



# European Conference on Curriculum Studies

## Future Directions: Uncertainty and Possibility

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University of Minho  
Institute of Education  
Research Centre in Education (CIEd)

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EDUCATION CURRICULUM

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## Curriculum and Power

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### Abstract

School has been an active force in legitimizing the dominant ideology and does it in name of the work market. School, through curricula, has functioned as a company. It was this enterprise concept that led to the conception of objectives that are more interested in efficiency of a functional economy than in critical thinking. This way, the economy replaces the democratic ideal in the cultural and educational policies. This way the curriculum is seen as an unimportant technical issue and the objectives of education are based on the professional demands.

In this light, the organization of the curriculum is based on a moulding process that is highly instructive and final. Creativity and abstract capacity are considered useless because they are not considered measurable behaviour that can be precisely defined and established. It is obvious that the technocratic model does not include the humanistic and critical perspective of education.

**Keywords:** Curriculum, Control, Ideology, Social Reproduction, Power

### Curriculum and Power

Curriculum is a value. This is my first assertion. And because it is a value, it is an ethical issue. But this value then becomes an aim, for education moulds the mind in a way that enables one to build one's worlds. Furthermore, it is essential in building the real conceptions people have of themselves and their abilities. In this light, education produces (reproduces?) knowledge. One's participation in a social context implies that one has instruction (which does not necessarily mean one is educated) and it is that same context that teaches us how to learn, speak, imagine, etc.

Reflexive thinking was withdrawn from mercantile thinking. In other words, it seems like cultural production had become similar to industrial production. Our culture is established according to the criteria of the political economy, i.e. Culture seems to be at the service of state investment. It is easy to see that the division applied to industrial work is exactly the same as that applied to scientific work and, consequently, the same method is used in the distribution of academic subjects in educational institutions.

We have a specialized culture; possibly even an erudite one, but lacking a philosophical outlook on the whole. The vulgarization, mediocrity and degradation of thought, or in other words, the lack of a true education, is caused by an educational culture that has abandoned the teaching of philosophical reflection. Culture and pedagogic activities have become the responsibility of the state, or the economy and in that way become a utilitarian culture that educates the society to be conformist and submissive at the service of professional opportunisms.

Education is determined by nature and cannot be seen as separate from it. Yet, education is not about extension and amplification and least of all should be reduced to a simple function. When extension and amplification are mentioned, erroneously we intentionally create a greater number of *ordinary men* that see happiness as a utility and that associate education with production and market demands.



**Educational systems should reanalyse their policies in order to establish what the participations of companies can teach to motivate students and promote / create a new perspective in schools or educational institutions. (...) At times, the messages that most children receive during their education/schooling do not focus on corporative spirit, and children are less encouraged to create their own companies, as a possible alternative to being employed by another<sup>1</sup>.**

This means intelligence is at the service of property and profit. The state, pretending to solve social issues, intervenes in the worst possible way in education by cultivating intellectual barbarity. In addition, by reducing education to a useful and functional instrument and promoting a specialist culture, the state is activating a convenient obedience and a certain division at work. The specialist seems to be the factory worker, distant and alienated from an authentic culture. He produces a pseudo-culture that contributes to the advent of a non-culture.

When education is moved by a utilitarian spirit, it does not expand because it is partial. Being an educator is not a fixed position, an occupation or a career centered on compulsory, extensive and universal appreciations. A genuine education demands a holistic view and can only be provided by a critical spirit, per se, a philosophical one, which implies an affectionate and empirical relationship that brings together and unites the master and the disciple.

In fact, autonomy is given to the student, but it is purely institutional, this means that school does not really promote individual freedom. It only gives the student the illusion of liberty because the specialist guidance aims at keeping him/her in that field. This new man<sup>2</sup> is, therefore, on his own.

