



## The classic and universal values: a discussion from the foundations of historical-critical pedagogy

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**RESUMO.** Este artigo tem por objetivo desenvolver relações entre o conceito de clássico, tal como postulado pela pedagogia histórico-crítica e a constituição dos valores universais. Com o intuito de alcançar este fim, o texto está dividido em três momentos. Em um primeiro momento abordamos a contraposição existente entre a concepção de conhecimento presente na pedagogia histórico-crítica e a concepção de conhecimento hegemônica. Em um segundo momento, apoiando-nos nas obras de Karl Marx (1818-1883) e Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), em produções de György Lukács (1885-1971) e de autores próximos ao seu pensamento, como são os casos de Agnes Heller (1929-2019) e György Márkus (1934-2016), buscamos estabelecer as relações entre a construção dos valores universais e o clássico. E, por fim, em um terceiro momento, analisamos o trabalho educativo como um processo situado no âmbito da educação escolar e que se vincula à preservação dos valores universais condensados nos conhecimentos clássicos. Verificamos que a compreensão do clássico a partir da constituição dos valores universais é fundamental para entendermos a conformação deste como um produto da atividade humana. Os valores condensados nos conhecimentos clássicos, para além de sua vinculação sócio-histórica, transcendem em direção à universalidade. A compreensão adequada desse processo nos permite a necessária superação da antinomia entre dogmatismo e relativismo, condição fundamental para o entendimento do conceito de clássico conforme postulado pela pedagogia histórico-crítica.

**Palavras-chave:** clássico; educação escolar; marxismo; pedagogia histórico-crítica.

## The classic and the universal values: a discussion from the foundations of the historical-critical pedagogy

**ABSTRACT.** This paper aims to develop relationships between the concept of classic, as postulated by historical-critical pedagogy and the constitution of universal values. In order to achieve this goal, the text is divided in three parts. Firstly, we discuss the counterpoint between the conception of knowledge present in historical-critical pedagogy and the conception of hegemonic knowledge. Secondly, based on the works of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), productions by György Lukács (1885-1971) and authors close to his thinking, such as Agnes Heller (1929-2019) and György Márkus (1934-2016), we seek to establish the relations between the construction of universal values and the classic. Lastly, in the third part, we analyze educational work as a process situated in the scope of school education and linked to the preservation of universal values condensed in classic knowledge. We observed that the understanding of the classic based on the constitution of universal values is fundamental to an understanding of its conformation as a product of human activity. The values condensed in classic knowledge, beyond the social-historical link, transcend towards universality. The adequate comprehension of this process allows us to overcome the antinomy between dogmatism and relativism, a fundamental condition to understanding the concept of classic as postulated by historical-critical pedagogy.

**Keywords:** classic; school education; Marxism; historical-critical pedagogy.

## El clásico y los valores universales: una discusión desde los fundamentos de la pedagogía histórico-crítica

**RESUMEN.** Este artículo pretende desarrollar relaciones entre el concepto de lo clásico, como postula la pedagogía histórico-crítica y la constitución de los valores universales. Para lograr este fin, el texto se dividió en tres momentos. En un primer momento, abordamos el contraste entre la concepción del

conocimiento presente en la pedagogía histórico-crítica y la concepción hegemónica de el conocimiento. En segundo lugar, basado en las obras de Karl Marx (1818-1883) y Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), producciones de György Lukács (1885-1971) y autores cercanos a su pensamiento, como son los casos de Agnes Heller (1929-2019) y György Márkus (1934-2016), buscamos establecer la relación entre la construcción de los valores universales y el clásico. Y finalmente, en un tercer momento, analizamos el trabajo educativo como un proceso ubicado dentro del ámbito de la educación escolar y que está vinculado a la preservación de los valores universales condensados en los conocimientos clásicos. Comprobamos que la comprensión de lo clásico a partir de la constitución de valores universales es fundamental para entender su conformación como producto de la actividad humana. Los valores condensados en los conocimientos clásicos, más allá de su apego sociohistórico, trascienden hacia la universalidad. La comprensión adecuada de este proceso nos permite superar la antinomia entre dogmatismo y relativismo, una condición fundamental para entender este concepto como lo postula la pedagogía histórico-crítica.

