

THE SOCIAL STATE, ACTIVE CITIZEN AND EMPOWERING EDUCATION: CONTRIBUTION OF MONTESSORI'S HUMANISTIC PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The social state, the phenomenon of the active citizen, and empowering education are the actual goals of what 'New Kazakhstan' has to achieve. Maria Montessori is a globally known, leading thinker and practitioner of humanistic education philosophy and positive social transformations. Montessori believed in and practiced the principles of developing non-commercialized and accessible to all quality education, which is not just child-centric but is also conducive to creating global citizens with an inclusive outlook who perceive themselves as the integral parts of the whole, called Universe. Montessori's education philosophy helps children develop a way of thinking based on the unity of the Universe, awakens and sustains in them an unrestrained interest in exploring the Universe, evokes creativity, and induces them to see everything in interconnectedness. Overall, an analysis of Cosmic education, a fundamental concept in Montessori's humanistic philosophy of education, which also can be depicted as empowering education, shows some concrete ways how to form active citizens, create a vital social state and build an inclusive society.

Key words: Social State, Active Citizen, Empowering Education, Montessori, Inclusive Society.

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Әлеуметтік мемлекет, белсенді азамат құбылысы және құқық пен мүмкіндіктерді кеңейтетін білім беру жүйесі: Монтессоридің гуманистік білім беру философиясының үлесі

Аннотация. Әлеуметтік мемлекетті, белсенді азамат құбылысын және құқық пен мүмкіндіктерді кеңейтетін білім беру жүйесін – «Жаңа Қазақстанның» қол жеткізуі тиіс басты мақсаттарының арасында атауға болады. Мария Монтессори – жаһанға танымал, гуманистік білім беру философиясы мен оң әлеуметтік өзгерістер жасаудың жетекші ойшылы және практиктерінің бірі. Монтессори барлық азаматтарға қолжетімді, коммерциялық емес сапалы білім беруді дамыту қағидаттарына сенді және оны жүзеге асыра білді. Монтессоридің білім беру философиясы баланы (яғни баланың қажеттіліктерін) негізге алып қана қоймай, сонымен бірге балаға өзін "Ғалам" деп аталатын үлкен жүйенің ажырамас бөлігі және жаһан азаматы ретінде қабылдайтын инклюзивті көзқарас құруға ықпал етеді. Монтессори білім беру философиясы балаларға Ғаламда әр нәрсенің басқалармен тығыз байланыста екенін көрсетуге негізделген ойлау тәсілін дамытуға көмектеседі, оларда Ғаламды зерттеуге деген шексіз қызығушылықты оятады және қолдайды, шығармашылық рухты оятады. Тұтастай алғанда, Монтессоридің гуманистік білім беру философиясында (оны құқық пен

мүмкіндіктерді кеңейтетін білім беру жүйесі деп те сипатауға болады) іргелі тұжырымдама болып табылатын “Ғарыштық білім” түсінігі, белсенді азамат құбылысын қалыптастырудың, күшті әлеуметтік мемлекет пен инклюзивті қоғам құрудың кейбір нақты жолдарын көрсетеді.

Түйін сөздер: әлеуметтік мемлекет, белсенді азамат, мүмкіндіктер мен құқықтарды кеңейтетін білім беру, Монтессори, инклюзивті қоғам

Социальное государство, активный гражданин и расширяющее права и возможности образование: вклад гуманистической философии образования Монтессори

Аннотация. Социальное государство, феномен “активный гражданин” и расширяющее права и возможности образование – одни из главных целей, которых должен достичь «Новый Казахстан». Мария Монтессори – одна из всемирно известных ученых и практиков философии гуманистического образования и позитивных социальных преобразований. Монтессори верила и практиковала принципы развития доступного для всех, некоммерческого и качественного образования, которое не только ориентировано на ребенка, но и способствует формированию глобальных граждан с инклюзивным мировоззрением, которые воспринимают себя как неотъемлемую часть целого, называемого Вселенная. Философия образования Монтессори помогает формировать у детей образ мышления, основанный на единстве Вселенной, пробуждает и поддерживает в них безудержный интерес к познанию Вселенной, пробуждает творчество и побуждает видеть все во взаимосвязи. В целом, анализ Космического образования, фундаментальной концепции гуманистической философии образования Монтессори, которая по сути является расширяющей права и возможности системой образованием, может показать некоторые пути создания феномена “активный гражданин”, формирования сильного социального государства и построения инклюзивного общества.

