

Resonances and paradoxes of education. Notes to speak on its behalf

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Detail "Birth of an asteroid",
collagraph. Marta Arangoa

Abstract

This text offers a set of notes that are meant to dialogue with some of the concerns proposed by the authors of the Manifiesto. The line of reflection begins with the implications of Biesta and Säfström's demand regarding a possible manner of questioning that addresses the ontology of education as a nodal matter for theory and education research. Our proposal focuses on the enquiry regarding the tensions resulting from dealing with the signifiers of education from a different epistemological register. Relying on the episteme of Human Sciences certain topics arise, that support the idea that education dwells in the cultural field and makes sense because through education the process of humanization is generated and produced. Speaking on behalf of education in an educational manner requires the overcoming of binarism to enable a line of thought in terms of paradoxes and complexity.

Resonancias y paradojas de la Educación: notas para hablar en nombre de ella

Resumen

En este trabajo se plantean un conjunto de notas que pretenden dialogar con algunas de las cuestiones que dejan abiertas los autores del Manifiesto. Nuestro recorrido reflexivo parte de considerar que la demanda que formulan Biesta y Säfström implica retomar un modo de interrogación que aborda la ontología de la educación como una cuestión nodal para la teoría y la investigación educativa. Nuestra propuesta se centra en indagar las tensiones que produce abordar los significantes de la educación desde otro registro epistémico. Apoyándonos en la episteme de las Ciencias Humanas, se despliegan tópicos que apuntan a sustentar la idea de que la educación tiene su morada en el campo cultural y que adquiere sentido en tanto a través de ella se genera y produce el proceso de humanización. Hablar en nombre de la educación de modo educativo requiere superar el binarismo para habilitar un pensar en términos paradojales y complejos.

Keywords: education; episteme; ontology; paradoxical thought; semiosis

Palabras clave: educación; episteme; ontología; pensamiento paradjal; semiosis

Introduction

The brief text that Biesta and Säfström published in 2010 as *Manifiesto for Education* invites us to reflect on the meanings of education. Their approach resumes, we believe, the inquiry regarding the ontology of education. Its urge to discuss on behalf of education in an educational manner im-

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plies a definition of what is educational before something can be said on its behalf.

We believe it is difficult to speak in the name of education because the ideas which follow might be the way in which education actually speaks through us. In any case the readers may observe how we are said/spoken in our discourse by the educational feel-thought¹ that lives in us educators and though which we undertake a vital commitment towards education.

In the following sections we develop a series of ideas which may serve as contributions to address some of the ontological questions regarding education. Such ideas could be taken as replies to the cognitive enigma that the authors have proposed; many of these lead to new questions whose answers are pending.

Stammering of/to think about education

The invitation to speak on behalf of education –as we delve into what makes education educational and how much education is still possible in our education institutions– results in a genuine challenge for us, since we understand it is vitally interwoven to the ways in which we walk, speak, write and feel our lives. The attempt to speak in the name of education becomes a feeling-thought act –an exercise in which passion and reason converge, intersect and become ordered in peculiar ways, drawing a topography of meanings that shape our own identity as educators. Thus, this urge implies a turn to us, our beliefs, as well as lingering on our discourses as fabrics of words resulting from the intention of our speech to meet the understanding and meaning of others.

The drive implies the reflection on the words daily used to speak of education, to describe and explain it, reaching beyond the apparent transparency and certainty that the academic canon commonly arrogates itself as a manner of authorization to name the world. However, the invitation is set to an alternative way of addressing these words; in order to unravel the meanings implied we must paradoxically resort to the very same words that education has provided to symbolize, name, signify and transmit in the process of others' appropriation and development of their own voice.

Speaking also involves taking a stance (Charaudeau, 1995). We can use words with

the purpose/eagerness to reconstruct something we deem real. In other words, we could be trying to define what education is with the belief that such words will achieve –to a greater or lesser extent– a representation of the real world of education. Another version implies the use of the adversative and polemic potential of language as a means to build power and participation in the disputes to decide on certain meanings, related to a particular ideological stance which reflects our position towards education. Finally, a third proposal involves the use of language in a militant, subversive manner as an instrument of improvement that creates new terms which enable fresh paths in understanding what we call education. If the words at disposal have been wasted or lost constructive force, the coinage of new words would offer new meanings for education.

Whichever strategic path is adopted regarding language use, it is necessary to creatively turn to those words that educational discourse has used along centuries to legitimize ritualized practices and institutionalized experiences in/for school order. The Manifesto invites us to reflect on those words that have shaped our academic common sense, to pierce through the multiple meaning layers which –as a palimpsest– are often hidden below ritual discourse as they dispute and strive for meanings.

