

# **“Thought of the outside”, knowledge and thought in education: conversations with Michel Foucault**

Cintya Regina Ribeiro

*University of Sao Paulo*

## **Abstract**

This study aims to discuss the supposed virtuous constitution of education and knowledge originated from a certain cultural heritage of Western modernity. The study's problematic is anchored in the diffuse but insistent question which echoes in the educational field: “what is the act of thinking in education in contemporary times?”. Studying the current conditions of thought as a problem of educational research calls into question the historical relationship between knowledge and reflective thinking, and it forces the confrontation of certain pedagogical amalgams dear to the modern educational field. Such confrontation takes place in the company of the thinkers Michel Foucault and Friedrich Nietzsche, given the strategic importance of their writings, particularly about language, the production of truth and their implications for the ways of knowing and thinking. I attempt to operate a critique of the language toward a critique of the thought in education, in the key of an ethical and political problematization. In this work, such analytical platform configures itself with Michel Foucault's discussions – both in relation to the matter of the thought of the outside, as developed by Maurice Blanchot, and the thought of difference, as formulated by Gilles Deleuze. I suggest that the exploration of this debate can be an exercise of exteriority or of differential thinking in the game with the knowledge and the reflective thinking present in the educational field – both in the ambit of school everyday pedagogical practices and in the field of the production of educational research.

## **Keywords**

Language – Thought of the outside – Reflective thinking – Thought of difference – Educational knowledge.

### **Contact:**

Cintya Regina Ribeiro  
Faculdade de Educação da USP  
Departamento de Filosofia da Educação  
e Ciências da Educação  
Av. da Universidade, 308  
05508-040 São Paulo /SP  
Email: [cintyaribeiro@usp.br](mailto:cintyaribeiro@usp.br)

# **“Pensamento do fora”, conhecimento e pensamento em educação: conversações com Michel Foucault**

Cintya Regina Ribeiro

University of Sao Paulo

## **Resumo**

*O presente trabalho visa problematizar a suposta constituição virtuosa entre educação e conhecimento oriunda de certa herança cultural da modernidade ocidental. A problemática ancora-se na indagação difusa, porém insistente, a ecoar no campo educacional: “o que é o ato do pensar, em educação, na contemporaneidade?”. A tomada das condições atuais do pensamento como um problema de pesquisa educacional coloca em questão a histórica articulação entre conhecimento e pensamento reflexivo, obrigando ao confronto de certos amálgamas pedagógicos caros ao campo educacional moderno. Tal enfrentamento se realiza na companhia dos pensadores Michel Foucault e Friedrich Nietzsche, dada a relevância estratégica de suas produções, particularmente acerca da linguagem, da produção da verdade e de suas implicações nos modos de conhecer e pensar. Busca-se operacionalizar uma crítica da linguagem em direção a uma crítica do pensamento em educação, na chave de uma problematização ético-política. Nesse trabalho, tal plataforma analítica configura-se a partir das discussões de Michel Foucault – tanto em relação à questão do pensamento do fora, tal como elaborada por Maurice Blanchot, como em relação ao pensamento da diferença, tal como formulado por Gilles Deleuze. Sugerimos que a exploração desse debate possa atuar como um exercício de exterioridade ou de pensamento diferencial no jogo com o conhecimento e com o pensamento reflexivo presentes no campo educacional – seja no âmbito dos fazeres pedagógicos cotidianos da escola, seja no campo da produção da pesquisa educacional.*

## **Palavras-chave**

*Linguagem – Pensamento do fora – Pensamento reflexivo – Pensamento da diferença – Conhecimento educacional.*

### **Correspondência:**

**Cintya Regina Ribeiro**

**Faculdade de Educação da USP**

**Departamento de Filosofia da Educação**

**e Ciências da Educação**

**Av. da Universidade, 308**

**05508-040 São Paulo /SP**

**Email: cintyaribeiro@usp.br**

Marked by the age of reason, a certain cultural heritage of Western modernity has posited a virtuous correlation between education and knowledge. According to such postulate, this synchronism has humanistic values for ballast of virtue. In turn, such humanistic values back the project of modern reason, especially in relation to its horizon of civilization.

