

COMMENTS TO MARGARET S. ARCHER,  
'EDUCATION, SUBSIDIARITY AND SOLIDARITY'  
AND PEDRO MORANDÉ,  
'SUBSIDIARITY IN CHILEAN EDUCATION'

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It has been for me an intellectual pleasure to read the contributions of Margaret S. Archer and Pedro Morandé to this Plenary Session. Both authors have a well established academic authority in the field of education. Let me just quote the excellent book written by Margaret S. Archer on the social origins of the educational systems.<sup>1</sup> Their papers not only have rich historical descriptions of the educational systems in the developed countries and in Chile, but also pose sharp questions and dilemmas as regards the real possibilities of a joint effectiveness of solidarity and subsidiarity in the everyday life of schools, colleges, institutes and universities.

Because of the demands of people, families, the civil society, the State and the markets, we are now facing the unprecedented challenge of *education for all*.<sup>2</sup> The aspiration is to have all youngsters with a secondary education diploma, and at least half of them with a tertiary education degree. That is not impossible. Just to give one example, in not much more than a decade, *all* Korean youngsters will have completed tertiary level education. However, formidable obstacles to fulfill these demands appear. The main one is, from my point of view, that of equity. It seems clear that a trade-off exists, so to speak, between 'quantity' of education – as measured by years completed and enrollment – and its 'quality'. Maximizing the first one very frequently leads to a sacrifice in quality, as can

<sup>1</sup> Margaret S. Archer (1979). *Social Origins of Educational Systems*, London and Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

<sup>2</sup> Made it official in the UNESCO's lemma.

be seen particularly in the poorest zones and in the peripheries of the relevant centers of each country. What happens is that when the poor manage to have access to the right to education, they can only get second or third brands of it. A second obstacle could be arising from the very organization of the educational process, whose basic technology, i.e., a classroom with teachers and students, a blackboard, chalks, copybooks and pens, has remained the same for centuries. Even taking into account the changes recently introduced by IT, the educational aptitude of the old educational technology is under serious scrutiny.

Morandé rightly emphasizes that the biggest problem continues to be present at the level of solidarity and equity ('justness') of the system (p. 8). Some acute questions immediately arise. First, confronting the enormous solidarity challenge of giving education for all, will it be possible to fulfill this goal without giving a relevant place to subsidiarity? In other words, could the States as organizations be sufficient to fulfill that goal or will it need the active help of the civil society organizations? A second, associated question arises and it is if there were a trade-off between subsidiarity and solidarity regarding the ambitious goal of education for all. For instance, many authors, particularly in the developing world, think that the only way to build a true solidary educational system is when the State is the main provider, and it is founded through a progressive tax system.

The core of my comments will be inspired by the handful of countries that have two traits in common, i.e., good educational standards and near the best wealth and income distribution. Just to give an example I present Table 1, taken from the latest OECD PISA study. To be in Scandinavia is almost a sufficient condition to belong to the group of the chosen (GC), and if you are in the Baltics or in the Far East you have good chances. Yes. Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Norway, Sweden, Japan, Korea and Hong Kong and Macao in China are, together with Canada, the only representative of the Americas, the countries that outperform in the two dimensions. I would like to add, by the way, that I don't share the more and more generalized 'religious' respect for educational test scores and that I agree with Archer's criticisms towards their abuse, that does not happen only in England but in many other countries too. But I consider that the tests convey relevant information and that, properly used, they could be part of the solution. Beyond the details, the very existence of the GC is important because it shows, at least, that the margin to improve educational (as well as socioeconomic) fairness is still large even in developed countries. I would say, unfortunately, that most of GC's educational systems tend

to be centralized. For instance, only one of the aforementioned countries is federal, Canada. And although I am not an expert in those educational systems, it is reasonable to guess that, perhaps, their progresses in solidarity have been obtained at the expense of subsidiarity. But this has not hindered them to be sensitive to the demands of the markets.