**The last people to be affected by this emancipation process were the children and it was seen as true liberation by working men and women as (...) but was, actually, an abandonment and treason for children that are still in the phase where survival and growing up is more important than the building of the personality.**

**(...) the fact that these youngsters are introduced into a world of constant change. People that refuse to take on the responsibility of this world shouldn't have children nor shouldn't be allowed to participate in their education<sup>3</sup>.**

The effect of this education is to keep men immature, ignorant and indifferent. In fact, a uniform, utilitarian and integrating<sup>4</sup> education is mediocre because there is a very thin line between erudite and futile, scientism and publicity and aims only to educate people to serve in the present moment.

The impoverishment of education and, consequently, knowledge is caused by the worshippers of the present, who are obedient slaves of practical and functional demands. The mission of education is being compromised by the personal experience of each one of us and the incentive given by the masters, for

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<sup>1</sup> Report from the European Council of Education, 2000, *The concrete objectives of the educational systems* - Lisbon Summit

<sup>2</sup> (...) the appearance of a New Man, able and willing to perform his role in modern society, who is prepared and able to judge all the problems that are inherent to the life of the community to which he belongs, satisfied with his position because he is conscientious of the inherent dignity and the social need of his work (...) then what remains to bother us? (...) the fact that we have obtained what was promised and we wanted and the fact that, even with all this, we are still not entirely satisfied with the results-WEIL,E., "A Educação Enquanto Problema do Nosso Tempo" (Education a current problem ) in POMBO 8org). *Quatro Textos Excêntricos* (Four Eccentric Texts) , pp.55,58 and 61

<sup>3</sup> ARENDT, H., " A crise na Educação"(The Education Crises) in idem, op.cit.,pp41 and 43

<sup>4</sup> Integration is always the confirmation of the dominant identity. Integration could be included in an associative process where there is accommodation (where one wants to facilitate one's integration in the group and makes a series of and concessions) and /or assimilation (when social integration requires a complete alteration of one's previous lifestyle. Within the associative process of socialisation there is still cooperation where each individual maintains one's own characteristics (for example manifestations of solidarity).



education as a transmitter of knowledge cannot be reduced nor confused with learning, nor the commodity of a specialized discipline and least of all with the mediocrity of language.

School curricula should include creative and critical thinking. In the pedagogic process authority (not to be confused with authoritarianism) should be promoted in order to cultivate men through reason and thinking directly articulated with experience and culture. In this situation, availability and enthusiasm are vital from both parties, i.e. will and diligence must come from both the teacher and the student.

Having a noble spirit is not, and cannot be, the responsibility of the state or the market. The state can only guarantee maximum freedom and autonomy which are essential in producing thought. Education based on knowledge is not supplied by the educational institutions because they are so immersed in training professionals, technicians and ideologists who compete for a vacancy in the market. Education is only possible for someone who wants to free oneself, for education aims to free modern man from the curse of modernity.

Ideology is a false consciousness that distorts social reality and serves the interests of dominant groups. It builds meaning in accordance to political, economic and social conveniences. Its justification is legitimized by (passive) social acceptance. It is during power disputes that speech loses its liberating component to take on a commutative dimension. This means, the word is the instrument that aims to strengthen and establish agreement between social partners. It is the concealment of ideas in practical principles. The power of persuasion becomes greater than the power of criticism and valued in a field of action whereas ideology is placed in a field of dominion.

This dominion *refers to an organized group of meanings and practices, to a system of central, effective and dominant, values and experienced actions.(...) Schools, (...) do not only “process people”, but also “process knowledge”. They act as agents of cultural and ideological dominions, (...), as agents of a selective tradition and cultural “incorporation”*<sup>5</sup>.5

Education and the way it is structured in the distribution of knowledge and meaning, guarantee the social and cultural control of a certain society. How? By producing and reproducing conscience. It appears concealed in social relationships that occur in the classroom. This means that school is, in fact, an ideological device of the state<sup>6</sup>.

**(...) there is an ideological device of the state that undoubtedly has a dominant role; even though one does not always pay attention to it for it is silent. We are talking about school**<sup>7</sup>.7

Ideology guarantees a precarious harmony where expectations are confirmed by the practices. Efficiency replaces debate and teaching is supposedly neutral, because the results do not depend on the teacher and the school structure, but on the students. This belief separates man from his capacity to give his own life meaning. The individual is now deteriorating in a collective obligation that hinders one from exploring social order. It is this blindness of consciousness that contributes to dominant power. It seems, however, that ideology turns into a sort of violence silenced by alienation.