Ключевые слова: социальное государство, активный гражданин, расширяющее права и возможности образование, Монтессори, инклюзивное общество

Introduction

The recent challenges like the Pandemic, the emergence of divided societies, the widening gap between rich and poor, the re-emergence of inter-state conflicts, devaluation of fundamental notions like human rights, ecological degradation, foremost, global warming, all of these necessitate engaging in interdisciplinary discussions on models of the social (welfare) state, conceptualization of the concepts of the active citizen, inclusive citizenship, inclusive society, empowering education. In the face of the rise of xenophobia, religious intolerance and fundamentalism, chauvinism, ethnic and language-based nationalism, and nativism, sexism, and homophobia, humankind has to dwell more on the issues of human dignity, human rights, and acceptance of each other. Overall, building an inclusive society is one of the most debated and acute issues of the 21st century. Moreover, the social state, active citizens and empowering education, also building an inclusive society — are all what ‘New Kazakhstan’ needs.

Both humanistic education and Critical Realism, which provides the conceptual framework of this paper, demonstrate that human is the state’s most valuable “asset”. This idea is also essential for the concept of inclusiveness, particularly inclusive society. The importance of building an inclusive society lies in the fact that it is an inclusive society that can contribute to the development of humankind and the overall betterment of people’s lives more than any others. However, a nexus between building an inclusive society and empowering education, and the social (welfare) state has been mainly overlooked in social sciences research in the post-socialist countries, though the scholars of the Nordic countries widely explore it, for example [1; 2; 3]

In this article, we try to conceptualize a nexus between Cosmic Education (the concept developed by Maria Montessori and which denotes her whole humanistic education system) and forming active citizens and building an inclusive society.

Montessori worked in the field of early education. She developed one of the most

influential humanistic philosophies of education, which is based primarily on early age education. Many progressive educators, psychologists, and the education systems of many democratic countries have adopted at least some of the key principles and ideas of Montessori's philosophy. Montessori believed and practiced the principles of developing non-commercialized and accessible to all quality education, which is not just child-centric but being based on the concept of Cosmic education, is also conducive to creating global citizens with an inclusive outlook, who can see and feel themselves as the integral parts of the whole, called Universe.

Montessori's philosophy is about the model of empowering education from early childhood. The goal of this model of education is to develop a global vision in children, which is incompatible with intolerance. This global vision, let alone racism, and fundamentalism, is inherently against the non-acceptance of others, which is indispensable in creating an inclusive society.

Methodology

This article is premised on the insights of the meta-theoretical Critical Realist approach, which is bigger than mere research methodology. It emerged as a post-positivistic meta-theoretical critique of positivistic and compartmentalized sciences [4]. Critical Realism aims to reconcile social sciences and philosophical inquiry by raising big questions and being concerned with human flourishing and well-being. It is built on reflexivity and interdisciplinarity; hence, it tries to understand social phenomena rather than merely describe them [5]. Critical Realism raises fundamental and global questions, such as justice, well-being, and morality; however, not in a sense used by conservative religions [6]. Critical Realism accepts the lack of social justice (exemplified as lack of access to quality education, health care, and social protection), and erosion of political legitimacy and democracy, un-development of human rights (e.g., women's rights, children's rights, minority rights) as ethical or moral crises [4].