This work is situated in a problematization key of this supposedly virtuous constitution of education and knowledge. From a genealogical perspective, I aim to explain the character of contingency of such binomial in an effort to denaturalize the conditions of its fulfillment.

This analytical undertaking is justified by the emergence of certain situations at the present time that have been manifested in the form of a fuzzy but insistent question that has echoed in the educational field: *what is the act of thinking in education in contemporary times?*

The very conditions that have called forth the emergence of the question and that make it possible to state it insert us in the problematic scene in which we are inevitably involved. Inquiring about the contemporary conditions of thinking or, more precisely, taking the current conditions of thought as a problem of educational research, is not an analytical procedure guided merely by an epistemological choice. Rather, in my view, such gesture refers to an ethical-political confrontation.

The relentlessness of the problem manifests itself because the emergence and urgency of the question let us glimpse a fraying horizon of what we have historically legitimized as *thought* or qualified as the act of thinking. This situation forces us to resort to other modes of thought, permeable to what is yet to come, enabling us to confront the empire of what has conventionally been defined as thought and thinkable.

Anchored in humanistic values, a modern platform that establishes an alliance between education and knowledge has for

operative principle the inseparability of *knowledge* and *reflective thinking*. Note that the question about the contemporary conditions of thinking forces us to confront certain pedagogical amalgams dear to the modern educational field. Such amalgams often reverberate historically in a naturalized and consensual way, updating themselves tirelessly as if they worked like “myths of origin.”

For this confrontation, I have sought the company of the thinkers Michel Foucault and Friedrich Nietzsche, given the strategic importance of their productions, particularly about language and its implications for the ways of knowing and thinking.

From the start, in a historical emphasis, I have aimed to focus on the effect that the classical correlation between education and knowledge has produced in the educational field, focusing on the problem of thought. From this platform and with an emphasis on ethics and politics, I have sought to operationalize the critique of language – in the Nietzschean and Foucauldian keys – towards a critique of thought in education. Such undertaking has aimed at promoting opportunities for other modes of thought, both within the school everyday pedagogical practices and in the production of educational research.

Considering both of these objectives, I propose a route in three stages: 1) In the first one, I point out how the vectors of knowledge and reflective thought present themselves as organizers of modern education, both in the mainstay of the Enlightenment tradition and in the universe of critical pedagogies, especially in the context of curriculum theories; 2) in a second motion, I propose to qualify and to problematize the territory of the conditions of thought in contemporary times in the wake of Foucault and Nietzsche. With such thinkers I hold that the acts of knowing and thinking are language operations involved with ethical-political effects; 3) finally, I seek to highlight the peculiar formulation of the “thought of the outside” in the Foucauldian legacy as well as

its articulations with the production of Gilles Deleuze on the “thought of difference.” I suggest that such exploration can act as an exercise of differential thinking in the interplay with the reflective thinking present in the educational field.

### **Education and knowledge: thought as an educational problem**

In addressing the specificity of the genealogical analysis, Foucault (1998a) states that a given historical *emergence* “is not the necessary emergence of what had long been prepared in advance; rather, it is the scene in which forces are in danger and confront one another, in which they can triumph or be confiscated”(p. 32).

From this perspective, when recalling the educational principle that displays the categories of knowledge and reflective thought in a single hinge, I must ask: under what historical conditions does such conceptual interplay materialize as a pedagogical truth? What discursive forces triumph during the emergence of such modern educational truth that echoes in contemporary times?

In other words, one question about thinking requires catching the scene of the historical conditions that engendered the formulation of the problem of knowledge and particularly of reflective thought, raising them as privileged objects of attention in the education field, both in their scientific and philosophical dimensions.

