# SOCIAL COMPETENCES, SOCIAL CAPITAL AND EDUCATION[1]

COMPETENCIAS SOCIALES, CAPITAL SOCIAL Y EDUCACIÓN

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## Abstract

This article refers to the current theoretical and policy debate on key competences, skills and qualifications, which every citizen in society must have or acquire, through a process of lifelong learning, in order to be able to cope with the challenges and demands of phenomena such as (economic) globalization, information technologies and multiculturalism as a result of the new character of migration flows. The recommendation of the EU Council and Parliament on key competences for lifelong learning, which include "social and civic competences", is indicative. The purpose of this article is two-fold: Firstly, to provide a contemplative review of some frequently used concepts within educational policy contexts. Secondly, to initiate a discussion on the relation between social capital and social competence, from a learning perspective, focusing on the question: Why is there such a huge interest in social skills and competences today, and what is the role of education (and what kind of education?) in the creation of social capital in society?

*Keywords:* Competences, social capital, social competences, lifelong learning.

## Resumen

Este artículo se refiere al actual debate sobre competencias claves, habilidades y calificaciones que cada ciudadano en la sociedad debe tener o adquirir por medio

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de un proceso de aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida, para ser capaz de enfrentarse a los desafíos y demandas de fenómenos tales como la globalización (económica), las tecnologías de la información y el multiculturalismo resultante del nuevo carácter de los flujos migratorios. La recomendación del Consejo de la Unión Europea y el Parlamento sobre competencias claves para el aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida, que incluyen "competencias sociales y cívicas" , es indicativa. El objetivo de este artículo es doble: En primer lugar, apunta a la revisión de algunos conceptos usados con frecuencia dentro de los contextos de política educacional. En segundo lugar, iniciar una discusión sobre la relación entre capital social y competencia social, desde una perspectiva de aprendizaje, dirigiendo el foco a las preguntas: ¿Por qué existe hoy un interés tan grande en las habilidades sociales y en las competencias? y ¿cuál es el papel de la educación (¿y qué tipo de educación?) en la creación del capital social?

*Palabras clave:* Aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida, capital social, competencias, competencias sociales.


## "Good and able", or the discourse of competences

THE CONCEPT OF "COMPETENCE" has already been introduced into our everyday speech, being no longer a privileged term of the social scientists. It is often accompanied by other qualifiers such as *communicational*, *digital*, *metacognitive*, *social*, etc., composing altogether the puzzle of skills for the integrated citizens of our postmodernist time who learn and improve themselves throughout life.[3]

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[3] The Council of the EU and the European Parliament adopted, in late 2006, the European framework of key competencies for lifelong learning. The framework identifies and defines the basic skills needed for the personal fulfillment, social integration and employability of citizens in a knowledge society.

The European framework of key competencies for lifelong learning is defined as a combination of appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to achieve some specific goals and problems associated with them. Basic skills are those that all citizens need for their personal fulfillment and development, their active participation in political and social life as well as their employment in the labour market. See Annex to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council of December 18, 2006 *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning - A European Reference Framework*, published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 30 December 2006/L394 (http The acronym *DeSeCo* stands for *Définition et Sélection des Compétences Clés* or *Definition and Selection of Competencies*. A summary of the report can be found on the Internet: http://www.pisa.oecd.org/dataoecd/47/61/35070367.pdf://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2006-0365+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN)

In this article, we are mainly going to focus on the concept of "social competence" which refers to some aspects of human communication, interaction and making of the good citizen. What exactly, however, do we mean when using the term *social competence* and which qualitative ingredients do we refer to when judging a person's social behaviour, e.g. at the workplace?

As a concept, social competence is multidimensional and is composed of social, emotional, cognitive and behavioral skills that are necessary for the individual's successful social adaptation and functionality, with a capacity for self-control, respect for social conventions and moral orientation. In research literature, social competence is defined generally as "effectiveness in social interaction" in a broader sense, and includes not only oneself but also the prospect of another, as well as the ability of learning from experience, so that learning can upgrade the individual's adaptability to changes in their social entourage (Rose-Krasnor, 1997).