**Palabras-clave:** clásico; educación escolar; marxismo; pedagogía histórico-crítica.

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## Introduction

Discussion about the classic is very broad and, as far as school education is concerned, it traverses several spheres. In times when relativism is increasingly present, the concept of classic has inevitably found it harder to join the debate. This difficulty is easily seen in the rejection and refusal of this concept, almost automatically identifying it with a discussion based on a Eurocentric conception of knowledge. This rejection stems from a reflection, even if not immediate, of a neoliberal vision of society, and reflects greatly on the content involved in educational work. Confronting this refusal requires that the foundations that underlie the concept of classic be made explicit.

This article addresses one of the aspects that underpins this discussion, which is the constitution of universal values. Our theoretical basis lies in the works of Marx, Engels, Lukács, Márkus and Heller<sup>1</sup>. Understanding the relationship between the constitution of universal values and the concept of the classic is fundamental for us to understand what exactly it means to affirm the classic as a product of human activity. We need to understand how the process of value production takes place within human activity, as an ontological necessity inserted in a process that presupposes choices between alternatives, and with a consequent valorization process. Therefore, the relationship between the classic and the constitution of universal values provides us with inputs to comprehend this concept as a product of an activity that has both a subjective and objective dimension.

## Counterpoint between the conception of knowledge in historical-critical pedagogy and hegemonic pedagogies

To establish the relations between the construction of universal values and the concept of classic, we believe that it is necessary, initially, to consider certain conceptions of knowledge adopted by contemporary trends of pedagogical thought. This explanation is essential, since it is our view that the hegemonic conception of knowledge does not coincide with the understanding of knowledge present in historical-critical pedagogy and, consequently, with the comprehension of the classic as postulated by this pedagogical theory.

The definition of classic adopted by historical-critical pedagogy is characterized by theoretical density and coherence with the Marxist foundation of this pedagogical theory. The existence of a Marxist foundation in the conception of the classic enables it to be interpreted in a way that supersedes both relativistic and dogmatic conceptions of knowledge. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for this concept to receive negative adjectives that associate it with ethnocentric or, more particularly, Eurocentric attitudes. It is possible to observe that, very often, this 'adjectivization' originates from ideas associated with multiculturalism, constructivism and other integral pedagogical conceptions linked, directly or indirectly, to what Duarte (2011, p. 83) called a "[...] neoliberal and postmodern ideological universe". Both these pedagogies and the ideological universe to which they are connected show themselves, with rare exceptions, little inclined to an analysis of the theoretically grounded concept of classic.

<sup>1</sup>It is important to highlight that the works of Heller and Márkus we refer to are from the period that these authors were within the Marxist fold.

Ideological expressions such as neoliberalism and postmodernism find their material basis in the development of capitalist society. Thus, it is necessary to understand these expressions within the development logic of the class struggle as it presents itself in this society. At the beginning of the historical process that led to the collapse of the Old Regime we find the bourgeoisie adopting and assuming a revolutionary perspective, stimulating an impulse toward cultural development. However, from the moment it rose to power, cultural development is no longer in its interest, because the central issue then became building forms of control that would enable its class domination over society as a whole. In Saviani's words (1991, p. 23):

If culture was boosted and enjoyed a great advance in the early modern period, at the beginning of modern society, of capitalist society, this was due to the fact that the bourgeoisie was constituted as a revolutionary class and, in this sense, as the bearer of a new phase of humanity that also involved a cultural advance. But as it consolidated its power, it became culturally sterile. A period emerges in which culture becomes standardized, loses its creativity, also losing its vigor, its systematicity, becoming fragmented.