Thus, we propose a brief approach to the world of educational research, highlighting the discussions of curriculum theories, particularly in their critical strands of thought. Such a cut is justified by the fact that the critical theories of the school curriculum – whose assumptions have been organized since the 1960s – have made explicit the choice of the question of knowledge as an investigative focus.

Tomaz Tadeu da Silva (2002), reference author for these studies, notes that “the

central question that serves as a backdrop for any theory of the curriculum is to know what knowledge should be taught” (p. 14). Any curriculum problematizations would be above all tentative answers to urgent needs of their own time. The ongoing demands here imply a pedagogical action triggered by two concerns: the legitimacy of the knowledge to be taught and the identifying features, modes of subjectification that are aspired to and are configured in the process of production, circulation and legitimation of such knowledge.

Aligned to the Foucauldian perspective among others, Silva (2001) argues that “the critical tradition understood long ago that the curriculum is at the center of the educational relationship, that the curriculum embodies the nexuses between knowledge, power and identity” (p. 10).

As a result, the production and validation of school knowledge, as well as the pedagogical investment in the methodologies of the acts of knowing, have a political-strategic character. Both actions, through the curriculum, would operate as vectors for the production of modes of subjectification and thus of forms of social lives.

Activated in this curriculum arena, knowledge and subjectification become effects of power relations. The curriculum is produced as a machinery of knowledge, powers, and identities.

One of the strands of the critical tradition can highlight the possible dual character of educational action. On the one hand, the strength of the curriculum as a place of reproduction of social relations, especially in the maintenance of the conditions of social inequality present in the capitalistic economic model, is recognized. On the other hand, the force of resistance of education, in order to overcome this social reproductivism, is recognized. Here, the resilience capacity would assert itself in that the privileged work of formation of critical thinking is assigned to the pedagogical sphere via curricular action, considering the processes

of subject emancipation and of production of other conditions of social existence. Therefore, conservation and resistance would be expressions of (re)production of social relations. For such strand of thought, the movements of social relations and the ways of dealing with thought in pedagogical practices would imply themselves dialectically.

Despite the political-progressive vector of critical theories, it is essential to rip their discursive composition in order to lead to the limit the problematization of the thought that I have proposed.

The appearance or the wording of the question of resistance as an object went to the educational field emerges against a backdrop of discursive forces that have the ballast of an ontology of the subject and of the truth.

In a problematizing study of the critical educational approaches, the researcher Maria Manuela Garcia (2002) points out that, for such discourses, “enlightenment, by converting the eyes and minds, is a condition of redemption and salvation” (p. 88). Such a salvationist concept of education suggests a moralizing implication, both in the individual and social dimensions.

Let us highlight some discursive vectors that inform and shape the critical educational heritage. From the start, the principle of enlightenment as an organizer of human life, that is, the investment in the act of knowing as a condition of enlightenment, liberation, emancipation of human beings in the face of the limits of their existence. The symbolism of enlightenment is a lapidary expression of clarification.

Questioning the incidence of the use of visual metaphors in the way, since the Enlightenment program, modern epistemologies have linked this possibility of access to the truth of things, the researcher Alfredo Veiga-Neto (2002) notes:

Enlightenment fostered the hope of a golden privileged perspective, the pers-

pective of the perspectives, from which the world can be explained and with which one can reach the Truth or – in a probabilistic version – very close to this Truth. (p. 28)

The liberation or emancipation by knowledge is anchored in an unconditional bet on the possibility of man’s encounter with the truth, having reason as a compass. For modern education, this principle yields the following developments: on the one hand, the certainty of an ontological subject, the consciousness founded on reason, the assumption of a cognitive or epistemological being who is rich in educational-training potential; on the other hand, truth as a possibility, a destiny to be achieved through the work of enlightenment supported by the education of reason.

