

Pedagogy as Education to Active Thinking: the Projects of John Dewey, Paulo Freire and Peter McLaren¹

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Abstract

In our study, we analyse some reflections contained in the education thought of John Dewey, Paulo Freire and Peter McLaren. The three thinkers, with mutually different methods, have, in our opinion, as common point the intention to show that no education system is neutral in relation to the way in which societies are organised: all systems of education aim at the constitution of a particular kind of society through the formation of a corresponding mentality in the individuals. The ethical and political foundations of a society are mirrored in the education system: any reform of the society should, therefore, begin with the reform of the education system; furthermore, any reform of the society cannot be effective unless it is founded on the reform of education.

As regards Dewey's observations, we concentrate our attention on his criticism of any education system based on the passivity of pupils and on the massification of students: Dewey steadily pleads for a system of education aiming at the individualisation of pupils. As regards Freire's meditation, we point out Freire's uncovering of the oppression exercised against the subaltern classes through the traditional education systems: the constant relegation of pupils of the oppressed classes to a condition of total passivity, which is the aim of the system of education described by Freire as the banking concept of education, destroys any sense and aspiration to autonomy in the pupils themselves. Self-depreciation of pupils is the result of the traditional system of education. McLaren points out that a correct system of education should have as its own aim the self-transformation and the empowerment of the students: educators ought to uncover the relations holding between knowledge, which is always a social construct, and the interests of the dominant class.

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La pédagogie comme éducation à la pensée active: les projets de John Dewey, Paulo Freire et Peter McLaren

Résumé

Dans notre étude, nous analysons certaines réflexions comprises dans la pensée éducative de Dewey, Paulo Freire et Peter McLaren. Ces trois penseurs, bien qu'utilisant les uns et les autres différentes méthodes, ont à notre avis comme point commun l'intention de montrer qu'aucun système éducatif n'est neutre par rapport à l'organisation des sociétés: tous les systèmes éducatifs ont pour but de constituer un type particulier de société grâce à la formation d'une mentalité correspondante chez les individus. Les fondements éthiques et politiques d'une société se reflètent dans son système éducatif, donc n'importe quelle réforme de la société devrait commencer par celle de son système éducatif; de plus, il est impossible qu'une réforme de la société soit efficace sauf si elle se base sur celle de l'éducation. En ce qui concerne notamment les observations de Dewey, nous concentrons notre attention sur ses critiques d'un système éducatif ayant pour base la passivité des élèves et la massification des étudiants. En effet, Dewey plaide constamment pour un système éducatif visant l'individualisation des élèves. En ce qui concerne la réflexion de Freire, nous signalons sa découverte de l'oppression exercée contre les classes subalternes à travers les systèmes éducatifs traditionnels: la relégation constante des élèves des classes opprimées à une condition de passivité totale, objectif du système éducatif décrit par Freire comme le concept bancaire de l'éducation, anéantit tout sens d'aspiration à l'autonomie chez les élèves eux-mêmes. L'auto-dépréciation des élèves est le résultat du système éducatif traditionnel. McLaren souligne que l'objectif propre d'un bon système éducatif devrait être l'auto transformation et la autonomisation des étudiants: les enseignants devraient en effet révéler les liens existant entre les connaissances, qui est toujours un construit social, et les intérêts de la classe dominante.

Mots clés: Dewey, démocratie, Freire, concept bancaire de l'éducation, McLaren, auto-transformation

Pedagogia como educação para o pensamento ativo: os projetos de John Dewey, Paulo Freire e Peter McLaren

Resumo

Em nosso estudo, analisamos algumas das reflexões incluídas no pensamento educacional de Dewey, Paulo Freire e Peter McLaren. Estes três pensadores, embora utilizando métodos diferentes, têm em nossa opinião um ponto em comum para mostrar que nenhum sistema educacional é neutro no que diz respeito à organização das sociedades: todos os sistemas educacionais visam formar um tipo particular de sociedade através da formação de uma mentalidade correspondente nos indivíduos. Os fundamentos éticos e políticos de uma sociedade se refletem em seu sistema educacional, portanto qualquer reforma da sociedade deve começar com a reforma de seu sistema educacional; além disso, é impossível que uma reforma da sociedade seja efetiva a menos que se baseie na reforma da educação. Com particular referência às observações de Dewey, concentramos nossa atenção em suas críticas a um sistema educacional baseado na passividade dos estudantes e na massificação dos estudantes. De fato, Dewey defende constantemente um sistema educacional que visa a individualização dos estudantes. Com relação às reflexões de Freire, apontamos para sua descoberta da opressão das classes baixas através dos sistemas tradicionais de ensino: a constante relegação dos alunos das classes oprimidas para uma condição de total passividade, objetivo do sistema educacional descrito por Freire como o conceito bancário de educação, destrói qualquer senso de aspiração de autonomia entre os próprios alunos. A autodepreciação dos alunos é o resultado do sistema educacional tradicional. McLaren salienta que o objetivo adequado de um bom sistema educacional deve ser a autotransformação e o empoderamento dos estudantes: os professores devem revelar as ligações entre o conhecimento, que é sempre uma construção social, e os interesses da classe dominante.

Palavras-chave: Dewey, democracia, Freire, conceito bancário de educação, McLaren, autotransformação

Introduction

In our paper, we shall analyse some ideas regarding the relationships between democracy, education to autonomy and refusal of authoritarianism: we shall base our investigation on some reflections of John Dewey, Paulo Freire and Peter McLaren. The aspect which is common to the three thinkers is, in our opinion, the conception that no education system is neutral in relation to the society to which it belongs. On the contrary, the education system is always connected to the principles and aims of the society by which this education system is adopted.

Our analysis will begin with the description of Dewey's model of the new school. Dewey proposes a new model of education which ought to be not only curriculum-centred but children-centred too. Education and schooling have, in Dewey's proposal, to be centres for social change and social reform. The school ought to become a place where pupils are taught the attitude to a constant revision of their own beliefs. The new pedagogy ought to be oriented against authoritarian, strict, pre-ordained knowledge. Education ought to be directed to the development of the individuality, autonomy and independence of pupils.