The analysis shown in the above quotation helps us understand the possible relations between the development of knowledge, modern society and the action of the bourgeoisie. Moreover, it also provides us with inputs to understand the relationship between the theoretical foundations of neoliberalism and postmodernism, with emphasis on the debate around the issue of knowledge. It is important to highlight that, both in the writings of Friedrich Hayek (1889-1992), and in the characteristics of post-modernism, reflections can be found that provide support for the view of knowledge present in some hegemonic pedagogies.

The origin of neoliberalism can be traced in the book 'The Road to Serfdom', written by Hayek (1944) in 1944. The proposals of the Austrian economist are aimed at defending a minimal State and promoting the privatization of sectors still controlled by the State (health, education, etc.). Furthermore, it is possible to note a conception of knowledge in Hayek's work and we may add that this epistemology maintains a close relationship with his conception of society. As such, in Hayek, we can infer a conception of knowledge in which it is perceived as something particular, quite tacit and limited to the individual's immediate environment (Duarte, 2016).

According to Netto and Braz (2012), neoliberalism, besides being an economic doctrine, also lays the foundations for a conception of society and the individual that usually presupposes a contradictory feature between the two and, by extension, socioeconomic inequality acquires naturalizing contours. The market acts as society's self-regulating entity, responsible for selecting and rewarding individual effort.

In the scope of the debates that took place throughout the 20th century, neoliberalism is opposed to the ideas of John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946), who advocated state investment and full employment - in short, he stipulated that the State, and not the market, should be in charge of organizing and stimulating society. Accordingly, we can describe neoliberalism as an antipode of the Keynesian welfare State, in which the dominant class' strategy in the class struggle was to give in to some working class demands in order to weaken movements challenging the capitalist social order. After the crisis in the Welfare State, between the 1970s and 1980s, neoliberalism found a clear path to becoming hegemonic. As a result, in today's society, the neoliberal ideology has acquired a lot of influence in the constitution of a conception of knowledge, a set of theories called postmodern (Duarte, 2011).

Postmodernism can be categorized as an ideological expression of neoliberalism<sup>2</sup> and, moreover, it can also be considered an important doctrine for maintaining the status quo. This upholds a very idealistic and subjectivist conception of knowledge, which limits the field of what can be known to that which results from the subject's constructions. Limiting knowledge to what can be constructed by the individual leads to the negation of objectivity, totality, and the existence of a historical unity, imposing the multiplicity of incomparable narratives (Moraes, 2004).

In both neoliberalism and postmodernism one can notice the absence of a historicizing conception, which results in a negation of the importance of historically produced knowledge. This denial easily ends up being identified with a denial of the importance of education and a distancing from the idea that the teacher's function is to take responsibility for the transmission of knowledge in its most developed forms.

<sup>2</sup> Marilena Chauí (2001) understood post-modernism as an ideology of capitalism in its neoliberal stage. Fredric Jameson (2000) arrives at a similar conclusion, and postulates post-modernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism.

This perspective can be clearly seen in the conception of knowledge present in hegemonic pedagogies. With their specificities reserved, these pedagogical theories generally maintain a conception of knowledge that denies the existence of totality, consequently possessing a fragmented conception of history, composed of several narratives, which ends up questioning the existence of universal knowledge.

In contrast to the pragmatic, subjectivist and relativist epistemology found in hegemonic pedagogies, the conception of knowledge that underpins the concept of classic in historical-critical pedagogy has a basis of understanding in which it is constituted from the apprehension of reality, through abstract processes, which thereby afford an increasingly fuller understanding of the inexhaustible richness of the real. Saviani (2012) highlights that knowledge is not produced from an immediate reflection of reality; however, the syncretic and relatively immediate capture of reality is the starting point for the knowledge process. After this initial syncretic capture of reality, knowledge moves on to be analyzed in a conceptual manner. The analytical phase of this movement towards concrete reality is characterized by the work with abstractions, which creates the impression that thought is moving away from reality and losing itself in meaningless speculations. However, it is a path that leads to an approximation with concrete reality by means of a momentary detachment, or rather, an overcoming of the fusion between thought and action that occurs in everyday practice. This is what Marx does, for example, in the first chapter of *Capital*, in which he analyzes commodities by decomposing them into use value and exchange value, reaching abstractions so high that they generate the impression that thought has become disconnected from the concreteness of capital as a concrete social reality. But this analytical and abstract phase is transcended by the movement to build a theoretical synthesis in which the concrete will be understood in its richness of relations and determinations. In the words of Saviani (2012, p. 61-62):

