

School Education And Teaching: A Past For The Future

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Abstract:

After all, why do we have to educate the new generations? When we consider this, we realize that we have something in common, that is, a human world, the fruit of human interactions and creations. For this reason, it is the common human world that should serve as a basis and guide for educating future generations, so that we can find indications and desirable ways of living together and with others. From the bibliographical perspective of Hannah Arendt and some of her contemporaries, we question our human condition and its connection with the task of educating new generations. This means that we nurture the need for the common human world to last and continue, in a movement of eternity.

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I. Introduction

We believe that the dialogue between school and teaching is necessary in order to contemplate the human world through relationships mediated by intersubjectivity. This enables us to reflect on the reasons for educating the new generations. Without an understanding of what constitutes us as humans and how we construct our world, a school and a teacher would serve no purpose, as the reasons for having schools and educating new generations would not be clear. This would leave education largely at the whim of each teacher/school or establish a point of

leverage beyond the human world, shaping a metaphysical thought that is undesirable due to the nature of our human condition.

Therefore, the indication is that all education must necessarily begin with the human world, with our symbolic achievements stemming from our capacity to transcend instinctual and biological determinations. After all, the human world is a human creation; it was humans, under the conditions of their times, who created symbolic patterns and artifacts. Hence, we can assert that only we humans have a world precisely because of our ability to create, modify, expand, and manipulate it, among other things. Thus, school education pertains to narrating to the new generations the issues that configure the human world. In this sense, the school is grounded in tradition, in the conservation and transmission of culture. This is what will enable the future renewal of today's children.

However, an education focused on the roots of the past means going to where we became commonly human, thus becoming both alike and different. It is in this movement that we can discover treasures and understand their values. This is the importance of school and teaching!

II. The Constitution Of School Education And Teaching: A Past For The Future

In times when various criticisms proliferate against the school institution, ranging from accusations of indoctrination, alienation, body disciplining, homogenization with artificial subjects and themes, centralization around teachers' knowledge with little space for student autonomy, protagonism, and interests, to inadequate preparation for real life, lack of flexibility, and an unappealing and unenjoyable environment etc. In light of such accusations, the question of the radical reform of the school institution often emerges in public discourse. The list of reforms is extensive, according to Masschelein and Simon (2017, p. 19, translation by the author):

[...] the school should become more student-centered, strive to develop talent, be more responsive to the job market and social environment to motivate and cater to student well-being, offer evidence-based education, which is more effective and can contribute to real equality of opportunities.

Could we include in this list the need to emphasize the development of competencies and skills, as proposed by the reform of Brazilian high school education, in addition to the option for students to choose what would be "best" for their educational path in schools? In summary, this is a movement that starts from the perspective that the purpose of the school institution is to "[...] optimize learning performance (individual)" (MASSCHELEIN; SIMONS, 2017, p. 19, translation by the author). Therefore, thinking in this way corresponds only to considering the purpose and functionality of the school and not what is inherent to the institution, that is, what makes the school a school.

However, these accusations against contemporary schools fail precisely because they ignore what constitutes the quintessence of this institution: what does the school do and what is its purpose? Wouldn't it be obvious to assert that society invented schools to integrate children into the world? Wouldn't it be evident to state that the school institution seeks to equip students with knowledge, public languages, and unique skills to find their place in society? Isn't it simply in schools that children are introduced to the historically produced knowledge of humanity (tradition)? After all, what makes a school a school and not something else? Does it really deserve to be preserved in the face of the numerous contemporary learning possibilities? These and other reflections compel us to ponder what constitutes the specificity of school education and teaching, taking into account our human condition.

Firstly, it's important to recall Kant's assertion that "man is the only creature that needs to be educated. By education is meant the care of his childhood (conservation, upbringing), discipline, and instruction as formation" (KANT, 1999, p. 11, translation by the author). From this, we can affirm that equipping students with knowledge, introducing them to public languages, and culturally produced knowledge of humanity is a demanding, slow, gradual task that requires effort, dedication, and choices, both from those who provide and those who receive the education.

In this specificity, Savater (2012, p. 141, translation by the author) considers that "[teaching] transmits because it wants to preserve; and it wants to preserve because it values certain knowledge, certain behaviors, certain skills, and certain ideals," which should not be relegated to oblivion. According to Arendt (2013), transmitting the legacy involves bequeathing an inheritance, and therefore, predecessors must decide what and how to pass on their legacy to those who will come after.