We shall then investigate some of the main concepts of Freire's critical pedagogy. The main aim of the critical pedagogy consists in the criticism of the consideration of pupils as being bank accounts. Freire's critical pedagogy does not regard pupils as being essentially empty, passive subjects who only need to be filled; pupils are, on the contrary, active persons to be promoted in their capacity of being active subjects. Students may not be considered as containers to be filled: the transformation of pupils into passive subjects leads pupils to a total inhibition of creativity. Schools are the first place where the reform of the society is to be initiated; without a reform of teaching there can be no reform of the society. Moreover, the organisation of teaching is functional to the kind of society to be reached through the organisation of teaching itself: the imposition of an attitude of passivity to the pupils will produce citizens completely subdued to authority and easy to fall prey of authoritarian orders of societies. The education to being active subjects, to independent inquiry and to examination of traditional beliefs will produce citizens able to live with democratic values and to promote the participation of everybody to the social life. Any reform of the society ought to have as its own foundation the reform of teaching. Any reform of the society cannot help having a project regarding the reform of the traditional forms of teaching and of learning, since the traditional form of teaching and of learning constitutes the very foundation of the traditional society. The education system is the foundation of the society.

The criticism of the conception of pupils as being passive objects to be filled with contents aims, among other things, not only to denounce the loss of creativity of pupils if they remain exclusively passive throughout the education process, but also to denounce the compliance produced in the pupils towards authoritarian orders of the society. The critical pedagogy aims to educate pupils to be free citizens which are able to autonomously think. Central to the meditation of Freire on the pedagogy is that no pedagogy is neutral towards the power structures of a society: different kinds of pedagogy are adopted in order to realise different organisations of the society; they correspond to different power structures. There is no pedagogy which is independent of the particular organisation of a society.

The reason for our analysing both Dewey and Freire together, in spite of the differences existing between the ideas expressed by the two thinkers and in spite of the difference of the environments in which the two thinkers worked, lies in their common criticism of the consideration of pupils as passive subjects: both Dewey and Freire fight against a model of education which, regarding pupils as passive subjects, destroys their own creativity, individuality and personality. Both thinkers plead for a new society in which education contents are not simply given from above and accepted without discussion: contents are to be verified, analysed, criticised.

McLaren brings forward the concepts of Freire's critical pedagogy: education ought to be fundamentally a process of uncovering the power structures of the society; if a society has determined characteristics, it has these characteristics since it is the advantage of some groups that society is organised with these characteristics. Society is not something natural and unchangeable; society is always the product of determined interests and power relationships. The duty of any central pedagogy is to uncover the power structures of the society.

2) Some positions of Dewey

We are now going to present some of Dewey's positions on education and school. Dewey states his principles in his book *Education Today* (1940, pp. 6-8). In such declaration of principles, he clearly expresses the essence of the new school: school is a social institution; school is community. School should bring the children to develop their own faculties for social ends. The dimension of socialising and of being socialised lies at the very foundation of the school system.

Dewey often insists on school being community. School ought to prepare for social ends. Dewey moreover supports a model of school having connections with the real

life of children. Life experience should be connected to education: the contents of education and of school should not remain without a concrete application.

Dewey insists that democracy and democratic values ought to be the leading principles in the organisation of schools: they ought to be the principles of the new school. Democracy means to free intelligence in order that mind be emancipated. The aim of education is to produce freedom of thought. The role of education consists in producing and promoting a free capacity of thought. The traditional school system is characterised by an undemocratic organisation, whereas democratic principles are becoming stronger and stronger outside schools (1940, p. 62). Dewey considers as one of the main characteristics of democracy its being connected to independent effectiveness and to emancipation of mind. Democracy is seen by him as being a political form developing independence and emancipation: democracy entails, therefore, the principle of individual autonomy. Democracy is connected, furthermore, in Dewey's view, with freedom of action, provided that freedom of action has as its own foundation a capacity of thought which can freely express itself. The internal authority of truth, which can be discovered by the reason of individuals, ought to be the guide of the deeds of the individuals. The traditional school system does not develop thought and freedom of intelligence: there is a delay between the social movements and the school system. Democratic principles are expanding in Dewey's society, whereas the school system shows an undemocratic organisation.

Dewey points out the contradiction existing between the increasing process of democratisation in the society and the absence of democracy in the traditional school system: the organisation of schools should not be imposed from above. The method of organisation should be democratic: it should be the product of collaboration between those who are involved in the school system. If democratic principles are applied in the society in its whole extension, schools may not represent an exception to this application (1940, p. 66).⁴

Dewey is confident that reality is in general better built if the construction of reality is the product of the collaboration between different individuals than if reality results from the planification made by few persons over the many. Democracy means that all individuals participate in the determination of the aims of their work. It is a value for Dewey that individuals can participate in the determination of the conditions and of the aims of their own work: Dewey favours a kind of society in

4 Dewey's definition of the meaning of democracy is interesting. Democracy means having a share in the determination of conditions and aims of one's own work. Within an authentic democratic system, individuals are able to participate in the decisions regarding the conditions and aims of their own work. No imposition from above is compatible with democracy. Dewey applies this general characteristic of democracy to the school system in order to give a direction for the reform of the schools.

which individuals participate in the organisation of the society. Dewey points out that, in spite of the expansion of the democratic values in the society, within the school system the democratic principles are absent, since schools does not allow pupils to be active subjects.