The global movement of knowledge comprises two moments. It starts from the empirical, that is, from the object as it presents itself to immediate observation, as it is figured in intuition. At this first moment, the object is captured in a syncretic, chaotic vision where it is not clear how it is constituted. It then appears in the form of a confused whole, therefore, as a problem that needs to be solved. Starting from this first representation of the object, one arrives, by means of analysis, to the concepts, the abstractions, and the simplest determinations. Once this point is reached, it is necessary to follow the inverse path (second moment), arriving, through synthesis, once again at the object, no longer understood as a "chaotic representation of a whole", but as "a rich totality of determinations and numerous relations".

For historical-critical pedagogy, the question of objectivity is presented in an opposite way to that conceived by hegemonic pedagogies. For this pedagogical theory, objectivity, before being a characteristic of knowledge, is a characteristic of being itself. In relation to knowledge, objectivity refers to its ability to capture, as faithfully as possible, the processes existing in reality. According to Saviani (2008), objectivity is a gnosiological issue, i.e., it deals with gauging the correspondence between knowledge and reality.

The author also reminds us that objectivity is not equivalent to neutrality and that, in this way, the latter concerns the ideological question. At the same time, this does not mean that the appropriation of knowledge by a particular group implies that there is no objectivity regarding this knowledge. There is a relatively frequent defense, on the part of the left, of the necessary disassociation from a knowledge appropriated by the bourgeoisie, as if it were a knowledge that automatically posed a danger or was of no interest to the working class. What must be emphasized is that this knowledge is appropriated by the ruling class and that access to it by the working class is made difficult and/or impossible. This knowledge is not of exclusive interest to the bourgeois, and to insist on this conception is a major error since, in many cases, when it is truly universal, it refers to the broader human dimension, which goes beyond the class sub-division that has marked our history until now.

This knowledge is produced by humanity and, as such, it synthesizes essential moments of human history; therefore, it is not limited to a particular group. This is where it is necessary to understand the contradictory relationship between knowledge and ideology. This relationship takes place in the class position of individuals, which is a result of the very process in which we are inserted; in this way, it concerns both the possibilities of classes and those linked to the internal historical development of scientific thought.

Addressing the issue of knowledge's objectivity does not mean to assume that it is immutable or that we affirm the existence of an absolute truth. According to Engels (2015), to affirm the objectivity of knowledge is to take a position that does not make room for relativism and subjectivism. Thus, the way in which human

reason seeks to intellectually appropriate the world is through successive approaches to the objective and effective understanding of reality, albeit without ever exhausting it completely. Accordingly, from the perspective of historical-dialectical materialism, knowledge should be understood as a process that has an objectivity, and is not fixed, unchangeable, unquestionable or insurmountable

## The constitution of universal values and the classic

In the previous topic we briefly explained the conception that underlies the concept of classic, by means of counterpointing the hegemonic conception of knowledge and the ideal of knowledge in historical-critical pedagogy. In this topic we will establish relations between the construction of universal values and the classic. As such, our starting point is the definition of this concept as postulated by historical-critical pedagogy. According to the most commonly used definition,

The classic is not to be confused with the traditional, nor is it necessarily opposed to the modern, much less to the current. The classic is that which is established as fundamental, as essential. It can, therefore, be a useful criterion for selecting the contents of pedagogical work (Saviani, 2008, p. 13-14).