The acquiring of skills is the outcome of learning, the starting point of which is primarily practice and not theory (Dewey, 1966). People are activated in specific social environments, where they interact with others in order to accomplish a task, to express some opinion, to work together in order to solve specific problems, etc. Continuous interaction between the individual and her environment constitutes the foundation of the learning process. Therefore, individuals never act in isolation, and their action takes place in a context that is largely defined by others in the form of values, norms, attitudes, expectations and conventions. The perception that learning has a practical and social background contrasts with the traditional view of formal education, which embraces the individual as alienated from practice (Andershed, Ljungzell, Sjöberg & Svensson, 2007).

The discourse of competences emanates from official international education policy centres, such as the European Commission, UNESCO and the OECD, and is constituted through making references to the new socio-economic conditions and significant changes that have occurred in the fields of production and, subsequently, labour market, because of the intense competition faced by Western societies in the era of the globalization of the markets (Pasias & Rousakis, 2008).

In this sense, the overused and often misunderstood target-term "employability"[4] acquires a particular meaning in the official documents of the European Commission and other international organizations, which justify policies of investing in lifelong learning and vocational training, as well as wider educational and mobility projects, e.g. Erasmus (European Commission, 2012). Through the Bologna Process, the concept of employability began, from 1999 onwards, to occupy the minds of those at universities, and therefore affect the shaping of curricula and teaching. The individualized labour market, the enlargement of the student population and the convergence of the diverse higher education systems into a more transparent system, to mention but three, are viewed as the main factors.

The ultimate goal is that students, through education and training, acquire those tools which will then enable them to acquire skills that will make them not only employable, but also able to evaluate and cultivate their employability. Consequently, employability depends on the degree of developing various skills, so that their holder can evolve her knowledge and personality by her own means, and generally, become useful.

The "European Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning", in its English version, makes use of the term *key competence*, rather than *basic skills*, building on the findings of the multi-disciplinary, orientated towards educational policy, research group of the OECD, under the direction of the Swiss Dominique Simone Rychen. Starting out from the question "*What skills do we need for a successful life and the good function of society?*", the researchers presented

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[4] Here's a typical quote of "EU speech", which, with "authenticity claims" of truth, imposes and legitimizes the implementation of educational policies for lifelong learning at a national and EU level:

"Europe has moved towards a knowledge-based society and economy. More than ever before, access to up-to-date information and knowledge, together with the motivation and skills to use these resources intelligently on behalf of oneself and the community as a whole, are becoming the key to strengthening Europe's competitiveness and improving the employability and adaptability of the workforce" (Commission of the European Communities (2000). *A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*.)

the results of their work, known by the acronym DeSeCo[5] (OECD, 2005;Rychen & Salganik, 2003; Rychen &Tiana, 2004) triggering thus, at the beginning of 2000, both nationally and globally, an intense debate about the content of education today and tomorrow. In order to meet the complex demands and global challenges of today's world, the DeSeCo working group presents the conceptual framework of basic skills by sorting them into three general categories:

a. competence to interact in socially heterogeneous groups,
b. competence to act independently, and
c. competence of using tools for communication.

These three categories make up a holistic model of competences and are considered by the DeSeCo as prerequisites for individual prosperity and sustainable socio-economic and democratic development of the society.

Investing in the skills of all members of the society through education is being put forward as apparent and obvious for the addressing of today's complex demands and global challenges. Usually, investing in skills is justified through arguments focusing on comparative evaluations on the basis of quantitative indicators. However, those standards are hardly ever accompanied by any critical analysis of the content and quality of either the educational processes or the skills

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[5] The acronym *DeSeCo* stands for *Définition et Sélection des Compétences Clés* or *Definition and Selection of Competencies*. A summary of the report can be found on the Internet: http://www.pisa.oecd.org/dataoecd/47/61/35070367.pdf

The concept "key competence" (or "key qualification") does not appear in the educational discourse with the Rychen workgroup, but was introduced by German economist Dieter Mertens in his 1974 lecture under the title "Schlüsselqualifikationen. Thesen zur Schulung für eine moderne Gesellschaft" ("Key qualifications. Statements on schooling for a modern society"). His lecture is available online at: http://panorama.ch/files/2745.pdf. By way of introduction, Mertens reers to three functions of education in the modern world: the development of an individual's personality, the laying of foundations for a future career and the preparation for the active participation in society.