Main part **The Social State and Inclusive Citizenship**

This paper assumes that an inclusive society has three major pillars, first is institutionalized care, embodied as the social (welfare) state; second is empowering education; and the third pillar is active citizen/s. A viable inclusive society is based on the idea that everyone is valuable. Accepting that everyone is valuable means that the right to receive and give proper care must be secured for everyone. Proper care is the fundamental quality of the social state. The right to receive and give decent and efficient care, which necessities the creation of the social state, is a central element of inclusive citizenship. An inclusive society provides worthy care for its interdependent members [3]. As it can be seen, care is both fundamental for the social state and inclusive citizenship. However, in the last decades, the notion of care has been under the constant assault of the various austerity and restructuring policies enacted by the proponents of the unregulated free-market economy model.

Critical Realism emphasizes the need to accept that humans are vulnerable and dependent on others beings. A Critical Realist scholar, Andrew Sayer [6], undertakes a fundamental critique of contemporary social sciences' reluctance to acknowledge that people's relation to the world is one of concern and interconnectedness. Since humans are sentient beings, capable of flourishing and suffering, and are needy and social beings dependent on others, are also vulnerable to how others treat them, human beings' view of the world is essentially evaluative. Evaluative and normative position, which is inherent to human beings, not only accepts but looks for the creation and further development (according to the changing needs and new challenges like the Pandemic) of social protection, social solidarity, and inclusion of those who are marginalized and disaffected

The central institution, which has to provide care, is the state. The state pro-

vides care through social policy programs and by accepting human-centric understandings of security, also by prioritizing public health and accessible to all education as the most important realms of public and private investments, etc.

As it has been mentioned, the social state and inclusive citizenship are closely interrelated concepts. Inclusive citizenship is the crucial element of an inclusive society. The state in the 21st century must have a well-functioning and guaranteed by Constitution social policy to protect not only the social and economic rights of its citizens but also fundamental rights, like rights to education and health care (especially these human rights can be jeopardized by commercialization as the result of privatization and austerity programs propagated by the neoclassical or neoliberal capitalism), individual self-determination and development. On the whole, the essential pillar of the social state is the uncompromised protection of the rights to education at all levels (including higher), comprehensive health care, and social rights.

There are different variations in the formulation of the models and policies of the social state. For example, it is possible to identify the so-called Nordic approach, where work and life balance is well-established, and work and family relations are characterized by collective commitments to child-care and "politicizing parenthood" [7]. Prevalence of work-family policies involving measures for parental (of all genders) leave, publicly financed child-care, and an individual taxation system are considered among the most important societal qualities of the Nordic social model [8].

The social state is characterized by the empowerment of its citizens, who are not left without the state's protection. Empowerment, *inter alia*, is manifested in education and is also reflected in parenting models. As such, the education system in the social welfare state is accessible and empowering; therefore, it is closely tied to the central values and principles of children's rights. Empowerment — or social empow-

erment — as a method and an objective of efforts has a central, though varying, role. As such, it appears as a general concept that describes the orientation and ethos of social pedagogical work [9].

The social state helps develop positive social capital, increase trust in society, the level of innovation and happiness of people in society. The social state supports the role of women as active citizen-workers and tries to embrace even those who are not classically accepted as participants of the labor market, such as "caregiver relatives" and disabled persons. This new understanding of citizenship is very important for Kazakhstan and other Eurasian countries where a significant part of women, caregivers, and disabled persons are beyond the official labor market and have become socially marginalized, or at least cannot enjoy many social rights and are not in the position of an active citizen.

The social state aims to overcome the problems of a fragmented society, socially and economically marginalized groups of people. In Kazakhstan and other Eurasian countries, care is still informal and linked to the traditional family model of the housewife marriage. It is unpaid work, hidden from view in the family household, performed by women and, as it is excluded from the category of formal employment, it is beyond to be recognized as the main provider of income for caregivers, as well beyond prestige and social security, and is lacking in recognition.

There is a nexus between the development of education which empowers personality and a high level of trust in society, and the developed positive social capital, which all contribute to the building of an inclusive society. Next, we explore the concept of empowering education, which is a central instrument of the social state to form an active citizen.