The classic, as stated in the quote above, has a validity that is independent of geography, and is not limited to a specific culture. Understanding the classic as a universal value does not mean to disregard knowledge related to specific cultures, or even popular knowledge. We view the process of humanity's historical development as being deeply contradictory and heterogeneous, occurring by means of forward and backward movements. This means that throughout the course of human history, not only in capitalist society, the production of goods, whether material or not, has been at the expense of a large part of humanity.

Besides situating the classic as a universal value, it is necessary to understand it from a perspective that considers it as human production, that is, as the fruit of human activity. Thus, in the process of fulfilling needs and the consequent production of means and objects to satisfy them, the human being, through processes of objectification and appropriation, objectifies material and non-material products; among the latter are some more elaborate or elevated objectifications, as in the cases of science, art and philosophy.

If we reflect on the question of knowledge, we realize that much of the knowledge that we appropriate today was produced under historical conditions that were not favorable to much of the humanity that lived at that moment in time (think of the Greek and Roman societies, to cite with the most common examples). Many cultures and various potential knowledges were, in a way, lost in this process, which does not imply indifference to these losses, but rather that we are aware of the contradiction and exploitation that took place and still takes place in the production of these objectifications.

Therefore, the recognition of the contradictory and exploitative character of this process allows us to elucidate certain aspects that permeate the production of knowledge. A first point that we must clarify is that in this process there were losses of particular cultures and, even, of entire civilizations. The second point concerns the transparency in relation to how the production process of the knowledge that we appropriate today occurred, which significantly helps us understand the exploitative situation in which we live. The third and last point concerns the fundamental need for the working class to also incorporate this knowledge, which is mostly appropriated by members of the dominant class, so that we can become aware of our situation and, potentially, overcome it. According to Duarte (2017, p. 109)

In this sense, defending the socialization of objective knowledge about natural and social reality does not mean naivety in relation to history, but rather the recognition that there are achievements that must be preserved. One of these achievements to be preserved by the school is the commitment to the truth. The Earth is not at the center of the universe. The Homo Sapien species emerged from a long process of life's spontaneous evolution. Society is the result of human activities and not of some superior or transcendent force or will. Class struggle exists objectively and is not an invention of socialists.

This implies that a product that emerged in an earlier society may have a richer essence in terms of human development when compared to today's society. In the same way, a product that emerges in the current historical context does not necessarily have a higher value than products from previous societies. Take Shakespeare, for example. In terms of the history of humankind present in his works, the richness surpasses both the artists and works that were his contemporaries, as well as current ones.

However, viewing the classic as a production of human activity, albeit permeated by contradictions, still does not justify the choice of a particular knowledge as classic. Its characterization as human production

only justifies the question of the classic having a material basis. It is still necessary to point out that, even within the production process of this content, it is limited to certain subjective and objective aspects. This point can be explained by the relationship between teleology and causality, that is, between necessity and freedom.

Lukács (2013) highlights that, in the process of objectification, individuals mentally pre-configure the objects they want to produce. In this way, the activity of work can only be defined as such to the extent that it presupposes an awareness of purpose; therefore, the object of work exists ideally, in the mind of the individual, before its explicitness. According to the author: "Work can only be produced as a teleological act [...]" (Lukács, 1982, p. 39)<sup>3</sup>.

According to the Hungarian philosopher (Lukács, 2013), teleology can only acquire materiality when it is expressed as the implementation of a certain end, that is, when it becomes effective as an activity to achieve the purpose. This means that, from the act of purpose, consciousness initiates the teleological process. The individual, when defining nature as the object of a conscious action, objectifies a now humanized nature, since it becomes part of a posited causality; that is, as a result of the work activity; and, within certain historical-social circumstances, the basis for the development of human beings is formed. Therefore, the notion of posited causality relates to a causality that has been set in motion by the mental anticipation of an object already possessing human characteristics. It is precisely the relationship between the teleological setting and the causality of labor that enables the emergence of the social being and the consequent human universalization.