How should we turn to those words through which education can be named –and which have been emptied of their meanings in the techno-bureaucratic operation of the contemporary public systems of domination– as they have been dissociated from the vitality of humanizing experience that is constituent of pedagogy? Or has the contemporary imaginary of education abandoned its necessary commitment to the humanization of subjects, collectives and societies?

Humanization is hereby meant not as the achievement of the project of the Ideal Man but as the progressive conquest of autonomy and the continuous re-creation of itself. This humanization is conquered through be-Being², in the inter-change and inter-mediation of others who transform and transmute our conditions of existence and our ways of thinking, feeling, dialoguing and constructing such conditions through their interaction through symbols, institutions and practices (Maturana, 2014).

In this article we resume the interest in these questions. We also assume the impossibility of speaking without resorting to the grammar of school education that the Modern project has articulated, as we commit to offering thoughts that may shed light on other words, other possibilities of speaking on behalf of education.

Flexible and mobile margins to think of education?

The urge to speak of education in educational terms offers the possibility to relocate/recover a central matter for the disciplines in the education field. The long course undertaken by education studies in the 20th century to reach scientific status and achieve institutionalization in the academic sphere was accompanied by a resection of the analytic, abstract and theoretical foundations as the bases of educational knowledge (Colom Cañellas y Nuñez Cubero, 2001). The first dismemberment led to the excision of Pedagogy (understood as analytic reflection related to Philosophy) and the Sciences of Education (founded on the scientific contributions of Sociology and Psychology). The second dismemberment resulted in the distinction of Pedagogy/Theory of Education and Didactics, which deepens the complex and conflictive relationship between theory and practice in education.

In practical terms, the recoil of theoretical knowledge implied the abandonment of the educational questions (what for, why, who for) while growing importance was allocated to the effects and instrumentality of the educational machine (Biesta, 2014a). Is it possible to think/speak about educational action in such divide? Can action be addressed as such without turning to the intention that triggers it, the purpose towards which is oriented and the meanings on which it is rooted? Can such fragmented thought properly address education beyond its configuration as an institutionalized practice? What can the interstitial approach to education offer as intentional and intentioned action, intrinsically related to cultural dynamics?

Un-indebting educational thought

The contemporary academic-scientific educational field has been nurtured and made progress due to the borrowings of the so called

“scientific disciplines”, which have colonized the language of education, sub-alternizing pedagogical knowledges and proposals. The concept, conceptual-model and methodological-resource loans are common and legitimate in Science but they hardly enable the foundation of the ontology of the educational.

In the current “post” age context (empirist, structuralist, modern, truth), relocating the issue of ontology in education means resuming the epistemological concern regarding the conditions of possibility for the establishment of a regimen of power/knowledge for education which addresses its complex, heterogeneous, multi-determined, multi-referenced, polysemic, and heteroglossic nature (Yuni y Urbano, 2013).

In this regard, the inscription within the epistemic territory of the Social Sciences anticipates a way of naming and approaching education, emphasizing its character as instituted social practice. On the contrary, the inscription in the field of the Human Sciences places education as a key component of the cultural operation that enables representation, meaning-making and symbolizing human experience and its permanent re-creation and transformation in the pursuit of freedom.

The inscription of education in the domain of Human Sciences implies a different truth regime and knowledge construction that enable the return of the educational questions discarded by the scientific imperative (even by its most open and “sensitive” options). In other words, the return to that which is “pedagogic” in education is only possible in the context of the inquiry regarding the relational, moral, ethical, esthetic, and political dimensions that support the meaning/s that remain in tension and dispute in their end and in their materialization in its current shapes.

Education as a cultural scheme

As we currently conceive it, education constitutes a scheme devised by culture to deploy the process of socializing humanization. Through such process the symbolic order is installed in the primitive and incipient cerebral structure that characterizes us as hominids. To be humanized thus means to become cultural beings, transcending the biological order and seizing the tools that the very culture provides

to transform our cognitive, emotional and relational systems (Maturana, 2014). Humanizing implies being caught in the intersections of the symbolic that, by means of their permanent dynamism and transformation, generate the enabling conditions for the development of psychic complexity mediated by social interaction (Urbano y Yuni, 2016).

Education understood as a cultural scheme represents the grammar of the symbolic field that rules over the existence of beings and things through a code which names, prescribes and locates as it labels. The grammar of the symbolic transmutes what exists as real in what is constructed as representation. All that can be represented carries within itself the lack of the real thing itself and the return of the presence of what is summoned in its absence. Thus, any act which is deemed educational implies the violence of the symbolic and the willfulness of its orientation towards the inaugural in terms of conditions of existence.

