justice, and humanity (i.e., the common good) rather than the “values” of the market.

*Education and Contemporary Society* is a book that can suit and benefit all readers who are willing to question themselves, their beliefs, and their place in society. It is likewise recommended to individuals who want to think critically about the time and society they live in and everyone who truly believes in justice, equality, and life-

giving humanism. The manuscript would primarily be useful as required reading for students of pedagogy, psychology, sociology, philosophy, and culturology.

Finally, we should mention that this book was preceded by Miroslav Colić's equally significant and intriguing work entitled *Towards Critical Revolutionary Pedagogy* (Students' City Cultural Center, 2021). The book in question represents a singular, original guide to the history of pedagogical thought, spanning ancient and medieval eras, Renaissance humanism, the Age of Enlightenment, and contemporary pedagogical thought (pragmatism, freedom pedagogy, critical pedagogy, the descolarization of society, and postmodern pedagogy). Together with *Education and Contemporary Society*, this book constitutes Miroslav Colić's unique socio-historical overview of pedagogical thought, authentically embedded in the context of contemporary education.

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