This inheritance comprises not only material aspects but also knowledge and understanding, principles and comprehensions. The ability to discern is a link that connects one generation to another, something we share with those who lived in the same place but in a different time. We could add: this movement is only possible based on discipline, respect, and obedience; only then will newcomers have contributions and supports to find their place and act in the human world. In relation to this, Bueb (2008) reinforces the idea that the authority of the teacher is related to expecting respect, consideration, and obedience from the student. Obedience corresponds to a revered virtue or a secondary virtue, as it gains its value primarily through the intention it serves. Thus, we can affirm that education without authority is not education. Similarly, referring to discipline, Bueb (2008, p. 18, translation by the author) states that:

Discipline is the unloved child of pedagogy, yet it is the foundation of all education. Discipline embodies everything people dislike: obligation, subordination, mandated renunciation, repression of instincts, and the curbing of personal desires. [...] Discipline always begins with external determination and should end in self-determination. Discipline in education is only justified through love for children and Youth.

In this sense, the only discipline that is valid in education, the one strictly pedagogical in nature, is that which pertains to attention. According to Larrosa (2018, p. 132, translation by the author), “[...] the school must discipline bodies and minds, of course, but so that they are attentive.” School discipline and the teacher who enforces it aim, broadly speaking, to produce attentive minds and bodies, studious minds and bodies capable of submitting to the demands of the subject matter. In this case, if the teacher is demanding, it is because the subject matter also demands it; nonetheless, this is why the teacher always demands in the name of study, effort, determination, and not in their own name. Discipline in school education is about creating diligent students, it is, paraphrasing Foucault (2006), about self-care.

Similarly, we could cite Kant (1999, p. 25, translation by the author) to consider that being disciplined in education means: “[...] seeking to prevent animality from harming human character, both in the individual and in society. Therefore, discipline consists in taming wildness.” This is only possible and necessary for humans because we lean towards freedom, whereas animals do not require discipline due to their instincts and because they do not learn from their ancestors, as their conditions are predefined. In other words, “animals fulfill their destiny spontaneously and unknowingly. Man, on the contrary, is compelled to try to achieve his end; which he cannot do without first having a concept of it” (Kant, 1999, p. 18, translation by the author). Therefore, only humans need care and education.

It is in this context, to some extent, that justifies the need for the school institution, given the condition that school education is continually refined by various generations. However, and for this reason, it is important to note that newcomers do not need to start from scratch, as there are already generations equipped with previous knowledge inherited from preceding generations, allowing learning to occur in a perspective of continuity. This is why Boufleuer and Fensterseifer (2010) consider the human species as a pedagogical species, a species that always learns from someone before them, from someone who came earlier and has been in the world longer. Consequently, for the authors,

There is no pedagogical dialectic without teaching, or rather, without someone first constituting themselves as a pedagogical precedent. Precedent in the sense of having learned before to the extent of being able to assume the task of mediating the social and cultural integration of those who are arriving. Pedagogy has always been attributed with a sense of 'guidance.' And how could someone guide others along paths they have never walked before? [...] (BOUFLEUER; FENSTERSEIFER, 2010, p. 261, translation by the author).

In this direction, those who introduce new generations to the world of human productions - through school education - have the necessity of having learned beforehand what they propose to teach. It is by becoming a pedagogical precedent that the teacher dignifies all the content and subjects they present to the new students. Now, if the school is the place where teachers hand over the world to those who come to it, this includes the need for the teacher to understand what constitutes the human world and what is worthy and deserves to be brought to the table every day in class.

If we understand that the teacher offers a past for the future, then we can consider that they occupy a prominent place in school education, since offering a past means initiating the new students into human traditions, a task that is indeed not easy. According to Barcena (2001, p. 192, translation by the author),

The past exists because we can narrate, because we can evoke and make present what has already occurred, what has happened, and because we can establish a relationship of receptivity and listening with those who have the power to transmit to us a memorable experience, destined to be stored in memory.

To deepen understanding, Peters (1979) asserts that school education involves initiating the new into activities, modes of conduct, and thought that have intrinsic rules concerning what is possible for action, thought, and feeling, across varying degrees of competence and relevance. He states, “if teachers are not convinced of this, they should find another occupation” (PETERS, 1979, p. 125, translation by the author). In Boufleuer's study (2013, p. 407, translation by the author), the author emphasizes that “[...] before starting a class, the teacher must conduct a kind of self-examination, asking oneself: - What does the subject I am about to address mean to me? Do I find reasons within myself to attest to its importance in their learning?” These inquiries demand of the teacher, according to the same author:

The understanding of teaching as a living testimony of the culture to be addressed through school curricula suggests that the first thing to be considered in preparing a lesson is indeed assessing the degree of intimacy the teacher has with the knowledge they intend to work with students (BOUFLEUER, 2013, p. 406, translation by the author).