From the relationship between teleology and causality we can apprehend that the process of constituting classic content has a subjective and an objective basis. To affirm that this process has a subjective basis does not imply conceiving that this content occurs in a wholly subjective way, entirely dependent on the will of individuals. In the same way, affirming the objective aspect does not imply that the classic imposes itself as an automatic consequence of historical development. The highlighting of the relationship between teleology and causality is done to the extent that it is fundamental to understand what it means to affirm the classic as a product of human activity and, as such, embedded in historical praxis. Marx (2011a, p. 25), summarizes this aspect as follows: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."

To understand this relationship between objective and subjective in the formation of values, as well as understanding their sociohistorical nature, it is also necessary to highlight the ontological necessity in the creation of values. In this way, in the process of value creation, the human being, when looking for ways to satisfy his or her needs (not necessarily material), is faced with choices among alternatives to reach a certain end. In these choices, a valuation is implicit, a choice of something that is deemed to have greater potential to facilitate the activity in a certain direction. In addition to the act of valuation, it should be added that values, taken in themselves, have an objective reality; in the words of Heller (2008, p. 16), value is: "[...] independent of individuals' evaluations, but not of men's activity, for it is the expression and result of social relations and situations. It is, therefore, an ontological necessity, which presupposes a social objectivity. In this way,

In the act of the alternative is also necessarily contained the choice between what has value and what is contrary to value; we therefore have, by ontological necessity, both the possibility of choosing what is contrary to value and the possibility of making a mistake, even while subjectively choosing what is of value. (Lukács, 2012, p. 409).

If, at the beginning of humankind's development process, the choice between alternatives was more linked to a practical utility, throughout the development of humanity, this choice between alternatives has increasingly demanded a correct understanding of reality and the knowledge involved in this process. It is not, therefore, a purely subjective value since the objective criterion for determining value is conditioned by the awareness of the individuals involved in the social practice and, moreover, the identification of the object's characteristics that make it suitable for use as a means of action is a mental process of analysis. The process of choosing value is always subjective and objective, universal and singular, because it is embedded in human actions.

We also need to reiterate that the existence of the classic is not enough, because individuals need to develop - and this also includes their sense organs - so that they can appropriate classic content. Therefore, the human being needs to appropriate "[...] each of his 'human' relations to the world - seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, observing, experiencing, wanting, acting, loving [...]" and make of these

<sup>3</sup>"El trabajo no puede producirse sino como acto teleológico [...]".

aptitudes “[...] organs of his individuality” (Marx, 2015, p. 349). The relationship between production and consumption as presented by Marx (2011b) is fundamental to understanding the formative process of human needs. Besides the fact that there is no production without consumers, the needs of consumers are determined by production. Hence, we can think of school education as a demand-generating process, which aims to build increasingly higher needs in the individual (Duarte, 2016).

It is within the relationships explained above that values are constituted. Human beings produce objects to satisfy needs and the objects that are produced, whether material or non-material, constitute use values. This means that there is something in the use value that has a usefulness, which has as a characteristic and purpose the satisfaction of needs. Therefore, values are constituted from the activity of labor and so originate in the fundamental ontological activity of man. More specifically, values arise from the production of the means employed in the activity of obtaining what human beings need for their subsistence. It is from this primary activity of producing instruments that the possibility for the development of values is founded.

Explaining that these values are formed and constituted implies discussing how this preservation occurs. Heller (2008), points out that even when the forms of subsistence are modified, the values remain. When there are changes to the structure of society, as in the case of the transition to capitalist society, there are changes to the non-economic structures. In addition, the form of values depends on the constitution of the society in which they are constructed. At this point we should highlight the issue concerning the validity of the values produced throughout the development of the human race. According to Lukács (2012, p. 413-414), in the course of the human race's historical development, the “[...] authentic values [...]” undergo an eventual disappearance. However, this disappearance is not complete, as it is also subject to the historical development of the human race. This incomplete disappearance can be understood if we think of situations in which values emerge that society is not yet able to incorporate more effectively into its practices, thereby keeping them at the margins of major social processes. In this sense, we could say that their disappearance is relative.

