

From Paulo Freire's political clarity to an education for peace

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(Trad. Moisés Silva)

*When a child imagines a joyful and free school,
it is because his school denies him freedom and joy.*
Paulo Freire

A brief historical review of education will show the different connotations it has had, and which have somehow left their mark on the struggles to change it. In Mexico, the Liberal Reform of the mid-nineteenth century was deeply committed to popular and free education, provided and controlled by a civil government. President Juárez declared that the desire to learn and be educated was inborn in the human heart (July 2, 1848).

The 1960s left a profound mark in the history of Latin America: the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, the Alliance for Progress, and the takeover of military dictatorships in South America, beginning in Brazil in 1964, can be seen as connected historical events.

For Colombia, a question may be asked in the present moment: Will the current political, social and economic situation increase the number of the excluded people and, therefore, make it necessary to set up, or reinstate, the feared popular education that embraces an ever-increasing number of Colombians?

Historically, schools have been assigned complex tasks involving multiple variables, factors, and actors, which exceed the agency capabilities of teachers and administrative staff in educational phenomena.

As Paulo Freire clearly stated,

One of the fundamental concerns of an education for development and democracy must be, in our opinion, providing students with the instruments needed to resist the uprooting powers of an industrial civilization that is well armed to produce it [...]. An education that places students in a continuous dialogue with the other, that prepares them for a continuous revision and critical analysis of their "discoveries" (1971: 84-85).

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The Brazilian educator also pointed out that every educational action has a political dimension. Every educational process induces attitudes and values in the students that turn them passive or critical, selfish or caring. The new educational policies in Latin America and, to a large extent, in the world, are in the service of politics, which in this moment are dependent on the requirements of economy and the world's markets, creating a new gap between rich and poor countries.

This means having what Freire "calls *political clarity*, that is, a conscious and continuously updated vision of the model of society we consider more suitable for the development of the human being" (Guichot, 2012: 185), since that will be the source of our educational project.

We see educational scenarios that have been permeated by the fragmentation of the territory caused by conflict between different criminal organizations around the community. We go to a school that has been infiltrated by the values of a culture inherited from drug dealers, narco-guerrillas, paramilitary groups, and the corruption of the governmental forces, among others (Garcés, 2016).

We see a society that promotes greed as a value, crime as the celebrated theme of soap operas, illegal drug consumption as a normalized act, a society that is a far cry from many of the values sought by the citizen education at school. A Utopia – capital U – of an education in the values associated with a democracy is overwhelmed by the pragmatics of a culture with a proclivity for crime (Garcés, 2016).

The school is the place where the breakage of links that the students experience in their families are transferred, in a moment in history when parental authority is becoming extinct and when absent parents are replaced by grandparents, uncles or aunts, or even by electronic appliances. Families do not accompany the school in its educational processes, leaving their place to everyday rituals in which education "does not mean the comprehensive formation of a future citizen, but rather a bookshelf where we can elude the civil responsibility of taking care of the child, families where the significant breakup of affection predisposes the student to attitudes which are very different from the ones intended by the school in the construction of a human network" (Garcés, 2016).

In the specific case of the education of ethnic groups, or groups of people displaced by violence or conflict, we observe that racism becomes a scourge that may strike people at any age, and as members of a society we have the obligation to prevent it whenever possible. It is urgent to work on the orientation, training and acceptance of all human beings, for we are all equal, and democracy plays an important role in this task at school.

Freire invites us to think "a little about our students' cultural identity, and the necessary respect we owe to our practice as educators". A democratic school must always be open to the reality surrounding its students to understand them better, to commit fully to its teaching practice, and to learn from its relationships with a concrete context (2012: 118, 122).

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