Regarding the two basic questions I posed *supra*, both authors are skeptical in their analyses of the present situation, although they have some hopes regarding the future. As it is well known, legal or real decentralization and other forms of devolution of educational institutions have progressed a lot in many countries in the last couple of decades. Both authors agree – and I too – that these decentralized forms do not imply *per se* subsidiarity, although they enhance it (Morandé) or, at the least, they are not an obstacle to subsidiarity (Archer).<sup>3</sup> However, some forms of decentralization can carry on new, unintended forms of inequality. This seems to be the case with the system implemented in Chile – and in other LATAM countries – in which the state subsidizes private schools – mostly confessional and most of them Catholic – provided that they do not charge an expensive fee. Showing the vitality of civil society as an educational agent, it happens that subsidized schools become more and more attractive than the neighbor State schools, and the best students tend to move to them leaving the public schools without positive peer effect for the remaining students. On the other hand, and this is specific to the Chilean system, since the subsidy is given proportionally to the number of students, the consequence is a more than convenient increase in the pupils to teacher ratio, with negative consequences for the quality of education.<sup>4</sup>

Both authors tend to coincide at the time of analyzing the failures of the educator-State. Some possible explanations are as follows. a) The low cultural capital of families of the poorest sectors who mostly attend State schools. b) The dead weight of inefficient bureaucracies. c) The very well known process of agency's capture (see Archer, p. 392), in which the weak-

<sup>3</sup> Archer points out a sort of trade-off between subsidiarity and solidarity, at least when the first one comes basically from the market demands (p. 393). 'Late Modernity, reached before the end of the twentieth century, will be briefly reviewed as a period during which the reforms of State Educational Systems operated in zero-sum fashion' (p. 394).

<sup>4</sup> This system is different from the USA's *charter schools* – in which the schools continue in the public sector although with private direction and management. But it is very probable that also the charters system could eventually lead to the same problem.

est sectors of society are not really represented at the time of the effective distribution of the educational good. d) A final, and perhaps the most challenging problem, could be a new sort of ‘clash of civilizations’<sup>5</sup> between, on the one hand, the schools’ culture, trying to teach and practice basically modern values and, on the other hand, the youngsters’ culture, and perhaps also that of the new postmodern families. Part of this problem is vividly described by Archer when she emphasizes the ‘a-functionality’ of families’ culture regarding the postmodern demands that the labor market poses to the new entrants. A relevant question here is whether removing both, the lack of freedom to design the curriculum and the test scores-oriented education – both emphasized by Morandé – could help to overcome this clash.

Now we can see in many countries a *de facto* privatization of the educational system, very evident in the aforementioned exodus of the best students to the richest schools. But, as the very existence of the GC group shows, we need to avoid rapid generalizations. It seems clear that the main candidate to explain these exceptions is the more equitable distribution of wealth and income that we can observe in GC societies. Morandé rightly points out that econometric studies are not conclusive at the time of explaining educational outcomes. This has been the case with the so-called ‘educational production function’ research program.<sup>6</sup> But even the new, more precise vein of experimental studies – be them random or natural – has not rendered clear explanations either (Llach, Adrogué and Gigaglia, 2008). *Nevertheless, there is a broad, almost unanimous consensus in the literature on the close association between societies’ equity and average educational outcomes.*

One of the biggest surprises for people from the Americas when they learn the organization of most of the European and some Asian educational systems that have been in place up to the middle of the last century is their institutional cum social segmentation.<sup>7</sup> This European segmentation, almost completely absent in most of the Americas, is vividly analyzed in Archer’s paper. In the case of the United States, on the other hand, the total or partial financing of the educational system out of the land tax has had a

<sup>5</sup> Of course, a very different clash to that stressed by Huntington between the West and the Muslim world.

<sup>6</sup> This failure is very well described in Glewwe (2002) and Akerloff (2002).