Without this prior examination, we might venture to say that there would be no reason to enter the classroom and perhaps even to be a teacher. Therefore, in accordance, Boufleuer and Fensterseifer (2010, p. 261, translation by the author) state that:

Even though gathering, systematizing, and presenting cultural knowledge can be considered inherent to teaching, the crucial aspect is for the teacher to establish themselves as a subject immersed in culture, someone who has intimacy and complicity with it. Only in this way, as a kind of living testimony, can the teacher attest to the importance of their students learning such knowledge.

In this sense, there is a clear need for the teacher's complicity with the content they are currently teaching or will teach. This demonstrates that the teacher must truly "know well" what they propose to present to their students; otherwise, they will not be seen as a living testimony but as a false one, replaceable by any other sophisticated device or technology due to insufficient dedication and commitment to their field of knowledge.

Similarly, if the school is to open up to the world in order to introduce new generations to the public works that history bequeaths us, then it must establish itself as a distinct place. A place that, according to Arendt (2013), is intermediate, situated between the public and private spheres. Furthermore, being a distinct place involves being a place of suspension, where time, needs, and routines that occupy students' lives can be left behind. Masschelein and Simons (2017, p. 32, translation by the author) understand suspension as "[...] making something inoperative, or, in other words, taking it out of production, releasing it and removing it from its normal context. It is an act of deprivatization, of expropriation." This is why schools have walls, gates, and doors that signify the suspension and containment of daily flow and speed; this is why a school is not a shopping mall, a coffee shop, a restaurant, an amusement park, or anything else.

Preventing the torrential flow of social life - filled with pleasures, desires, and immediate needs - from affecting the school means providing each person who enters with a space and place for thinking and stepping away from daily concerns, reaching beyond their own limits. As Mattei (2002, p. 209, translation by the author) notes, "if everything is open, nothing is open, and each one finds themselves alone within the spiral of their own shell." Therefore, it's important to emphasize that suspension is not about destruction but about deactivating, interrupting, and discontinuing. For this reason, Victor Hugo's phrase "a school that opens is a prison that closes" deserves to be rephrased to "a school that does not close is a prison that opens," because it is this non-closure that allows the new generation to engage in thought and gradually become familiar with public languages. Thus, the school is a place where the present, the immediate, and the instantaneous must be suspended; this suspension, as Arendt (2013, 2017) described as non-time, leads towards eternity.

It is important to emphasize that it is due to the complete openness of the school that many teachers no longer know what to do in the classroom. Many ask themselves, after all, why should I teach? What should I teach? And what do I need to be in order to teach? Parents also wonder: Why should children go to school? These and other questions represent the widespread confusion that has arisen between what is public, private, and social, or in simplified terms, what constitutes our human condition and allows the world to continue, endure, and deepen.

Moreover, it is this factor of confusion that contemporarily brings criticism to the forefront of school education, considering it conservative, elitist, capitalist etc., judgments that stem from political, social, or economic theorizations, but never philosophical ones. These criticisms, according to Kohan, Masschelein, and Simons (2017), reduce education to functions of another order, identify it with something else, and fail to understand what is proper to the school institution, what makes a school a school. Therefore, it is necessary to defend the school from such criticisms, as we understand that defending it means showing what purpose the school serves, what makes the school a school and not something else, understanding that what it proposes is indispensable for humans, to become human, to constitute a common human world.

Therefore, the school we defend here, taking into account our human condition, is a school that is truly a school, a place of suspension, deceleration, thoughtfulness, attendance, complicity, discipline, authority, dedication, attention, a place where things of the common human world become subjects of study, of human materiality. We refer to things of the human world as everything deserving of preservation and presentation, not relegated to oblivion; this is what a school curriculum consists of, namely, perceptions and knowledge of the human world worthy of presentation to generations entering this world.

In this sense, we can assert that the school is not what is contemporarily thought based on ongoing reforms; in essence, the school is not a place for the formation of competencies and skills according to a supposed social functionality, nor is it about replacing rigid, enduring, slow, demanding content with competencies that are flexible, mutable, always susceptible to training and retraining. This is an anti-school/educational and anti-institutional discourse, incorporating an ideological veneer.

We emphasize that it is the specificity of the school institution to empower all students with human knowledge and wisdom, regardless of their backgrounds, a reason that makes the school a specific place of learning, a place where students can surpass themselves and renew the common human world in the future, once again. Therefore, teaching consists in making visible, precisely because knowledge introduces visibility of the human world and the beings that inhabit it, a visibility that fundamentally has the characteristic of being able to be the object of discursive transmission.