In this light, the ideological device of the state has to be restrictive, because by exerting a concealed violence on individuals, it promotes injustice and consequently inequality. **What distinguishes the IDS (Ideological Device of the State) from the Restrictive Device of the State is essentially the following: the Restrictive Device of the State “functions with violence” while the ideological devices of the state functions “based on ideology”. (...) In fact, it can be said that any state device, be it restrictive or ideological, “functions simultaneously with violence and ideology, but with a very important difference that impedes that the ideological device and the restrictive devices of state are confused.**

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<sup>5</sup> APPLE, M., *Ideologia e Currículo (Ideology and Curriculum)*, pp. 27-28

<sup>6</sup> *Ideological devices of the State refer to a certain number of realities referring to distinct and specialized institutions that appear before the immediate observer.* Althusser, I., *ideologia e aparelhos do Estado (State Ideologies and Devices)*, p. 43

<sup>7</sup> Idem, op. cit. p.64



**In fact, the restrictive device works mostly and massively with repression (physical included) , even though it also works, secondarily, with ideology.**

(...) it should be said that, most ideological devices of the state work mostly and massively with ideology, even though they too function with repression, even though limited(...) and rather slight, concealed or even symbolic (...) this way schools and churches “educate” using methods common in sanctions, exclusions, selection, etc. not only with their officials , but also their followers<sup>8</sup>. The actual concept of efficiency is already a form of violence.

(...)the resistance to the historical feeling of individuals that are in favour of the values of the private societies: in a private society which is not purely rational, the individuals should not be totally calculative, if they were, they would not work, and above all would not sacrifice themselves for the survival of their own particular society-community, and could even reject the principles of efficiency. Social education should not only take into account the historical desires of the community members, but should also keep these values alive – and simultaneously promote maximum rational efficiency<sup>9</sup>.

This external (to the society) violence is the struggle of an organized group. The division of social work is precisely the understanding that an individual’s worth is nothing more than his strength/ availability to work.

School has been an active force in legitimizing the dominant ideology and does it in name of the work market. School, through curricula, has functioned as a company. It was this enterprise concept that lead to the conception of objectives that are more interested in efficiency of a functional economy than in critical thinking. This way, the economy replaces the democratic ideal in the cultural and educational policies. This way the curriculum is seen as an unimportant technical issue and the objectives of education are based on the professional demands.

In this light, the organization of the curriculum is based on a moulding process that is highly instructive and final. Creativity and abstract capacity are considered useless because they are not considered measurable behaviour that can be precisely defined and established. It is obvious that the technocratic model does not include the humanistic and critical perspective of education. The reason is clear: theoretical understanding is difficult to quantify.

Finding meaning is possible due to education, and the affirmation of that possibility is the educator’s role who has to be demanding and responsible. (...) **thinking should have a meaning and not be only something with a commercial value. (...) a negative education is one that not only fails to show where the meaning is, but also where it cannot be<sup>10</sup>. 10**

Business pedagogics only expects education to provide a bigger production, that is, more profit and more happiness; it implies that educating for a market culture allows earnings and these can buy happiness. The state has its responsibilities here: it teaches to fit in, that is, it intends to integrate students by supplying them with an adequate learning and an official profession, thus generating conformism in them.

The division of scientific work resulted in the rupture between knowledge and civilization, yet only education can insert knowledge in life. Schools seem to have lost the purpose of education that is committed to culture. It is not about teaching well-educated people, specialists or people working in culture, but about a greater demand: education that seeks to liberate from the constraints of modernity.

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<sup>8</sup> Idem, op.cit. pp.46-47

<sup>9</sup> WEIL, E., *Filosofia Política (Political Philosophy)* p.106

<sup>10</sup> WEIL, E., “A Educação Enquanto Problema do Nosso Tempo” (Education a current problema) in POMBO O. (org). *Quatro Textos Excêntricos (Four Eccentric Texts, pp.67)*

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