The problem with the school system is that schools represent an isolated realm in comparison with the real life (1990b, p. 17). Schools form a dimension which is isolated from the changes of the society; they are a kind of closed box within the society. The organisation as such of the schoolrooms is relevant for understanding the way of functioning of the traditional school system:

“Another thing that is suggested by these schoolrooms, with their set desks, is that everything is arranged for handling as large numbers of children as possible; for dealing with children en masse, as an aggregate of units; involving, again, that they be treated passively. The moment children act they individualize themselves; they cease to be a mass and become the intensely distinctive beings that we are acquainted with out of school, in the home, the family, on the playground, and in the neighbourhood. On the same basis is explicable the uniformity of method and curriculum. If everything is on a “listening” basis, you can have uniformity of material and method. The ear, and the book which reflects the ear, constitute the medium which is alike for all. There is next no opportunity for adjustment to varying capacities and demands. There is a certain amount – a fixed quantity – of ready-made results and accomplishments to be acquired by all children alike in a given time.” (1990b, pp. 32-33)

The essential characteristic of the traditional school system is that schools are organised with the aim to produce a series of possibly identical individuals⁵. The aim of the traditional school system is to produce individuals with uniform competences: Mass production, instead of individualisation, is the goal of the traditional school system.

5 The following aspects of the quoted passage are, in our opinion, relevant:

- The disposition of desks is directly connected to the aim of handling as great a number of children as possible.
- Children are treated as aggregate of units, as a mass; there is no attention for the children as individuals.
- The process of learning is organised on a listening basis, since children should remain passive in the process of learning.
- Method of teaching and curriculum of studies are uniform, since children are treated as a mass and not as individuals.
- There is no adjustment to different capacities and to different demands.
- There is no adaptation of the learning contents to the individuals. Individuals as such should disappear.
- A fixed quantity of ready-made results is the guideline for teaching and learning; individual needs are left out of consideration.
- The aim to be reached is the production in series of teaching and learning. Education contents are already given: there is no way of modifying the contents of the subject matters depending on the concrete individuals. Passivity is the rule and the aim of the traditional school system.

Children attend school in order to take in contents, not in order to create something in independence and autonomy: they ought to exclusively repeat an already completely and definitively established doctrine. They should listen and not be active. The opposition between traditional school system and Dewey's proposal for a new school amounts to the opposition between a system in which children only have to learn and to repeat contents without an autonomous elaboration, and a system in which children act as protagonists and become really distinctive beings, beings which are promoted in their personal skills.

Individualisation is the process directly opposed to the uniformity of learning: this ought to be one of the aims of the school system. Dewey clearly expresses the idea that children who act, and do not simply listen, individualise themselves. Autonomous activity means individualisation: there is an opposition between an education system which is exclusively based on the listening activity in pupils and an education system which, on the contrary, allows children to act in the classroom. The first one brings to a massification of the children, whereas the second one produces individualisation and, consequently, emancipation of children.

In Dewey's view, the traditional school system constitutes an isolated system in relation to life⁶. He denounces the following points in the traditional education given in the school system:

- The whole school system and the corresponding education system are dominated by an absolute absence of life experience.
- Children cannot apply their experiences in the school and cannot apply the learned contents in the school in their life experience.
- Schools are isolated from the life outside the schools.

Dewey hardly complains about the separation between school and life: school functions as a kind of separated realm in comparison and in relation to life. Children are compelled to give up ideas, interests and activities they have in life, in order to assume the habit of the school. Dewey opposes the following two organisations with each other:

⁶ See on this subject the following observations of Dewey:

"From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while, on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning at school. That is the isolation of the school - its isolation from life. When the child gets into the schoolroom he has to put out of his mind a large part of the ideas, interests, and activities that predominate in his home and neighborhood. So the school, being unable to utilize this everyday experience, sets painfully to work, on another tack and by a variety of means, to arouse in the child an interest in school studies." (1990b, p. 75)

- a. Traditional school system: passive learning, learning as listening, absorption of contents, massification of pupils.
- b. New school: active learning, individualisation of pupils.

Dewey declares that the child ought to be the centre of the education: therewith he clearly opposes the model of education in which the child has been considered as subordinated to the subject-matter (1990a, p. 187). We can collect from his discourse the following ideas:

- i. The priorities in the new model of education are clearly set: children are the starting-point, the centre, the end of the process of education.
- ii. Only the mental development of the children furnishes the standard for teaching and learning.
- iii. Studies should be instruments for the autonomous development of children.
- iv. The child cannot be interpreted as an entity that has to be filled with contents. The goal of education is the self-realisation.
- v. Education ought to develop personality and character.
- vi. The self is the centre. The accumulation of knowledge is nothing, if this implies that the self is lost.
- vii. Learning is an active process. Passivity cannot function within a conception of learning as individualisation.

It is clear that, within the education model based on pure listening, children are treated as passive objects; in the model of acting, a space of creativity is given to pupils. The learning model of listening is inspired by a passive behaviour, whereas the learning model of acting presupposes an active behaviour. Both models are connected to different models of society: models of school correspond to models of society:

- i. The education model of listening corresponds to the aim of producing uniformity in the society.
- ii. The education model which considers students as acting subjects corresponds to the aim of individualisation in the society.

A school based on listening will tendentially produce individuals that are prone to uniformity, whereas a school based on acting will tendentially produce individuals that are at least relatively autonomous. The formation of personality and of character is the central point for Dewey: Dewey proceeds in the direction of the formation

of autonomy. The quantity of knowledge which is transmitted in the lesson is not the central point within the teaching and the learning processes; the absorption of knowledge can represent a loss of the individual as such. Dewey is contrary to every form of indoctrination, to every form of transmission of knowledge in which knowledge is accepted without critical reflection. Development of autonomy should be the aim of education.

3) Freire: The danger of internalisation

Coming now to the analysis of some points of the meditation of Paulo Freire, we can see that in his analysis of the relation of oppression, Freire points out the danger of internalisation: internalisation is the process through which the minds of oppressed people are assimilated to – and therewith enslaved by – the system of values, of ideas, of judgments of the dominating classes. Throughout internalisation, the minds of the oppressed individuals become a replica of the minds of the oppressors: oppressed individuals are completely annulled as regards autonomy and independence of their own conscience. The peculiar point of Freire consists, in our opinion, in his work of uncovering the traditional education in its being the product of precise power structures.

Reality is presented, within the traditional education, as given once and for all. Traditional schools transmit the conception of an unchangeable reality with its social and power structure: reality is to be accepted by everybody as it is without any discussion. A precise sphere of interests, which aims at the conservation of power, lies behind this presentation of reality. The kind of society founded on these interests wants to perpetuate itself in and through the education system.