Moreover, if our human condition is marked by openness, incompleteness, indeterminacy, unpredictability, wandering, creativity, inventiveness, plurality, and uncertainty, it means that we are a species

that needs and engages in learning, that needs to go to school and needs the school, that requires teachers and responsible adults, that needs discipline, that requires prohibitions, that needs to know and become familiar with the world, that needs and does not do without other humans, that requires plural coexistence. It is in this movement of constituting oneself as human in intersubjectivity and of building a human world with and for others (common) that we can welcome future generations, who always need us. This is why Arendt states that:

Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and save it from the ruin that would be inevitable without the renewal and coming of the new and the young. Education is also where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and abandon them to their own devices, nor to snatch from their hands the opportunity to undertake something unforeseen and new for us, instead preparing them in advance for the task of renewing a common world (ARENDDT, 2013, p. 247, translation by the author).

This is what we expect from the school and from every teacher who is or will be in the classroom; it is this specificity that ensures our integration into the common human world and allows us to know the works that history bequeaths to us, human deeds and actions, traditions and values, cultures and customs, the threads that weave the past and the present, all of which configure an inheritance that makes a livable world possible. It is this continuity, in the form of memory, that allows for the durability of the common human world. Therefore, memory is considered a possibility to narrate and recognize the authority of the dead, of the victims of history, including to prevent Auschwitz from recurring. Moreover, we will always be what we are capable of doing with our past and what we want to leave to the new generations, aware of the unpredictability of future action.

III. Conclusion

If language is foundational to the human condition, then we have a world because we have language; thus, only we (humans) have a world. Therefore, we can consider that language needs the other to be effective, because it is with others and among others that we become learning subjects. It is in language assumed in plurality that we construct references of objectivity and plausibility for living together. And in this movement, we constitute a common human world. Only through language can we think about the common, the reasonable, the desirable, every decision, guidance, or education that would be situated outside of language is considered dangerous, misleading, and undesirable.

Moreover, if we possess a common human world that deserves to be preserved and improved, that needs to continue and endure, then it can be considered worthy and deserving to be presented to newcomers, so that they can become familiar with what we humans have achieved in other times. Therefore, it is necessary for all those who are responsible for the new generations and their education to understand the history of humanity from its beginnings to the present day, emphasizing both solidarity examples and the oppressions, dominations, and barbarities that have been the result of human beings. It is in this way that each newcomer will be able to understand and recognize themselves in the humanity to which they belong; in summary, we need an education that allows us to think about and understand our human condition. Therefore, school education consists of maintaining intersubjectivity that is subject to human existence.

For Arendt (2013), the way in which school education should carry out its task of responsibility for the world is by focusing on the past, rather than the future, since what exists between human beings has been placed in it. The past is what contains everyone's history, that is, their identities as beings belonging to the common human world. We educate so that human heritages and stories can remain alive; it is in the past where the meaning and sense of humanity and worldliness are found.

Understanding school as a place that has the commitment to present the world to the youngest means considering it as a separate place, a place that breaks, deactivates, and tenses daily flows, that breaks with haste, with immediate and spontaneous needs, aiming to show each student what is worth desiring. That's why schools have doors and walls, the walls separate, but also protect children, preventing them from going wherever they want to go, protecting children from family, shopping, factories, McDonald's etc. Therefore, entering school has to do with leaving other spaces/places and devices; entering school is dedicating your (free) time to study subjects, to understand and become familiar with public languages.

It is the possibility of being in just one place, with free time to attend, deliver, and learn, that makes school a place of dedication to studies, of initiation into symbolic inheritances. Initiating students into the works that history has left us is a movement that requires much from both those who deliver and witness, and from those who receive and study. Therefore, initiation is not something momentary and quick, but requires slowing down, suspension, time (free), effort, attention, discipline, and determination. It is in school that the world becomes a subject of study. It is in school that minds and bodies are disciplined so that students become scholars. It is in school that we can create the common good.

Moreover, to present the world to new generations, it is necessary for teaching to configure itself into a relationship of intimacy with the human world – this is what is also expected of all adults who are responsible for children and the world. The relationship of intimacy is always under the prior examination of what is proposed to

be taught, of what is put on the table. It is necessary for the teacher to know and be able to justify why their discipline is present in the school curriculum. The teacher must know why their discipline can make a difference in the students' lives. This context constitutes the teaching authority because it is the place and its specific task that confer authority, if this is not taken seriously, both the school and teaching are doomed to failure. In this direction, Savater's message (2012, p. 29, translation by the author) is consistent: "[...] in the dialectics of learning, it is as crucial what those who teach know as what those who must learn do not yet know." Therefore, the only thing that makes the school a school and the teacher a teacher is love and responsibility for the world and for the new generations. May this advice be remembered by all those who step into schools and who are responsible for our children.

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