See also: Liedman, S-E (2008). *Nycklar till ett framgångsrikt liv? – Om EU:s nyckelkompetenser*, p. 5.

At this point, it should be noted that one does not always distinguish clearly between competence and qualification, and the words are sometimes used with the same meaning.

that the educational system should be advancing. There may be a risk, therefore, to treat learning and education as a mechanical adaptation to a constantly changing labour market.

The empirical claimed questions are: What kind of skills are necessary for a happy life in a cohesive society of solidarity, and on which regulatory, theoretical and practical basis they are selected? The search can be facilitated by consensus and conceptual clarity. On the contrary, however, there are many definitions for the concept of *competence* and this is shown by the Rychen team publications[6]. Some philosophers seek the eternal human virtues. A social psychologist focuses on context. Some economists consider what kind of knowledge, skills and dispositions a worker should have in order to prosper in the labour market, whereas an anthropologist argues that the issue of competence is directly related to *practice* (Rychen & Salganik, 2001).

A decisive criterion for the identification of the skills needed by members of a society are the collective goals (e.g. economic development, social cohesion, welfare and security) that this society seeks to achieve. The individual's socialization and its ability to participate actively in society development are considered special key competences for the modern citizen and contribute to the production and reproduction of social capital.

## Social competence and social capital

When we discuss key competences in pedagogical / educational terms, we cannot, by default, help delimitating and translating them into measurable didactic goals. Not all competences are, however, liable to quantitative evaluations. Those which are the result of a learning process, such as digital competence, vary from those which by their

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[6] Most definitions converge into signifying a person's certain *disposition* and *readiness* to carry out activities and tasks. A definition of the term in French dates from 1690, according to *Le nouveau petit Robert*: "[la c]onnaissance approfondie, reconnue, qui confère le droit de juger ou de décider en certaines matières" ("the deep and accredited knowledge which affords the right to judge or decide on certain matters", underline translated by us). See: Le nouveau petit Robert (2003). *Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française,* p. 489.

nature are based on procedural skills, for instance the social compe-
tence or the metacognitive competence to learn on one's own (*think-
ing about thinking*)[7], and which refer to constant psychosocial mental
and psychodynamic processes. Such qualitative competences are listed
for example in the European Framework of Key Competences for
Lifelong Learning: critical thinking, creativity, initiative taking, prob-
lem solving, risk assessment, decision making, and constructive man-
agement of feelings. These "thematic" skills are not among the eight
key competences but are shown as horizontal, which cut across all the
competences of the Framework.

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[7] The originators of the key competences frameworks, which are examined here, may
have had in mind Aristotle's perception of thinking (*λόγον ἔχον*) as the highest function of
the mental energy, as it is worded in his *Metaphysics*:

> And thought thinks on itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought;
> for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its
> objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same. For that which is ca-
> pable of receiving the object of thought, i.e. the essence, is thought. But it is active
> when it possesses this object. Therefore the possession rather than the receptivity
> is the divine element which thought seems to contain, and the act of contem-
> plation is what is most pleasant and best. If, then, God is always in that good
> state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this
> compels it yet more. ["αὐτὸν δὲ νοεῖ ὁ νοῦς κατὰ μετάληψιν τοῦ νοητοῦ· νοητὸς
> γὰρ γίγνεται θιγγάνων καὶ νοῶν, ὥστε ταὐτὸν νοῦς καὶ νοητόν. τὸ γὰρ δεκτικὸν
> τοῦ νοητοῦ καὶ τῆς οὐσίας νοῦς, ἐνεργεῖ δὲ ἔχων, ὥστ᾽ ἐκείνου μᾶλλον τοῦτο
> ὃ δοκεῖ ὁ νοῦς θεῖον ἔχειν, καὶ ἡ θεωρία τὸ ἥδιστον καὶ ἄριστον. εἰ οὖν οὕτως
> εὖ ἔχει, ὡς ἡμεῖς ποτέ, ὁ θεὸς ἀεί, θαυμαστόν: εἰ δὲ μᾶλλον, ἔτι θαυμασιώτερον." ]