The core of education is the paradox of the symbolic. That is the reason why the educational act *par excellence* refers to the potentiality of being, in a permanent *being-made* so that what is folded in the restraining act tends to deploy as a means to guarantee the constant development of subjectivity, which is humanized in socializing interchange practices. In such paradox, the conquest of freedom is founded in the constant and permanent restraining demand towards the symbolic order that enables our representation as subjects of certain temporalities (the past, present and future ones; those belonging to collectives, societies and subjects) which are always both common and singular.

Education as a cultural scheme does not imply a stake on a situated deployment in the future but rather in interference in the present that relates us to a lineage and some given socio-cultural-biographical filiations. At the same time, it drives us into the conquest of certain cultural ideals that function as social mandates, challenges or demands of personal and collective transformation. In such logic, the time of educational action is present as transitional space-time in which subjects and societies explore the possibilities and tensions arising from the permanent quest for autonomy and the restraint to the structuring order of the symbolic.

Education as a cultural scheme aims at fastening instinctive passion to civilizing communal rationale. In such restraining act the ontology of being (of nature) is transmuted to the paradox of the representational subject. Why do we speak of a paradox? Representing entails bondage in the interstices of an image which carries within the dynamics of the eidetic. Self-assuming ourselves as subjects signified and embedded in interaction and interrelational communal webs involves the acceptance of our being supported, held and braced by the remains of an original being that builds itself in the symbolic development of meaning provision. The task of education consists in locating the act of restraint at the doors/frontiers of the educable and humanizable, in a scheme that triggers the deployment of consciousness within the alienation of an original unconsciousness.

Education as a cultural *device*

Relating education and freedom requires thinking of the former in dialogue with conscience (Biesta, 2014b). Education is the cultural *device* in charge of generating conscience. However, this “conscience construction” implies tightening the intersections of personal freedom and the “does and don’ts” of a collective. Through education we are personalized in the normalization of the hegemony which acts as similitude, as what is diverse in difference is emphasized as tolerance. In this intentional practice, the “intolerance” of what has been alienated from the plurality, and which denounces the complex multiplicity of the paradox, is concealed.

Enacting educability entails being interfered by the violence of a knowledge which legitimizes power and generates the need to make complex what is folded and potential in such being as its “project”. Being an educable subject implies becoming the site where the “debate” of the project of civilizing communal rationale is conjugated. Such rationale intends to model the representation of singular consciences according to the imperatives of the paradigm of a collective conscience that harbors the seal of the contingent and the perfectible in its matrix, as it upholds the promise of the humanizable. However, this scheme is assumed in the paradox of potentiality which places the lack as that which is prone

to completion. Education as possibility can be founded only through the affirmation of the incompleteness of the human being and its assimilation to what would become disqualified without the approach of the educable.

Education as a cultural *device* operates through the demand towards subjects and collectives, appealing to their needs to “be more restrained” and embeddable within the social domain. Desire thus remains as an internal/external place to be conquered, whose horizon is always displaced in a permanent development.

Education as a humanizing act

Our perspective defends the status of education as a “performative act” which operates on subjects, institution and societies by transmuting consciences, moral choices, social ideals and cultural imaginaries. As a performative act, education places the figurative condition which is inherent to culture in the semiology of representation. Through the educational act, whatever is legislated by the universe of culture –which is eminently symbolic– relates the existence of objects *per se* to a signifier that provides a symbol that opens its meaning. Though such act, whatever exists is invested by

a nomination that transforms its existence in itself, opening it up to the flow of interpretation and the interjection in meaning attribution (Arfuch, 2002).

The educational act is the mechanism through which the process of subjective constitution is fulfilled; on these grounds the acts of sensorial perception and intellection are organized in the games of the language structures. Beings and things are formed as texts prone to interpretation, which are open to someone’s meaning –someone who is located as the interpreter of what can be decoded.

In this same act, the dialogical dialectic of the humanizable act is re-inaugurated, which questions the possibility of the knowledgeable as a condition of psychosocial complexation. This is conceived as an extension of the representational field in the development of reflexive processes, which places self-consciousness in relation with others and the world. In this manner, education deploys the humanizable side of what is human in terms of the acknowledgement of acquisitions that leave a trace in the subject’s conscience. Such conscience locates subjects as the core components of social action and as predicates of their practices (Charaudeau, 2009).