The question of preserving values and their potential disappearance can be exemplified by reflecting on art. Art has in its essence an objective value, which goes beyond an individual subjectivism of appreciating or not appreciating a particular work. Kosik (1976) argues that the greatness of a work of art cannot be measured only by its reception in its period of composition. The relationship between value and the classic helps us understand that it does not mean that artistic value must be assigned by a specialized critic. The value is intrinsic to the artistic object, even if its identification is not an automatic or even immediate process. A work of art has the feature of being a constitutive element of its time, not reduced to a simple historical conditioning, but the bearer of an authentic historicity. In this way, the effectiveness of the work of art is not attributed by a physical characteristic of the work itself, but by its ability to synthesize human experiences and revive them for each new human generation.

In this sense, the value category helps us to understand why great classic works stand out in periods other than those in which they were created. Values can thus be preserved in objectifications, as is the case of Homer's, Shakespeare's, Goethe's, Balzac's or Machado de Assis' works. In analyzing the question of value, we clearly see that value is not something continuous and that, as such, it is always subject to the relationship between reality and possibility.

Therefore, value is that which defines the human being, and makes culture expand, enrich and develop. In other words, everything that contributes to the development of objectification spheres. Values contain characteristics of the human race that have the potential to promote the explicitness and development of the human essence.

All human activity is oriented to the production of value. However, in capitalist society this production is accompanied by the phenomenon of alienation. This means that the highest values produced by the human race are denied to most individuals. With capitalist society came the possibility of a universalization of culture, even if under alienating conditions. Before capitalist society there was no possibility for a universal culture.

As stated above, we believe the question of the classic is related to universal values. To this end, the category of universality needs to be properly understood in order to advance the discussion. We need to realize that the development of human needs and abilities, such as art, science, and philosophy, contributes to the development of the human race's universality. The point is that the process of this universalization does not coincide with the universalization of the individual. On the contrary, the universalization of

humankind can occur in a society in which individuals become extremely unilateral. This is the case in capitalist society where universalization occurs through the globalization of economic relations in which the exchange value of commodities becomes the link that unites all people. It is a one-dimensional universalization which, although it creates the presuppositions of free and universal individuality, prevents the development of this kind of individuality in most circumstances. In the words of Márkus (2015, p. 115-116):

Transcending alienation means the abolition of this counterpoint between essence and human existence - that is, the creation of the conditions for a historical development that encloses the inverse and antagonistic relationship between the richness and multilaterality of social life and the limitation and unidimensionality of the life of individuals. The end of alienation, therefore, means the creation of social conditions in which it will be possible to judge the overall degree of development in society and human progress by the degree of individual development, when the universality and freedom of the human race will be expressed directly in the free and multilateral life of men.

Consequently, overcoming this alienating form of social relations' universalization and building rich modes of universalizing culture and life is indispensable so that each person, in all the diversity of life and culture forms, is truly an active representative of the material and spiritual wealth of the human race.

### **Educational work in the preservation of values**

We will address the issue of educational work as a fundamental process in the preservation of values, considered in the context of school education. According to Saviani (2008, p. 13), "[...] educational work is the act of directly and intentionally producing in each individual the humanity that is historically and collectively produced by all men". Educational work concerns the reproduction in individuals of the human production objectified in culture. It is the process of intentional humanization of individuals, and of human education.

Educational work is defined as intentional in the sense that it presupposes intentionality on the part of the one who teaches. In other words, it presupposes that the teacher has a command of both the content and the best ways to achieve this end. An important aspect of this issue is the discussion about teacher training, which, in addition to the alienation process that encompasses all of society, is also found in a process of precariousness, from which the classics from the various areas of knowledge and the pedagogical area itself are often absent.

The successful accomplishment of educational work guarantees, in a direct and intentional way, the ample permanence of classic content during the course of the human race's development, insofar as this content can be appropriated and incorporated into the individuality of the subject. Moreover, the school, by teaching this content, opens up the possibility of a fuller objective and subjective development of the individual. Thus, the more the individual appropriates the values preserved in this classic content, the greater are the possibilities that his/her development will reach levels close to the maximum potential of the human essence created by social practice.