 (Aristotle's Metaphysics, Book XII, 1072 b 20-25, translated by W.D. Ross. Oxford:
Clarendon Press. 1924. Accessible online at: http://www.kennydominican.joyeurs.com/
GreekClassics/AristotleMetaphysics.htm)
    Aristotle's excerpt is analyzed by Sven-Eric Liedman through Hegel's interpretation
in *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* [See: Liedman, S-E. (2006). *Stenarna i
själen. Form och materia från antiken till idag,* p. 298-305 και Liedman (2008)].
    It would be desirable if the educational community approached the framework of
competences with reflective attitude, giving them a content that would be consistent with
a different ideal of Education. Only then would for instance the metacognitive ability
of "learning to learn" not be construed as a "study technique", but rather as a substantial
learning attitude, not limited to the reproduction of knowledge but including the explo-
ration, contemplation and understanding, which occurs when the learners take part in the
learning process with their own experiences.

We are now going to shift our focus to the concept of social competence, which has entered our daily speech and is used diversely without any really clear definition.

At first sight, this term belongs to the novelty fashionable words and can therefore be considered not liable to serious scientific investigation. Given, however, its extensive use in various fields of social activity, the term has attracted the curiosity of social research[8]. As early as the 1990's, there have been made some proposals (in Sweden) to introduce the teaching of social competences as a separate subject into schooling, although there was a serious retort regarding the usefulness of the term. The most severe critics suggested that the term *social competence* is an "expression of petty attitudes and behaviour", that it "implies adjustment" and that it is in no case liable to generalisation (Persson, 2003).

Especially widespread is the use of the term in workplaces; it is found predominantly in recruitment ads for workforce of various specialties and grades. The question which rightly arises is whether, in the case of job ads, by "social competence" are implied the same qualitative features e.g. for a porter, a municipal employee or a manager of a multinational company.

The question posed by sociology on the matter reads as follows: What kind of human interaction phenomena are signified by the term *social competences* and what are the qualities of a "socially competent" person?

The urgent need to foster social skills and the expectation to behave "socially" in today's post-modernist era rather implies that *something* is missing from the image of the conventionally integrated social being. So, what is missing, and why now?

Through socialization, the individual shapes its personality, internalizes the acceptable behaviour standards, the rules, values and customs of society or of the group which it belongs to. The socialization process lasts throughout their lives and is characterized by either spontaneous or organized interaction relations of the individual with

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[8] A simple Google search of "social competence" renders 14.800.000 results which refer, among others, to a lot of books, papers and relevant studies.

others in given social and cultural contexts. Claiming that humans are social beings, we accept the existence of some properties common to all people. However, if we argue that a person is "social" and mention some specific properties that this person has, then we separate it from other people who lack these properties. The ability to interact and communicate with others is considered to be the most important property of the social individual coming not only from its familiar environment, with an attitude of understanding the other and mutual trust. It is, therefore, a basic competence to effectively adapt to the norms and rules of conduct that apply or are dictated by the actual social circumstances.