“Birth of an asteroid”, collagraph. Marta Arango

Speaking of education through paradoxes

The intellectual program of Modernity has nurtured binary, taxonomical and antinomic thought as the means of rational reconstruction of the world. Such intellectual program has spoken of/to education by placing emphasis on the necessity of its rational control as a social practice and as a discourse device for the normative rationalization for society as a whole.

In such rationalizing spirit, all educational dimensions related to sensibilities, passions, emotions, beliefs, and ideologies have been made invisible by the hegemonic educational discourse. However, the dynamics of school grammar has preserved these “sensitive” and “irrational” elements –elements that have been concealed beneath the public presentation of the “scientifically-founded” educational discourses and practices on whose grounds the professionalism of educators is configured.

The attempt to discuss education in the contemporary context calls for the transcendence of binarism and the antinomic logic, proposing a paradoxical logic and a complementary policy towards opposites. Finally, we cannot explore the ontology of education without acknowledging its intrinsically paradoxical character, with multiple determinations and relational, dialogue, moral anchors through which conscience is configured and the construction of autonomy is installed as the ideal of personal and communal realization.

Among the paradoxes that can be recalled we propose the following: *The paradox of the recursivity in production, reproduction and transformation of the grammar of the symbolic domain in a community through education.* Education is a key device for the preservation and care of culture, since tools which enable subjects to partake in the civilized apparatus are provided by it. Such tools –rooted in the permanently living, mobile, and contingent dynamics of socio-cultural processes– not only allow the control over beings and things but are also re-designed, perfected and creative when used in rituals and instituted practices. As they contribute to the reproduction of cultural order, educational processes trigger the processes of symbolic complexation and simultaneously enable the emergence of new signifiers.

The paradox of restraint for the conquest of autonomy as educational performance. Education as humanization involves all life; it thus must be reconsidered in terms that transcend the interchanges and interactions supported by age or generation gaps. Rather, it should be acknowledged that the conquest and long-life preservation of autonomy is part of an ongoing recursive process of passages in between experiential times of autonomy and heteronomy. In such process, the restraint to the socio-cultural communal order is accepted to become able to define –by means of its very tools– a singular identity domain in which the Self can decide on its own regulatory norms.

Proposing education as the act that enables freedom implies the acknowledgment of the necessary involvement of the binomial autonomy/heteronomy in the relationships with others, as well as the restraint to a hierarchical and asymmetrical social order. Such restraint legitimizes the exercise of symbolic violence as a condition to the inauguration of something novel in the representational universe of the subject.

Education as performative act unsettles the pair restraint/autonomy which defines our communal belonging as subjects involved in continuous subjectivation as we encounter others and the institutions of culture. Even if the condition of subjects cannot spare us the force of primary symbolic violence –which enables the passage from individuals to subjects– the quest for freedom is made effective in the different forms of resistance and rejection of other manners of symbolic violence fostered by cultural devices.

Thus, freedom is not conquered as mere affirmative action of liberation and self-assertion but in the permanent exercise of resistance to the imposition of the imperatives of the set order. Then, freedom is not to be located in the future, as a differed conquest of educational action; it is, on the contrary, an achievement that must be re-validated and permanently re-conquered (in a continuous mode) as a condition to preserve the restraint to a communal order while keeping the singular self in the development of the be-being.

The paradox of the acknowledgment of the lack and the promise of completion as a condition for educability. The symbolic grammar which structures the educational device oper-

ates by means of the transmission of certain components of culture. Through educational transmission the representations of the self and the world are modified. Such transmission cannot be understood as mere reproduction or as a process of cultural cloning but as passage, smuggling (Hassoun, 1996) or traffic of truths (Jackson, 2015) which always leave behind a remainder –a remainder which is configured as debt, demand or fantasy to pursue.

In the more extensive social processes, generations are clustered by such remainders, which become the common patrimony. The common remainder that interjects generational interchanges is the recognition of lack and incompleteness. The regulatory ideal of education as action over individual and collective subjects is supported by the shared promise and grounded on the reciprocal trust in the possibility of generating a project that may recover completion, make complex what has been simplified and reconstitute what has been shattered in its senses.

The efficacy of education as a cultural *device* would lie on the acknowledgment of those remainders and the appreciation of these as bearers of something unprecedented –something novel which invites subjects and collectives to start over, to renew their commitments to remain restrained, re-creating and renewing their interpretation of the world. Education paradoxically generates the recognition of the lack and incompleteness; at the same time, it supports the illusion of a project which is presented as a totalizing experience by means of which one becomes “someone”.