Empowering Education, the Social State and Active Citizen

The phenomenon of active citizen is a way to generalize the new face of the so-

cial (welfare) state model, and it is the result of accessible to all empowering education. Active citizen presupposes that an individual, as a citizen, participates in all the various arenas, economic, social, and political, of civic life. A lack of participation can thus be interpreted as a reflection of marginalization or social isolation. As such, in our days, active citizen is about demos. We argue that if considered holistically, demos are active and knowledgeable citizens, whereas okhlos are the mob. Non-accessible education and, in general, insufficient and noneffective social policies produce okhlos. Okhlos and inactive population are the aims of oppressive, authoritarian regimes and autocratic leaders. Thus, empowering education is the antidote to authoritarianism; however, not only openly oppressive and authoritarian regimes but also the models of capitalism, which promote the commercialization and commodification of education, health care, and shrinking, even elimination of social policies, are in intimate relations with authoritarianism (for example, Chile under Pinochet enacted economic reforms in line with neoliberal Chicago school's prescriptions).

The right to education is a fundamental human right, essential for exercising all other human rights. This human right promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields significant development benefits [10]. Education certainly plays a crucial, if not a leading, role in transforming human beings and society in a positive direction. Education and cultural upgrading are needed to enact positive transformations of societies from the inside. On the other hand, education is a powerful tool by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and participate in social and, depending on age, political life fully as citizens [10]. Hence, by its nature right to education implies being empowering. However, only the models that are child-centric and children's rights-friendly can be truly empowering. In other words, not all types and models of education can be qualified as empowering

so as to form independent and wholesome personalities called active citizen. The less education is paternalistic and the less education is teacher-centric, the more education is open to be empowering.

Kazakhstan and other Eurasian countries seriously need scholarly information about children's rights-friendly and child-centric empowering education models. The more society is inclusive, the less culture of dominance is felt, and the more social inclusion and less exclusion based on age, race, origin, social class, gender, and education; the citizens are more active.

According to psychologists, especially preschool time is crucial for children's emotional and psychological development. What happens to children in the period up to six/seven years is what then becomes the basis of their adult life. Many problems of adulthood, such as intolerance, violence, narcissism, and different traumas, have their roots in childhood [11; 12]. Hence, the more consciously and in accordance with humanistic education and child psychology parents and educators regard and perform parenting and education as a process, the better for the children and entire society. Education must be regarded as a whole and comprehensive human needs-based system of human development, which starts from the early days and months but not only from school age [11; 12].

Education and the social state model play a crucial role in developing the social forces and identities needed to build an inclusive society. We assume that it is, foremost, education that determines and creates the social forces needed to build an inclusive society. The notion of empowering education offers natural, from bottom to top, ways of developing a democratic and inclusive society.

The Main Qualities of the Education Philosophy of Montessori

Maria Montessori was a scholar and practitioner of humanistic education and children's rights. She lived in a turbulent

time when wars, racist sentiments, and nationalist movements were at their peak. She was driven by the ideals of justice, peace, and equality and fought for women's and children's rights. Montessori saw wars and, in general, conflicts as disunity of people. Montessori considered a child as a hope for humanity and a drive for civilizational change. She urged the adults to recognize that a child has the right to be a citizen of the first order and that a child must be respected. In her educational method, Montessori called for the help we need to provide a child to become an emotionally and psychologically strong and self-realized adult with a global vision [13]

The main features of the education philosophy of Montessori can be presented as follows (1) child-centric, non-commercialized, and accessible to all quality education, and (2) Cosmic Education, which instills in the children the vision of global and inclusive citizens who also care about the environment. It must be reminded that the definition of the right to education and the scopes of education given by the United Nations, for example, by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, declares that education should be directed to create the vision of global and inclusive citizens. Article 26 stipulates that "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; education shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace". Montessori's ideas served as a precursor to the UN documents-approved global and human rights-based vision of education.