Characteristic of the competent individual is to act consciously and deliberately, having a realistic view of the objective margins of action allowed by the circumstances and its own potential (Hagström & Hansson, 2003). In practice, a person's self-esteem about her own skills is not enough, because it is ultimately the judgment of the others in given social situations which shall assess her actions as "competent" or "incompetent". This makes the concept of social competency a controversial issue and its use an instrument of power, as in the case of an employer who disqualifies an employee on the grounds that she lacks social competences. Apart from this, however, the concept itself contains valuable and necessary ingredients for the harmonious coexistence of the members of a society. This is also shown by descriptions of social skills in the aforementioned recommendations of the OECD and the European Union:

> These include personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence and cover all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life, and particularly in increasingly diverse societies, and to resolve conflict where necessary. Civic competence equips individuals to fully participate in civic life, based on knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation. (*Key competences for lifelong learning. A European Reference Framework*)

In the OECD text, "investing" in social competences is justified upon a wider analysis of the rapidly changing social structures and

the effects of globalization on the labour market and the cohesion of societies. For this reason, according to the OECD text, it is required by modern citizens (of the member countries?) to learn, to live and to work with others:

> As societies become in some ways more fragmented and also more diverse, it becomes important to manage interpersonal relationships well both for the benefit of individuals and to build new forms of co-operation. The building of social capital is important, as existing social bonds weaken and new ones are created by those with the ability to form strong networks. One of the potential sources of inequity in the future could be differences in the competence of various groups to build and benefit from social capital[9].

It is now becoming evident that social competences acquire a content and quality characteristics in specific social, economic and cultural contexts. At the same time, through the competences discourse, the idea of the socially trained person / citizen who is aware that she is responsible for her "fate" depending on the competences she has developed, is arising. The competence to analyze situations, to contemplate, to communicate and collaborate with others, ultimately depends on her ability (her disposition and willingness) to learn continuously. Still, this is possible in societies with robust, open and democratic educational infrastructures – in other words, in societies with a strong social capital.


## Social capital

The concept "social capital" is used today as widely, and has been the focus of social research for two decades. From an epistemological point of view, it is almost impossible to devise a unified concept and a unique measure of social capital. Although there is no consensus

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[9] The Definition and Selection of key Competencies, Executive summary, p. 12. Available online at: http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/47/61/35070367.pdf )

about what social capital is, the concept remains popular, something which implies its "added value" as a tool of analysis and interpretation of the various dimensions of social structure and action (Frane; 2007; Koniordos, 2006).

The name of the concept emanates rather from the theoretical perception that every society has three types of assets or capital: the natural, the human and the social capital[10] Robert D. Putnam's studies (1995) gave rise to an extensive discussion of the phenomenon and the concept of social capital, linking it with empirically documented changes in the social behaviour of people contemporarily. The title of his much-discussed book "Bowling Alone" refers to the fact that Americans continue practising the sport of bowling to the same extent, though now in a more lonely way, and not as earlier, in clubs or groups, which are believed to reinforce social ties among their members or facilitate the making of new ones (Putnam, 2000). The message coming through the book's 540 pages, supported by data on how often Americans go on trips or invite friends at home for dinner, it is that civil society in the United States is in crisis.

According to Putnam, the average American is becoming less active in voluntary organizations and participates in various informal social networks to a smaller extent. All indicators since the mid-70's, he argues, are constantly tending to "go wrong" and this is evidence that the social capital and its nucleus, which is social trust (Demertzis, 2006) have been corroded in the USA. People have distanced from each other and from society, a fact which affects the relations of reciprocity which are based on mutual respect and trust and which, according to Putnam, are prerequisites for social progress. The decline of

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[10] Excerpt of an interview with Robert Putnam:

> By analogy with notions of physical capital and human capital--tools and training that enhance individual productivity--"social capital" refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit." (Putnam, R. (1995). "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital. Available online at: http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/assoc/bowling.html)

See also Rothstein, B. & Kumlin, S. (2001). Demokrati, socialt kapital och förtroende and Rothstein, B. (1998). "Varifrån kommer det sociala kapitalet?".

social capital is reflected on reduced participation in political parties and movements, which at best manage to activate a very limited number of their registered members.