One of the greatest danger for persons who are oppressed is the internalisation of the opinions of all those who aim to put them in a position of inferiority and aim to convince them that they are inferior. The mechanism of internalisation functions through the following strategy:

- i. Determined contents are imposed to the oppressed individuals. The oppressed are subjected to a process of indoctrination consisting in spreading the belief that, in reality, there is only a correct way of thinking, the model of thinking of the oppressors. The minds of the oppressed individuals are assimilated to the values of the minds of the oppressors.
- ii. All mind spaces, all spaces for thinking are closed to the oppressed individuals; all alternatives to the existing world, since the existing world is presented to

the oppressed as the only possible one. The oppressed cannot even think at the concept of a reality which is alternative to the way of thinking that has been imposed on him.

- iii. Reality is presented as static, immutable, unchangeable.
- iv. The oppressed is subjected to a process in which he is convinced of his absolute absence of value. In this way the oppressed is convinced that the hierarchical structure is right, that he ought to obey and that he ought to remain at the place it has been assigned to him.

Through the internalisation of the contents transmitted by the oppressor, the oppressed definitely loses his own autonomy. The oppressed are being progressively assimilated to the system of values of the oppressor.

Imposition of values does not necessarily mean that oppressors assimilate oppressed to their own values: imposition constitutes, therefore, only a first step in a whole process of cancellation of the minds of the oppressed individuals. The real danger for the oppressed is the assimilation, the internalisation of contents, of systems of values, since, through the internalisation of values, the oppressed disappear as autonomous person. The individual has no more an autonomous will, an autonomous thought, an autonomous reflection. The individual as individual is annulled. Freire tells:

"The "fear of freedom" which afflicts the oppressed, a fear which may equally lead them to desire the role of oppressor or bind them to the role of oppressed, should be examined. One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is prescription. Every prescription represents the imposition of one man's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the man prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness. Thus, the behaviour of the oppressed is a prescribed behaviour, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor.

The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for human completion." (1970/1992, p. 31)

Prescription is imposition: It is imposition of the mentality of the oppressor on the oppressed; it is imposition of the choices of the oppressor on the choices of the oppressed. The thought of the oppressors completely assimilates the thought of the oppressed individuals. The life perspective of the oppressor becomes the life perspective of the oppressed. The values of the oppressors become the values of reality of the oppressed individuals. Therefore, oppressed individuals are annulled in their own values and in their own personalities. Oppressed individuals do not possess any way of autonomous thinking. They recognise themselves as the subaltern part of the system of values of the oppressors. A place and a duty in reality and in society are assigned to the oppressed individuals: oppressed individuals acknowledge that this place is the correct place for them. They accept the system of values of the oppressors as the only possible system of values. This system of values is, for the indoctrinated, oppressed people, not simply a particular system of values; it is not simply the system of values of the oppressors: it is the natural system of values. For indoctrinated people it is no longer possible to imagine an alternative to the given values. As the oppressed individuals have completely internalised the contents and the values of the dominant classes, they cannot recognise the values of the society in which they live as the values of a particular group of persons: they are mental prisoners of the indoctrination. No alternative thinking is open to them.

A process of transformation of consciousness begins through the prescription: the consciousness of the oppressed is brought to conformity with the consciousness of the oppressor. In other words, the oppressor dictates contents and orientation to the oppression. A mechanism of assimilation of the oppressed to the values of the oppressor comes about. Consequently, the behaviour itself of the oppressed follows the prescription of the oppressor. The oppressor dictates the rules of thinking and of behaving of the oppressed. The oppressor determines everything: values, thought and behaviour of the oppressed individuals. The real question is, in Freire, the mind: if the minds of the oppressed individuals are subjected to the process of internalisation, oppressed individuals do not have any longer their own mind at their own disposal. The oppressed individuals will thereby accept anything which comes from the oppressors. Freire points out that the whole process is a process of internalisation of image and rules of the oppressor. The oppressed individuals regulate their own way of thinking on the basis of the contents and of the guidelines of the oppressors.

One of the consequences of this process of internalisation is the fear of freedom. The internalisation has provided determined contents for the oppressed. In order to become free, the oppressed ought to free himself, and ought to have the will to free himself from all the contents with which he has been endowed. He must substitute

these contents with his own autonomy and his own responsibility. The hierarchical model of education is not simple to be given up. The feeling of dependence is not easy to be eliminated. The individual is dependent on a system of values: this system becomes a kind of second nature for him. The habit of being subaltern entities produces a new nature in the individual. Once all contents of the oppressed have been eliminated through the process of indoctrination, the oppressed individuals have no principle to which they can recur in order to work out an alternative to the existing order.

Oppressed individuals are afraid of losing the security given by dependence for something which they do not know. Oppressed individuals do not know what freedom, autonomy and independence are, since they have been subjected to a process of assimilation through the education. For these individuals, education has been nothing else than assimilation to an external doctrine. The universe of the oppressed does not know any other contents than the contents of the oppressor⁷. It is a common strategy of all oppressive way of thinking to aim to persuade that there is no alternative to a determined way of thinking. Of course, this way of thinking is presented as neutral, as natural, as the only possible, whereas it actually corresponds to the precise way of thinking of some interest groups.

The oppressed ought to learn autonomy and responsibility. Without autonomy and responsibility, there is no way to reach good foundations for society. This is the first step to freedom. The oppressed, since he does not have any other contents available than those dictated and imposed by the oppressor, finds himself in the difficult situation to have to abandon the contents of his own education without having, at least immediately, contents with which to substitute the contents of his traditional education. Freedom is never a gift: Freire points out that authentic freedom is and ought to be always acquired through the active engagement and participation of the oppressed individuals. Freedom does not come about by itself. Moreover, freedom ought to be constantly pursued: freedom is a constant process; it is not something which can be arrived at once and for all. Freedom is always the result of personal and social conquest.