Montessori education institutions are well known in many countries, especially among professionals in education and parents who care about their children's future. In Kazakhstan and other post-socialist countries, Montessori preschool facilities and schools are also functioning. However, many of them are commercialized and

can be considered "bourgeoisie" places, though Montessori was remarkably egalitarian and inclusive in her life, personal and professional philosophy. She was fundamentally against any commercialization of education. On the contrary, Maria Montessori established her education institutions for orphans and poor children who hailed from disaffected families. Montessori's vision and philosophy of education strongly defend the social state. Montessori's political orientation supported social democratic values, specifically free and accessible to all quality education and health care.

Montessori emphasized that the child's mind is completely different from adults, and it possesses magnificent and almost miraculous faculty of taking from the environment external ideas and impressions, incarnating them into their beings [14]. Therefore, she regarded a child's mind as fertile soil for significant intellectual development driven by a child's interest and imagination. Montessori [15] noted that "The secret of good teaching is to regard the child's intelligence as a fertile field in which seeds may be sown, to grow under the heat of flaming imagination". Montessori called for a model of education that can satisfy the inner curiosity of a child. This education model can answer all essential questions necessary to provide a vision of the whole Universe [15]. In brief, Montessori's education model provides children with a global vision.

Montessori's Concept of Cosmic Education and Active Citizen

Montessori developed the notion of Cosmic education, a key element of her primary education model. This notion underpins the delivery of the Montessori's curriculum [16]. The underlying idea of Cosmic education is that all things in the Universe are interrelated, each has its function or task in the Universe, and all things function according to Cosmic Plan [17]. Montessori's humanistic education philosophy implies that Cosmic education is an

antidote to all wars, conflicts, disunity, and injustice because the fundamental idea of Cosmic education is to teach children about the Universe and that we all are its interrelated parts. If one feels pain or gets hurt — all parts feel pain, resonate and empathize with it. The understanding that all of us are united in the cosmic structure like one big body helps children to perceive themselves as the members of a big family called the Universe, the parts of a helpful and interrelated world which should not be scared. “The stars, earth, stones, life of all kinds form a whole in relation with each other, and so close is this relation that we cannot understand a stone without some understanding of the great sun! No matter what we touch, an atom, or a cell, we cannot explain it without knowledge of the wide universe” [17].

Montessori pointed out that properly presenting the idea of the Universe helps children acquire a global vision that allows their minds to concentrate, generate the ability to work and mold their intelligence to see the world in wholeness. “Since it has been seen to be necessary to give so much to the child, let us give him a vision of the whole universe. The universe is an imposing reality, and an answer to all questions” [15]. It is almost impossible to explain the new fields of study without the knowledge of the wider Universe [18].

In Montessori education, the following are the primary pillars: the importance of hands-on sensorial material and exercises, experiences with the natural world, moving from simple to complex, from concrete to abstract, from general to particular. According to the last principle, a child learns subjects beginning from the general like solar system to other subjects in their interconnection to the sun. For example, in botany, the effect of the sun on plants, in history the time according to the sun's revolutions, in geography the influence of the sun on a climate, economy, culture of any country. On the other hand, in the framework of Cosmic education (which is premised on the underlying idea of perceiving the big picture, the Universe), we

move from the big picture (or whole, the Universe) toward its parts, like in studying tree when we begin with the whole tree and then go to the branches and leaves in descending order. These parts are represented by zoology, botany, geography, science, craft, music, and other branches of sciences, that are to be connected to the bigger picture or frame of knowledge.

Also, the children's work with and exploration of cultural richness nurture their vision and lay the grounds for their humanistic and inclusive outlook. When parts fit into the whole picture and are seen in the interrelationship, they make sense for children and cause great interest in them [15].

The Cosmic education approach teaches to have faith in children, respect them and their potential, and trust the power of the mind to work independently [19]. Children can freely navigate this whole framework and develop it through new subjects, studies, and concepts.