Leaving the word open

Along this text we have stammered some ideas that may help to consider what we mean to say when we discuss education. From the epistemic grounds of the Human Sciences we have followed a theoretical path in which we have recapitulated on some constitutive issues of education. To do so, we have aimed at recovering reflexively the questions regarding education and humanization from a semiotic perspective that have enabled the depiction of education as a scheme, a *device* and a performative act of culture. Such act has been described as paradoxical and capable of producing the unprecedented on the basis of the

familiar, as well as an act which is deployed in the inter-time of the continuous mode in which subjects and societies are-being.

In this text we have undertaken the subversion of ordinary ways of responding to intellectual interjections. The cognitive path that relates the topic (education) and the elucidation of its meanings would have been the rule. However, we believe that, in order to account for our intention as we speak of education, we must analytically approach the signifiers and unsettle them. Only by means of the symbolic torsion of the signifiers, the core question of education –its role in meaning-making– can be comprehended. It is only by means of unfinished debates regarding the meaning of education that its relationship with Life, with the Common, with whatever in its nature refers to co-implication and is multiple, diverse, heterogenous and contingent in the process of humanization, can be rehabilitated.

As Filloux (2009) ventures, education is the seed of humanity; it contains the human germ that can only be perceived in the inevitably random and contingent process of humanization. Nevertheless, such seed is not the individual's; it belongs to the culture that implants and fertilizes it, as it generates the conditions and restrictions for the subject to emerge as a vital project for him/herself, resignifying his/her own meanings on the grounds of their enrolment in the chain of meanings of institutions, social practices and discourses.

Notes

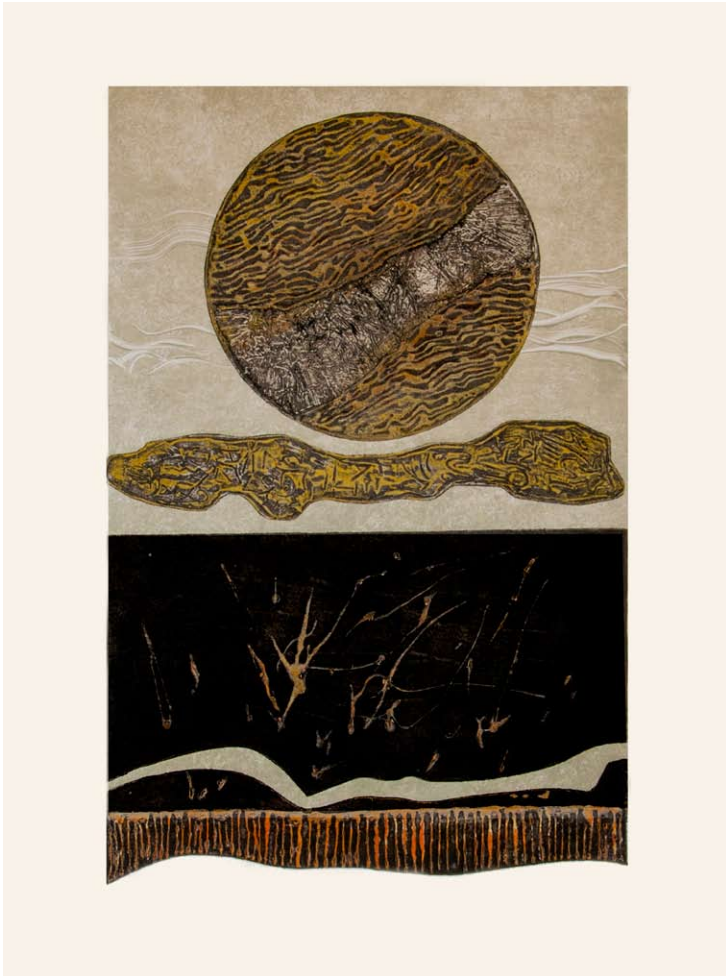
Traducción al inglés: María Marta Yedaide (Grupo GIEEC-CIMED-UNMDP). Supervisión de la traducción: Carlos Domínguez.

- 1 TN: “Feel-thought” is the product of our attempt of translation of the original word “sentipensamiento”. Such category has been introduced into the word of Latin American academic production through Orlando Fals Borda, who in turn gives credit for such creation to the (wise) original inhabitants of the region close to Colombian San Benito Abad.
- 2 TN: In reference to a native category of Dr. Yuni's Doctoral research (*ser-siendo*), aimed at a redefinition of identity as ongoing psycho-social reconstruction –inspired in turn in Ortega y Gasset's proposition of man as a *gerund* (1999).

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