Very interesting is what Freire says about the concept of self-depreciation of the oppressed:

7 The strategy of the oppressor is to close the spaces: Through the imposition of his own contents, values, ways of thinking, the oppressor is able to make the oppressed think that there cannot be any further content, way of thinking, value outside the contents which the oppressed has received. The strategy of the oppressor is to let the contents appear as the natural and only possible contents in order to close all the spaces for alternatives. The oppressor has won his battle every time he manages to make the oppressed believe that there is no alternative to a precise way of thinking or of being.

“Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything – that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive – that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness.” (1970/1992, p. 49)

Freire’s passage is particularly important for the understanding of the strategy of the oppressors: the oppressor aims to destroy any sense of self-confidence of the oppressed. It is a kind of psychological strategy through which the oppressor eliminates any sense whatsoever of self-confidence: any basis for self-confidence is progressively destroyed. The oppressed destroys this sense by making the oppressed believe that is not able to do anything and that he must always be directed by others. The following points are to be underlined:

- i. Self-depreciation is the very symbol of the victory of the oppressor on the oppressed: the oppressor has destroyed the oppressed up to the point that he oppressed cannot but despise himself.
- ii. Self-depreciation is imposed through constant manifestations of contempt: the oppressed are subjected to the continuous expression of negative judgments made by the oppressors against them.
- iii. Oppressed persons are compelled to steadily hear that they are good for nothing, that they do not know anything and that they are incapable of learning anything.
- iv. Sickness, laziness and unproductivity are the constant manifestations of accusation that are expressed by oppressors against oppressed.
- v. Freire speaks in this case too of internalisation: the oppressed are compelled to hear so many times that they have no value, that they become convinced that they have no value. Oppressed individuals internalise the opinions of the oppressors so that they become mental slaves of the oppressors.
- vi. Through the process of internalisation, a precise way of thinking is imposed to the oppressed individuals: through this way of thinking oppressed individuals become convinced that they should be and should remain subordinate, that they should follow the orders of the oppressor without any discussion, objection or exception

4) Freire: Against the banking concept

Freire uncovers the strategy the imposition of values to the oppressed. Freire denounces the attempt to make the oppressed think exclusively along with the system of values of the oppressor, so that the oppressed himself, in the intention of the oppressors, can become a supporter of the system of values of the oppressors. The oppressed should not be able to see the very possibility of an alternative way of thinking.

The banking model of education is one of the most famous polemical targets of Freire⁸. The characteristics of this model of education can be synthesised in the following points:

- i. Narration of the teacher implies passivity of the students.
- ii. The relationship holding between teacher and student is structured as a narration in which the teacher is the narrator; the only active part of the situation. All other persons are passive. To be a student means to be a passive entity within the traditional education system.
- iii. The contents being transmitted in the school activity become lifeless and petrified. This comes about as a consequence of the particular organisation of the school: if the organisation of the school determines only an active part, the teacher, and all passive persons, the students, the contents transmitted in the school tend to become a kind of repetition without addition or without modification.
- iv. Reality is being presented as motionless, static, compartmentalised and predictable so that the oppressor can present reality as something already given and given once and for all.
- v. This particular kind of school organisation is not due to defect, failures or accidents: this particular organisation corresponds to a particular ideology and to a particular organisation of the society. The oppressor aims to produce and to maintain a specific order of society.

⁸ Freire tells:

"A careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally narrative character. This relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students). The contents, whether values or empirical dimension of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified. Education is suffering from narration sickness. The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to "fill" the students with contents of his narration - contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity." (1970/1992, p. 57)

- vi. Students are containers of contents. From students, only the passivity represented by their being “filled” is expected. Nothing else is required from the students; on the contrary, it is required that students exclusively are containers to be filled: they may not be something else.
- vii. From students it is not expected that they are something else than passive spectators during the lessons. Actually, students ought not to be something else than passive spectators during the lessons.
- viii. The model of the lesson as narration corresponds to a precise intent as regards the internalisation of the structure of the society in the school. As society is organised in leading subjects and led subjects, so must the school be organised into leading subjects and led subjects. Pedagogy and school are a presupposition for the structure of the society, in the sense that they have the duty to impose – of course, without letting this appear as an imposition – on the students the structure of the society. They have to let appear as “natural” an organisation that is, on the contrary, artificial. Society aims to have under control the pedagogical system. If pedagogy were not organised on the model of “leader-led”, the society itself in its organisation on the model “leader-led” would be in danger.

As to the transformation of students into containers and receptacles, Freire is particularly clear in his judgment (1970/1992, p. 58):

- i. Narration is a form of imposition of contents on the students. Narration implies that students must accept and memorise the contents of the narration.
- ii. Students are transformed into containers, into receptacles. This is the triumph of the passivity, of the transformation of students into passive spectators.
- iii. The degree of efficiency of the students is measured on the basis of their capacity to act as container to be filled. Students’ capability of being filled becomes the absolute value of measurement of all the capacities of the students.
- iv. We can observe in this way the transformation and interpretation of education as an act of depositing, in which activity and passivity are rigidly distinguished: the teacher deposits contents, the students are the containers of these contents.
- v. Students receive, memorise and repeat contents; they are completely passive.
- vi. The only action conceded to the students consists in their being receivers of contents.

- vii. Objects of knowledge are presented through the banking model of education and through the passivity imposed to students as fully given, as completely immutable⁹.
- viii. This way of education destroys the creativity. This should not be a surprise: the banking model of education has as its main aim to transform students in passive elements; every form of creativity has to be eliminated. Creativity could and would mean a project of change within the society: the banking model of education is the instrument used to destroy the very birth of creativity.
- ix. The banking model of education constitutes a form and a strategy of dehumanisation. Freire clearly expresses that individuals are truly human only if they can autonomously inquire, only if there is space left for an independent inquiry and only if the autonomous inquiry as such is openly appreciated instead of being depreciated through the banking model of education.
- x. Knowledge can be produced only through the inquiry that individuals pursue in the world with mutual dialogue. Banking model is the anticipation and the promotion of a model of blind and absolute obedience.

Within the ideology of the oppressors, knowledge is presented as a gift from those who consider themselves to be knowledgeable to those individuals that, within the system of values of the oppressors, are considered as being nothing.