Cosmic education induces the children to feel that they belong to the world community and the need to contribute to its well-being. Global citizenship is one of the central ideas of Montessori's educational philosophy. The approach to forming the vision of global citizen permeates the Montessori curriculum and program that recognize and celebrate the cultural and spiritual diversity of all people. Celebrating diversity helps children embrace this diversity and understand that there is unity in diversity. Cosmic education helps children see what unites all human beings and prepares them to resist reactionary nationalism, religious and ethnic hatred, war, injustice, neglect, and destruction of the environment [20]. Overall, the global vision of Cosmic education is the antidote to narrow-mindedness, conflict, and division-prone mindset, which seeks and legitimizes conflicts because this mindset is inherently against the cosmic unity of humankind and nature and the planet.

Cosmic education paves the way to organize all branches of knowledge into the whole system effectively. In other words, this approach helps a child make sense of inter-

related branches of knowledge (which, in fact, is one body of knowledge). According to Critical Realism, one of the main problems of today's sciences and academia is the compartmentalization of sciences, when the scholars live and do research in ghettoized, detached from each other environments [5]. Therefore, the Critical scholars eloquently defend "post-disciplinarity". Montessori's approach from the very beginning helps overcome this problem. Cosmic education approach helps children to order and systematize all knowledge they receive.

The years from 3 to 6 are seen as an important period for laying the ground for expansion, consolidation, and intellectual growth that prepares children for further cultural development, discovering the world and their place in it to understand and adapt to the environment [17]. The main responsibility of the "Guide" (in Montessori education institutions, the adult-teacher is called "Guide") in the classroom should be to open new areas for children, guiding them through lessons to discover their interests and giving them an opportunity to explore those centers of interest keeping their fire of interest and curiosity burning [20]. Thus, there is no fixed program to follow, but new areas of knowledge are presented in the classroom to children to uncover their interests and plant seeds in the fertile soil of their minds and souls for future development.

The children comprehend the globality of the world, the diversity of cultures, and other elements of the Universe which surround them. Children may find their place in the global system — the Universe, and become global citizens or a part of a world community with their own racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic distinctions or richness.

Overall, cosmic education helps children understand the Universe in its wholeness and interrelated parts, understand and know their own selves, discover the cosmic plan (which implies accepting and celebrating diversity and developing the consciousness of inclusiveness), and contribute to it. As a result, children develop a way of thinking and mindset, life philosophy, based on the

idea of the unity of the Universe that evokes in them interest, creativity, empathy as well gratitude to the Universe and to all its actors' contributions. This way of thinking gives the children insights into their place in this inter-related big world called the Universe and encourages to fulfill their own humanistic tasks toward the cosmic plan.

Conclusion

Empowering education, which is indispensable for the gradual formation of active citizen, the social state model, where care is a central idea, and development of inclusive society are all parts of one whole. Nonetheless, empowering and accessible to all education is the main factor in developing an inclusive society. The ideas of Maria Montessori, specifically her fundamental concept of Cosmic education, lay the grounds for empowering education, which is conducive to creating active and global citizens.

One of the main goals of Cosmic education is to create and nurture the intimate interrelationship between children and the Universe (planet, nature) and people as diverse as they are. These ideas permeated Montessori's curriculum and education program. Cosmic education helps children perceive and see themselves as integral parts of global citizenship, find their own place within it, and contribute to universal human flourishing. In other words, this humanistic education approach develops a global vision in children and makes them the active agents for cultural and civilizational changes. It is what forms in the children the qualities of future active citizens. In brief, Cosmic education aims to help form global citizens who know and respect their own and other cultures, languages, and traditions. Maria Montessori's philosophy of education strongly defends the social state. Specifically, Montessori adhered to social democratic values, which uphold free and accessible to all quality education and health care and reject commercialized and commodified education, the main factor behind the emergence of social and structural inequality — an antipode of inclusiveness.

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