A very important aspect in order for educational work to develop as fully as possible is the curriculum. Accordingly, it is possible to view the curriculum as an instrument that guides educational work. As already highlighted by Saviani (2008), the classic can be a good criterion for choosing the core content that should be part of the school curriculum. In this way, to define a curriculum, it is necessary to clarify the content that will comprise it. Defining the fundamentals of the concept of classic provides more inputs for discussion on curriculum formulation, so that the content that should be part of it is not treated as a random element.

In relation to the argument that classic knowledge should be part of the curriculum and, consequently, of educational work, certain caveats generally refer to the possible close connection of this knowledge to reality and to what it might provide in terms of the individual's education. In other words, they are basically reflections and reservations about the usefulness of this knowledge. It should be noted that, as mentioned above, classic texts are closely related to reality; however, this relationship does not occur in an explicit and immediate way. A superficial analysis may give the impression that it is not linked to reality.

In the same way that its relationship with reality is not immediately perceived, what this knowledge provides to the individual's education is often not perceived in an instantaneous way either. We believe that one of the most important influences of the classics in the education of individuals lies in the broadening of their world view, insofar as this change in the world conception is only possible through the appropriation



of higher knowledge. Therefore, the command of classic knowledge in science, art and philosophy is not an end in itself. Gramsci (1982, p. 129, 130), states that

The scientific ideas the children learnt conflicted with the magical conception of the world and nature which they absorbed from an environment steeped in folklore; while the idea of civic rights and duties conflicted with tendencies towards individualistic and localistic barbarism – another dimension of folklore.

As a result, educational work contributes to surpassing transcendental and individualistic conceptions of the world. However, this transformation is not immediate, that is, it is not through simple contact that a change in the individual's conception of the world will occur and, likewise, the change does not always occur consciously. Developing the individualization of the worldview is connected to the relationships in which the individual is inserted. Hence the importance of the transmission and appropriation of classic knowledge as content that condenses rich human experiences.

We can extend this reflection on the conception of the world to the issue of creativity. There is a widespread interpretation of the classic as something that does not favor the free development of the individual's creativity, or rather, as something that prevents the development of his or her creative potential. Contrary to this position, we consider that the appropriation of this content is precisely what enables the development of creativity and originality. As such, it is only when the individual appropriates the richest of what has already been produced by humanity that the possibility for developing new and original knowledge opens up. Saccomani (2016, p. 189) addresses this issue in a very synthetic manner by stating that "[...] creativity is taught when the student is led to appropriate the synthesis of human experience accumulated in scientific, artistic, and philosophical knowledge [...]". Therefore, creativity should not be construed as a natural, spontaneous process, but rather as a constituent part of the process of appropriating classic knowledge.

Finally, for educational work to occur in a fully effective way it is important that there is a national system (Saviani, 2013) that defines what should be taught. Similarly, clarity is needed regarding the goals of the school as an institution whose specificity is the socialization of systematized knowledge, as well as certainty about the goals of a national education system. For both objectives to be achieved, it is necessary to build a national education system that is public, free and secular, which guarantees all people the conditions for the adequate appropriation of the classics in science, arts and philosophy.

## Conclusion

The classic, as understood here, is not founded on relativistic conceptions, just as it is not possible to interpret it within rigid and unalterable conceptions. It is necessary to view it as a product of human activity and, in this sense, endowed with contradictions that permeate the historical development of humanity.

If, on the one hand, it is necessary that school education provides access to the most essential knowledge historically produced by humanity, on the other, it is essential to elucidate the contradictory processes within which the production of this knowledge takes place. By proceeding in this way, overcoming the antinomy between relativism and dogmatism, we will be in a position to advance towards a transcendence by incorporating the most developed human productions, since without them the arduous task of constructing a societal alternative beyond alienation and capital is made extremely difficult.

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