The ideology of oppression negates knowledge as a process of free inquiry. Through this scheme, teachers justify their oppressive function while destroying any dignity of students. Unlike the Hegelian master/slave relationship, students never come to be aware of their role as symmetric educators of teachers (1970/1992, p. 58-59). Freire identifies as foundations of the traditional pedagogy the following points:

- i. The banking concept of education implies that knowledge is transmitted from those who possess knowledge to those who are considered to be ignorant.
- ii. Oppressors present themselves as possessing knowledge and depict oppressed as ignorant.

Freire points out that education and knowledge are not static concept in which there are possessors of knowledge and there are those who do not possess knowledge. Freire clearly contends that, contrary to the banking system of education, knowledge and education are dynamic concepts, since they come out as the result

⁹ So as the structures of society are immutable, knowledge is immutable. The structure of society is given and unchangeable: in the same way, contents of knowledge are presented as already given and unchangeable.

of inquiry. The contents of knowledge and of education are the results of a steady investigation process.

The banking concept of education aims to avoid that knowledge is considered as the process and as the result of an inquiry. This point should not come as a surprise, since the presence of inquiry would mean and would imply freedom of research. If knowledge is interpreted as transmission of contents already completely established, as transmission of issues which can only be communicated without any remarks from the students, there is no space for freedom; if, on the contrary, knowledge is interpreted as a process of inquiry in which nothing is already given, freedom has a space. It is, therefore, not an accident that the banking model is opposed to the inquiry model.

In a further passage of his work, Freire clearly expresses the characteristics connected to the banking concept of education. The banking concept of education foresees the following division of duties within the school system:

“... banking education maintains and even stimulates the contradiction through the following attitudes and practices, which mirror oppressive society as a whole:

- a. the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- b. the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- c. the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- d. the teacher talks and the students listen – meekly;
- e. the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- f. the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- g. the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- h. the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- i. the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- j. the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.” (1970/1992, p. 59)

Freire further develops his criticism of the banking model: At the basis of the banking model lies the interpretation of individuals as manageable entities. Individuals

are regarded as “manageable beings”, as “storing deposits”. This kind of judgment aims to annul any form of critical consciousness in the students: under no condition could students regard themselves as potential transformers of the world. The following points of Freire’s statements on foundations, organisation and aims of the banking model of education should be, in our opinion, underlined:

- i. The foundation of the banking model of education is that individuals are adaptable and manageable things. The whole strategy of the banking model is guided by the conviction of manageability of individuals (and by the complete absence of respect for the autonomy of the individuals entailed in this conviction).
- ii. The banking model of education aims to transform individuals into passive persons, into dominated persons.
- iii. The banking model of education aims to eliminate every form of creativity from individuals.
- iv. The banking model of education aims to eliminate every capacity for independence and for autonomy which individuals possess.
- v. The whole strategy of the banking model is guided by the conviction of manageability of individuals (and by the complete absence of respect for the autonomy of the individuals entailed in this conviction).
- vi. The strategy of continuously transmitting contents to the students is the consequence of the aim of diminishing or eliminating every form of critical consciousness the students could develop. This is a strategy and a method of closing spaces for the mind and its capacity: students must be so engaged in assimilating contents that they cannot have the time to develop their critical consciousness. On the contrary, the very possibility of developing critical consciousness is being eliminated by the duty of continuous assimilation of external contents imposed by authorities.
- vii. There is a correspondence between the acceptance of the passive role and the adaptation to the world as it is. Passivity in the school means passivity in life. If the students accept their passivity in the school, they accept that they have to accept the world as it is.
- viii. Within the pedagogy of the oppressors, the world is not there to be transformed; the world is there in order to be accepted.
- ix. Since the oppressor does not aim to have the world transformed, it is clear why the oppressor aims to propose as the exclusive model of education the banking model of education. This model is from its very beginning to its very

end absolutely perfect in promoting in the students an attitude to passivity, to lack of self-initiative, to the refusal of the transformation of the world and to acceptance of the world as it is.

- x. The banking model of education makes part of a whole programme of making individuals passive towards the reality: the banking model is the particular part of a general programme aiming to have people subjected to the given reality. People are convinced that reality is given and unchangeable; the banking model is an application of a general programme.

Freire connects the strategy of letting the oppressed be adapted to a situation with the domination of the oppressed¹⁰. Therefore, we have to add the following remarks:

- i. It is important to notice that the banking concept of education and the paternalistic social action are considered to be parts of the same strategy. Both parts aim to let the individuals who receive the education and the social action feel like inferior, abnormal, marginal. In both cases the contents of education and the social helps come from above, they are conceded by a superior part of the society.
- ii. It is in particular interesting that oppressed are treated as a pathology and oppressor are the healthy part of the society. A part of the society is considered to be ill.
- iii. Adaptation is the first step for being dominated. The strategy of domination has at its first foundation to produce in the oppressed the adaptation to the situation in which the oppressed find themselves.
- iv. The norm and the sense of life is given and represented by the oppressors.

10 On the connection between the banking concept of education and the paternalistic welfare system, Freire expresses the following considerations:

"The more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated. To achieve this end, the oppressors use the banking concept of education in conjunction with a paternalistic social action apparatus, within which the oppressed receive the euphemistic title of 'welfare recipients.' They are treated as individual cases, as marginal men who deviate from the general configuration of a 'good, organized, and just' society. The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these 'incompetent and lazy' folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality. These marginals need to be 'integrated,' 'incorporated' into the healthy society that they have 'forsaken'. The truth is, however, that the oppressed are not 'marginals;' are not men living 'outside' society. They have always been 'inside' – inside the structure which made them 'being for others.' The solution is not to 'integrate' them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become 'beings for themselves.' Such transformation, of course, would undermine the oppressors' purposes; hence their utilization of the banking concept to avoid the threat of student conscientização." (1970/1992, pp. 60-61)