The term social capital is also used to describe and explain the benefits and opportunities that people gain by taking part in different groups[11] (Bourdieu, 1997), or the benefits from social ties with other people (Coleman, 1990). Social capital is also linked to another type of capital, *human capital*. The latter consists of the knowledge, skills and attitudes which enable people to perform various actions. Social capital is based on human capital, and it is created when the relations between people change with the aim of improving functions for a more effective achievement of common goals. The resources of human capital are individually committed, whereas social capital requires relationships and interaction between individuals in order to exist.

Coleman stresses the difference between social capital and private resources (human capital) when he states that social capital is characterized by the dimension of the public good, namely that "social capital is not the private property of any of the persons who benefit from it" (Op. cit., p. 315).

## Learning communities and social capital

Putnam's views on social capital regard a social model based on harmonic close relationships within various "communities" beyond family

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[11] Donald Broady – one of the most authoritative interpreters of Bourdieu in Sweden – tags the concept of social capital as a little "strange" in the framework of his theory on capital. In general terms, according to Bourdieu, social capital is "assets" in the form of family and friendship bonds, personal contacts or relations (networks), such as the possible advantages that the graduates from elite schools may have due to their mutual acquaintances. Broady argues that Bourdieu introduced the concept of social capital in his sociological studies on the educational system, probably as an ad hoc hypothesis, which allowed him to explain deviations that could not be traced back to the distribution of cultural and financial capital. Without any "contacts", it is not so certain that a valuable (university) degree will lead to any distinguished job in the labour market. In evidence of his interpretation, Broady cites Bourdieu's own words: *the possession of social capital by a person determinates its educational capital rendering opportunities*. See Broady, D. (1998). *Kapitalbegreppet som utbildningssociologiskt verktyg*, p. 14.

and close friends. These communities are founded on different values, such as solidarity, kindness, reciprocity, trust, brotherhood and so on, and are formed by geographical (e.g. regional associations), ideological (e.g. political or religious communities) criteria or based on common interests (e.g. environmental organizations). All these "civil societies" give meaning and identity to their members through learning processes, without usually being perceived as such. Their symbolic role in creating a "sense of belonging" is essential.

However, belonging to a community does not automatically create only positive capital, but also negative, as a collective identity of a limited range consists of learning processes, from which some people are either completely excluded or kept away. Communities which have traditionally been highly consistent, face a greater difficulty, in the era of globalization and migratory flows, in assimilating newly arrived members. The result is that the different communities live isolated and thus have a negative impact on social cohesion and economic development. In such cases, trust between the established and the new groups seems to be very low, because of open or concealed mechanisms of exclusion which keep the new population groups outside the realm of society.

Therefore, it is important to approach the "inner value and normative structure" of social capital in a contemplative mood before evaluating its importance for the individual and society. Because, what is the point, from a social perspective, of a social capital which can be positive for those "included" in a separate community, but which cannot bridge the distance from the other social entities, thus actively contributing to the consolidation of discrimination and segregation between "us" and "the others"? A social capital of such texture, which contributes to discrimination and exclusive dividing lines between humans, is an anti-social and therefore counterproductive one, in terms of an integrative sociopedagogical perception of education, respect and recognition of the human capital (Gougoulakis, 2006).

## Opening up the discussion

**a.** The turn of the public educational discourse to the key competenc-

es and skills coincides with the introduction of the neo-conservative "back-to-basics" doctrine in the 1980's. The "new" educational rhetorics goes along and is supported by the corresponding rhetorics on economic recovery, competition, investment in knowledge, new technologies, innovation, etc. (Shor, 1992)[12]. The issue of key competences encodes the perception that the abandonment of traditional pedagogy is to be blamed for decreased school performance and consequently for deficient "employability" of graduates. In other words, it reflects an overall shift in educational policy and the request to restore traditional pedagogical models which will teach "useful" skills and knowledge supported by a whole technology / industry of examinations and evaluations. Measurable performance has displaced student-centred teaching methods, which have not privileged abstract knowledge but have generally aimed at fostering inquiring spirit and the ability of critically understanding the world.