<sup>7</sup> Even in Russia and China. In this last country, primary education was not free up to very recent times.

very negative impact on educational equity. It has created vicious circles in which the price of land continuously increases in richer neighborhoods, thus allowing their School Districts to provide better qualified educational services. Finally, in Africa, most of Asia and Latin America, a very unequal distribution of wealth and income has been more or less automatically mirrored in educational services, with rich schools for the rich, and poor schools for the poor. If we put all these characteristics together – i.e. social and institutional segmentation in Europe and some Asian countries, very unequal financing in the USA and huge social and economic inequalities in the developing countries – we will be in a better position to understand the reasons of the success of Canada, Scandinavia, the Baltics and a handful of Asian countries. On the other hand, this very preliminary typology will also help us to identify the relevant aspects of the socio-economic context of each country – be they related to the educational system per se, to their financing, or to the socio-economic structure – to explain the difficulties to get a quality education for all.

### *Looking at the future*

Looking at the future, both authors – Archer and Morandé – go beyond the analysis of the situation and suggest some ways to get an educational system based on the four basic principles that illuminate this session, i.e., human dignity, subsidiarity, solidarity and the pursuit of the common good (Donati, 2008). Regarding what he considers the main challenge, that of educational fairness, Morandé mentions the possibilities of introducing quotas in the schools – i.e., some sort of affirmative action – and a differentiated, higher subsidy to the poorer schools. Perhaps more optimistically, Archer sees a new reality in which, overcoming the zero-sum games she attributes to Modernity,<sup>8</sup> both or all parties can become beneficiaries by pooling and sharing resources, reinforced by the fact that knowledge can be shared without reducing its value. Based on the typology presented by Donati (2008) to this session, she analyses what is going on with the four dimensions of subsidiarity – relational, vertical, lateral and horizontal – and identifies the seeds of an alternative future

<sup>8</sup> From my own perspective, Archer does not emphasize enough the role that economic development has played to make not so drastic the zero-sum games she attributes to Modernity.

for education, including some 'de-institutionalization' and the real possibility of 'de-schooling', mostly based on IT. Some examples of *relational subsidiarity* are a new sociological perspective on *free-giving*, exemplified by peer to peer relations through the internet in which the intrinsic value accorded to the Other greatly surpasses the exchange value assigned to social relations in Modernity. In the case of *vertical subsidiarity* Archer sees a positive contribution of projects like *One Laptop per Child*, free computer programming and Wikipedia, that are helping to reduce the increasing costs of education and to counterbalance any intention of monopolization of the education, from the State or from any other party. But in order to solve the two critical issues of educational equity and educational integrity we need the two other dimensions of subsidiarity, lateral and horizontal. In the case of the former, Archer sees important obstacles, because of the crisis of the cultural capital transmitted from parent to offspring and a huge deficit of sources of solidarity in developed societies that undermines both lateral subsidiarity and the support available to horizontal agencies seeking to actualize subsidiary establishments for schooling in the Third Sector and at the local level. Only the increased engagement of young people in association with local endeavors appears positive. Regarding *horizontal subsidiarity* Archer believes that real alternative schools are needed in determined locations, robust enough as to avoid both, becoming just another private school of the privilege in the educational market and the colonization by the State.

I would like to end my comment going back to the two questions I posed at the beginning. First, if by confronting the enormous solidarity challenge of giving education for all, it will be possible to fulfill it without giving a relevant place to subsidiarity or, in other words, if the States as organizations might be sufficient or if they will need the active help of civil society organizations. Secondly, if there is a trade-off between subsidiarity and solidarity regarding the ambitious goal of quality education for all. Let me begin by saying that in spite of diverse signs of a crisis in public education, it is important to remember the astonishing progresses in enrollments along the last century, most of them because of a protagonist role of the State.<sup>9</sup> This is particularly true in the case of the countries

<sup>9</sup> At the end of the 19th century no country had universal primary enrollment, while at the end of the last century that goal is common in most countries, many have between 50% and 100% of secondary school enrollment and tertiary enrollment approaches 40%.