- v. The degree of adaptation reached by the oppressed corresponds to the degree of domination that the oppressor can exercise on the oppressed.
- vi. The greater is the adaptation made by the oppressed, the greater is the domination of the oppressor on the oppressed.
- vii. Banking concept of education and paternalistic social action apparatus belong to the same strategy: this strategy consists in promoting the domination of determined classes of the society on other classes of the society.
- viii. Oppressed individuals are transformed through an action of propaganda into deviated cases: oppressed individuals are classified as deviations from the norm of the society.
- ix. A structure of society is proposed in which oppressed are relegated to the position of deviations from the natural order of the society; they are considered as abnormal cases of a healthy society. The oppressed individuals should be induced to consider themselves as the ill part of the society.
- x. The vocabulary too in which the oppressed are described by the oppressors is interesting: oppressed are incompetent and lazy, they are marginal entities. Oppressed are guilty of their own laziness.
- xi. The integration of the oppressed is presented as the integration of incompetent and lazy people into the healthy society. The society is as such healthy, whereas the oppressed represents the illness of the society. Oppressed are presented as individuals who have abandoned the healthy society.

Freire denounces that oppressed people are not marginal entities. Oppressed people are not persons living outside society. Oppressed are people living inside the society transforming them into oppressed, into persons living for other people.

Freire proposes a complete change of the society in order that oppressed acquire autonomy and independence instead of being not autonomous and not independent.

Freire adds some important reflections on the intrinsic weakness of the banking model of education: the oppressors, while recurring to the banking model of education, actually fail to understand that reality itself will bring, sooner or later, the individuals oppressed to become aware of the inconsistencies of this education system. Oppressed individuals will "discover through existential experience that their present way of life is irreconcilable with their vocation to become fully human." (1970/1992, pp. 61-62). Sooner or later, the contradiction existing between the position assigned to oppressed people from above and the vocation of oppressed people to develop their own capacities will explode: oppressed will see that reality is a process, so that it is changeable; it is not given once and for all. The banking model of education will turn

out to be insufficient as model of explanation of reality. We have to highlight some crucial ideas from Freire:

- i. The fundamental perspective in the banking concept is that reality is given; reality is complete, and the sense of reality is given too.
- ii. Contrary to the description of reality as a static entity, Freire points out that reality is not static. Reality is a process. Reality is continuously transformed by individuals.
- iii. The banking model of education denies the capacity of individuals to be transformers of reality. The banking model of education denies one of the essential characteristics of being human. Individuals are not passive spectators; individuals are actors in the reality.

Furthermore, Freire points out that there are precise foundations for the banking model. Departing from an unveiling of the banking model presuppositions, Freire¹¹ brings forth significant topics for meditation:

- i. The conceptual presupposition of the banking concept is the dichotomy between man and the world.
- ii. Individuals are considered to be exclusively spectators in the world. They are not re-creators; individuals are not active entities: they are passive entities.
- iii. Individuals are interpreted as being empty minds being ready for the reception of contents established by others.

11 On the presuppositions of the banking model of education, Freire expresses the following considerations: "Implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between man and the world: man is merely in the world, not with the world or with others; man is spectator, not re-creator. In this view, man is not a conscious being (*corpo consciente*); he is rather the possessor of a consciousness: an empty "mind" passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside. For example, my desk, my books, my coffee cup, all the objects before me – as bits of the world which surrounds me – would be "inside" me, exactly as I am inside my study right now. This view makes no distinction between being accessible to consciousness and entering consciousness. The distinction, however, is essential: the objects which surround me are simply accessible to my consciousness, not located within it. I am aware of them, but they are not inside me.

It follows logically from the banking notion of consciousness that the educator's role is to regulate the way the world "enters into" the students. His task is to organize a process which already occurs spontaneously, to "fill" the students by making deposits of information which he considers to constitute true knowledge. And since men "receive" the world as passive entities, education should make them more passive still, and adapt them to the world. The educated man is the adapted man, because he is better "fit" for the world. Translated into practice, this concept is well suited to the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquility rests on how well men fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it." (1970/1992, pp. 62-63)

- iv. The essence of the conscience of individuals is seen in their being recipients of contents from the outside.
- v. If individuals are simply recipients, if their consciousness is simply a recipient, the role of the teacher consists in the regulation of the way in which contents enter into the conscience.
- vi. Education is adaptation to an immutable existent condition of the world. The best educated is the best adapted person, since the best adapted person is the person that in the best way can receive the contents of the world.
- vii. This is the perfect situation for the oppressors: there is no better situation for oppressors than that in which people have to adapt to the reality that has been created by oppressors.

The model of passivity and of banking education represents reality and the place of men in reality as that which reality and place of men, actually, are not. Individuals can be actors if they develop the capacity and the self-confidence needed to be actors; they are not necessarily condemned and relegated to the role of spectators. Reality is changeable and is continuously changing; it is not given once for all.

Freire's criticism of the banking model holds for a revolutionary society too; the banking model of education would be false in a revolutionary society too. As Freire states,

"The revolutionary society which practices banking education is either misguided or mistrusting of men. In either event, it is threatened by the specter of reaction.

Unfortunately, those who espouse the cause of liberation are themselves surrounded and influenced by the climate which generates the banking concept, and often do not perceive its true significance or its dehumanizing power. Paradoxically, then, they utilize this same instrument of alienation in what they consider an effort to liberate. Indeed, some "revolutionaries" brand as "innocents," "dreamers," or even "reactionaries" those who would challenge these educational practices. But one does not liberate men by alienating them. Authentic liberation – the process of humanization – is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it. Those truly committed to the cause of liberation can accept neither the mechanistic concept of consciousness as an empty vessel to be filled, nor the use of banking methods of domination (propaganda, slogans – deposits) in the name of liberation." (Freire, 1970/1992, pp. 65-66)

These observations function as a permanent call to those that are interested in opposing the banking education methods and contribute to emancipation. There is no sense in using the banking concept of education: the banking model of education is always false: Liberation is incompatible both with the banking model and with the concept of mind as an empty vessel¹². An authentic revolutionary society may never adopt the banking education concept. If a revolutionary society uses the banking education concept, there is the danger of the transformation of the revolutionary society itself into a reactionary society. A society which aims to promote liberation of the oppressed cannot adopt the banking education model only with a change of contents. Actually, it is the whole banking education model as such which ought to be abandoned.