**b.** Today's developments in the field of educational policy should not be viewed nor understood outside the scope of social conflicts, forces correlation and necessary compromises. They reflect broader social, political and ideological whirls that have imposed the domination of the socio-economic model of market and the administrative paradigm known as New Public Management (Gültekin, 2011) impregnating the public discourse with the "Economist's" vocabulary and logic, transforming even the area of Education into service-providing businesses for affluent customers. The inability to control the speculative, still extremely powerful, financial system, due to the political system's own self-negation and essentially resignation, masquerades the shrinking job opportunities into a matter of failure of the educational system and of course reduced employability.

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[12] Ira Shor is considered to be one of the pioneers of critical pedagogy and in his work, he adapts the ideas of the Brazilian teacher Paulo Freire in a creative way. In his book "Empowering Education", Shor formulates an integral theory and methodology about a critical pedagogy. See also a detailed presentation of Ira Shor's critical approach to literacy by Demetris Nikoloudes in his doctoral thesis: Nikoloudes, D. (2010).

**c.** The relationship between competences and education is not a given one, nor does the development of a competence equal with the objective of any educational practice, because competences are acquired even without formal education. From this point of view, it would be partly arbitrary to reduce competences to educational goals (Liedman, 2008). Being competent can merely mean having the ability to do certain things, no matter how that ability was acquired, whereas the educational goal is interwoven with specific learning processes.

From a pedagogical point of view, addressing the relationship of education and competences, as the latter are classified and displayed in the aforementioned texts of the OECD and the European Union, should be based upon solid foundations of stochastic analysis of the rhetorics accompanying the formulation of key competences, with emphasis on detecting the explicit or underlying perception on knowledge[13].

In addition to the critical attitude towards official documents of public entities, it would be desirable for "pedagogy" to declare its values background and its *political* position about knowledge, man and society. Applying Habermas' theory of "fundamental cognitive interests" – the technical, practical and the critical or emancipatory one – which guide knowledge, the methodology that produces them and the instruments that mediate for their reproduction, we can outline respective pedagogical approaches to the key competences issue (Perperides, 2008). As a result of cognitive development within given social and historical contexts, the individual needs knowledge in the form of "tools" in order to process the natural world and give it form and function.

[13] The logic of the normative standards of the "discourse" about key competencies and normative formalities of their institutional representatives reveals a steady change in the nature of the educational process, from an "educational" process to a process of training "employable" workforce. The outputs of education are, therefore, reformed, with consequent effects on the forms of its organization and functioning. For a more detailed discussion about the adjustments which education is undergoing because of "the mutation of the nature of production", we recommend Pleios, G. (2005).

**d.** The individual is able, through language, to surpass its material existence, to develop relations of intersubjectivity thanks to symbols invented by man and to interpret her actions, thus giving meaning to her existence. The comparative advantage, however, of the "human species" is its contemplative ability, which allows it to create conditions of self-education and emancipation from social constraints imposed by the institutional framework of "established power and dependency relations". As, though, the ability of contemplation is a produce of learning, it is included among the skills to be developed. The contemplative and recontemplative process is considered a metacognitive ability and is essentially an individual one, as it requires a thinking being, but it can also be triggered by the forms of collective interaction and everyday communicative practice in designated social, cultural and historical contexts. As a learning process, self-contemplation and recontemplation contribute to social integration, acting as an equalizer of internal / individual demands and social coercion (Op. cit., p. 60).

**e.** The response of a society to the challenges facing it, gains strength according to the degree of accumulation of social capital, which depends on the wise use, without discrimination, of its human capital. The good society knows how to ensure opportunities of equal democratic "political" participation, communication and interaction. Each one of the structural parametres includes the humanistic qualities of *tolerance* towards the others' specificity, with respect and interest in their experiences, of *reciprocity* and disinterested solidarity with fellow human beings and, ultimately, *trust*.

The Greek society has got no other choice than: HEAVY INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION - Progressive, democratic education, open to all!

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