belonging to my group of the chosen (GC), in which a *centralized* type of State has played the most important role. This is, unfortunately, a clear evidence of some sort of trade-off between solidarity and subsidiarity, one in which the former was attained up to some extent at the expense of the latter. However, looking at the future I think it will be very difficult to replicate this model *urbi et orbi*. *What we can see in most of the countries nowadays is that the schools that perform the best, even in poor countries, are those in which the educational communities – parents, students, local authorities and groups of interest, parents' associations, teachers, and directors – have an active role.* And this happens independently of whether they are in the hands of the State, the market or the third sector. The very nature of the cultural change we are experiencing, so vividly analyzed by Archer and Morandé, will make more and more difficult to build or to rebuild the overwhelming and sometimes efficient State machineries typical of the last century. Paradoxically, only if all the parties involved, the State, the market and, overall, the concrete local educational communities work together it will be possible to get the challenge of quality education for all. One of the keys that must be in place in order to allow this associated work between the State and the civil society, is a good system to finance education, with progressive taxes and a real practice of the principle of the preferential option for the poor, i.e., to give more resources to the poor schools that need them the most. Of course, the internet and some forms of 'de-schooling' allowed by IT can help, but can also lead to new forms of inequality.

The educational policies of the 21st century will have chances to make more real the four basic principles that inspire us in the session – human dignity, subsidiarity, solidarity and the common good – only if they are completely re-designed, leaving aside the old model of a centralized bureaucracy regulating everything and allowing instead the birth of a school by school educational policy that will gradually transform all of them in what we can call *public community schools*, which means the deepest way of devolution.

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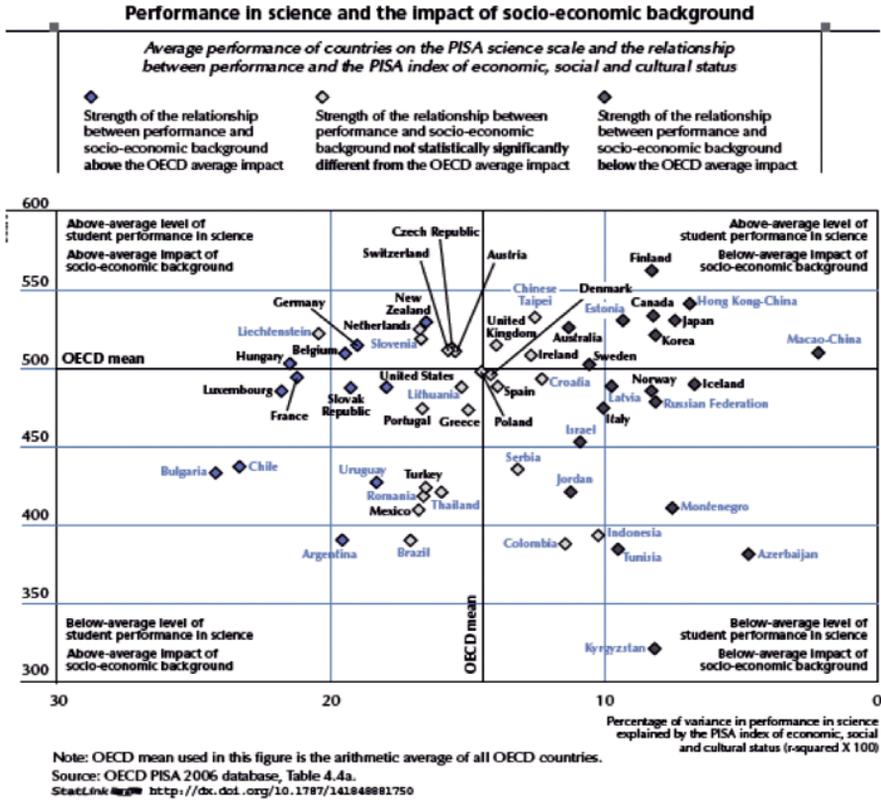


TABLE1. Socio-economic inequalities and science test results. Source: OECD (2007).