If education is reduced to the exercise of domination of the students, education is going to become a sheer indoctrination of the students: Students will adapt to the world of oppression even in a society which is aiming at liberation. Liberation is a praxis: it is the action and reflection of individuals on their world with the aim of transforming the world itself.

The foundation of education as practice of freedom consists, in Freire's view, in the denial that individuals are abstract, isolated, independent entities, which, as such, are not attached to the world. Furthermore, education as a practice of freedom refuses the interpretation that the world is a reality which is independent of men. The interpretation of the relationship between men and world as a relation of men with the world is the foundation of the correct education: world and men are not reciprocally separate entities. Freire tells:

"Education as the practice of freedom – as opposed to education as the practice of domination – denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from men." (1970/1992, p. 69)

5) Critical pedagogy in Peter McLaren Metodología

¹² The banking model is so diffuse in the society that even those who aim to produce a radical transformation of the society are affected by this model; they believe that this model can be used to modify the society.

Coming now to the analysis of some contents of Peter McLaren, it is clear in McLaren the intent of bringing forward and developing the meditation of Freire. The activity of educators consists in making students active subjects; education is not an activity of indoctrination:

“The dialectical nature of critical theory enables the educational researcher to see the school not simply as an arena of indoctrination or socialization or a site of instruction, but also as a cultural terrain that promotes student empowerment and self-transformation.” (1998, p. 172)

McLaren points out that schools should not be only a place of socialisation; they should promote the self-transformation of students. Education contents should uncover the connections between group interests and particular interpretations and constructions of society:

“Critical educators argue that any worthwhile theory of schooling must be partisan. That is, it must be fundamentally tied to a struggle for a qualitatively better life for all through the construction of a society based on nonexploitative relations and social justice. The critical educator doesn’t believe that there are two sides to every question, with both sides needing equal attention. For the critical educator, there are many sides to a problem, and often these sides are linked to a certain class, race, and gender interest.” (1998, p. 172)

Every question has many aspects: the duty of the educator is to explain these aspects. More than this, the duty of the educator is to show that questions have many aspects. It is the existence of a multiplicity of aspects the point which has to be explained first. There is no neutral pedagogy: knowledge is always connected to determined intents and aims; knowledge is always the result of a social construction:

“Critical educational theorists view school knowledge as historically and socially rooted and interest bound. Knowledge acquired in school – or anywhere, for that matter – is never neutral or objective but is ordered and structured in particular ways; its emphases and exclusions partake of a silent logic. Knowledge is a social construction deeply rooted in a nexus of power relations. When critical theorists claim that knowledge is socially constructed, they mean that it is the product of agreement or consent between individuals who live out particular social relations (e.g., of class, race, and gender) and who live in particular junctures in time.” (1998, pp. 173-174)

The duty and the aim of critical pedagogy consist in the uncovering of the construction of reality. The analysis of the critical pedagogy refers to the causes why some constructions of reality are legitimated by the dominant culture and why some models are refused:

“Critical pedagogy asks how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does, and how and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominant culture while others clearly are not. (...) Certain types of knowledge legitimate certain gender, class, and racial interests. Whose interests does this knowledge serves? Who gets excluded as a result? Who is marginalized?” (1998, p. 174)

As we can see, education ought to be a process of uncovering of interest and ought to supply students with the instrument that can enable to analyse the power relationships lying behind the structure of the society. The different forms of knowledge can be connected to the influences of gender, class, racial interests.

The duty of the critical pedagogy consists in revealing the intents lying behind the particular forms of knowledge. Forms of knowledge can produce marginalisation and exclusion: critical pedagogy has the duty of revealing which groups are marginalised and excluded from society because of the forms of knowledge.

Conclusions

Throughout the above analysis, we have seen some aspects common to the pedagogical intents of Dewey, Freire and McLaren.

With his interpretation of organisation and aims which an authentic democratic education ought to have, Dewey expresses an absolute refusal of passive education. Education ought to refuse any process and method of producing a series of identical individuals; it ought to promote in scholars autonomy and independence.

Through his refusal of a banking concept of education, Freire expresses, as Dewey does, his favour for an education promoting an active behaviour in scholars; Freire's pedagogy is, actually, a denunciation of the education system worked out by the dominant classes. Dewey's general perspective is that, since society is becoming more and more democratic, school system ought to follow this transformation of the society. Freire's perspective is that traditional society is authoritarian: a change in the school system is the first step towards a modification of the whole society. Both thinkers refuse the model of passivity for students: they both refuse a model of school system in which pupils are considered as passive entities.

McLaren explains in his reflections that knowledge always corresponds to precise power relations: the duty of a critical pedagogy consists in revealing the social root of the models of knowledge.

We would like to summarise our analysis with the following main points:

- i. Principles and foundations of a society are reflected in the system of education.
- ii. There is no neutral education. Education is always connected to the power structures of the society; it is connected to the model of society which is to be realised and conserved through the system of education present in the society.
- iii. To propose a form of education is to propose a form of society.
- iv. To propose a reform of education is to propose a reform of the society.
- v. No reform of the society can be really effective if it is not founded on a reform of the education system.
- vi. Any method of education based on the passivity of students is to be refused.
- vii. A connection between learning and life should be one of the aims of education.
- viii. Any method of education aiming at the production of uniformity in the students should be refused.
- ix. To promote in the scholars an attitude of adaptation to the existing reality is not the aim of the new model of education.
- x. Individualisation of students ought to be promoted as aim of education.
- xi. Students are not containers to be filled: the independent research activity of students ought to be promoted as one of the aims of education.
- xii. Reality has a multiplicity of aspects. Students should be directed to the awareness of the presence of a multiplicity of components in the reality.
- xiii. Forms of knowledge are connected to interests: the duty of a critical pedagogy is to reveal the interests lying at the basis of the forms of knowledge.

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