It is in this ingenuity that reflective thought, supposedly an expression of a supposed reason, produces the act of knowing – the celebrated encounter of the subject with the truth. Thus, both in the wake of the Enlightenment tradition and the historical-critical tradition, the pedagogical investment in the reason makes reflective thought one of the key parts of educational technologies in contemporary times. The assumption of reflective thought as a virtuous pedagogical truth is the object of this work.

### **Reflexivity and exteriority of thought: some considerations**

The problematization of thought as reflection derives from a larger critique, namely the question of knowledge as a ballast of modern culture. Let us thus enter this critical horizon.

Foucault’s considerations on the issue of knowledge and truth find ethical inspiration in Nietzsche’s work. In one of his passages about the problem of knowledge, Nietzsche (2008) provokes:

What arbitrary transferences! How far flown beyond the canon of certainty have we flown! [...] We believe that we know something about the things themselves when we talk about trees, colors, snow and flowers, and yet we possess nothing but metaphors for things which do not correspond in the slightest to the original entities. [...] truths are illusions that are no longer remembered as being illusions, metaphors that have become worn and stripped of their sensuous force, coins that have lost their design and are now considered only as metal and no longer as coins. (p. 55-56)

The provocation of the German philosopher brings to light crucial problems of modern thought. Let us consider particularly two foci: the first one refers to the condition of arbitrariness of language, giving the knowledge and therefore the production of truth an arbitrary character too. The second focus refers to the peculiarity of modern Western culture, with the act of “forgetting” or suspending the linguistic process of valuing values. This cultural operation performed in the language by omitting the arbitrary process of valuation and definition of what is true and false gives a certainty status to such illusionism of the truth. This arbitrary nature of language gives materiality to culture by inventing the fabric of social values.

Expliciting this process of valuation of values, Nietzsche establishes first a critique of modern culture, insofar as such culture is available as a cornerstone of the foundation and support of life forms that conduct themselves as powerless. However, beyond this time target, the extemporaneity of a radical critique of language unfolds, since this is the very machinery that establishes this valuation plant.

It follows that there would be no exemptions in the ways of knowing and postulating the truth. Inspired by the untimely philosopher, Foucault (1999a) adds:

Knowledge is always a certain strategic relation in which man is placed. This strategic relation is what will define the effect of knowledge; that's why it would be completely contradictory to imagine knowledge that was not by nature partial, oblique, perspectival. The perspectival character of knowledge derives not from human nature but always from the polemical and strategic character of knowledge. One can speak of the perspectival character of knowledge because there is a battle, and knowledge is the result of this battle. (p. 25)

In the criticism above, knowledge is not the expression of adhesion or continuity among subjects, words and things. As a human invention, knowledge is the result of combat, the effect of struggles driven by what Nietzsche (1998, 2001, 2008) qualifies as “will to truth” – the motto continuum of power relations.

According to the author, the truth of knowledge would be a contingent effect of relations of forces in dispute – a sort of conflict between truths in contention for the status of truth. In the Foucauldian sense, knowledge as conflict would produce effects of truth. Because of their contingent nature, such effects would become privileged objects of problematization of the subjects in their topicality.

If, in relation to knowledge, its perspectival status refers to the historical contingency, its strategic willingness is closely linked to the question of power. In other words, historical configurations strategically arrange different vectors of forces, i.e., the multiple power relations in which men are placed. These articulations give knowledge, or, more specifically, these effects of truth, their political implication.

Thus, the critique of modern Western culture is above all political, because it puts into question the work genealogically orchestrated by language and power. Such machinery is on the basis of the process of producing knowledge and of ballasting and naturalizing the truth.

Such inflections inevitably pulverize the categories of subject and truth as ontological references for the organization of social life. The root of these deconstructions is the critique of the sovereignty of reason, an attitude which, for pointing out the irreducibly historical character of the virtue of rationality, makes explicit the worldly genealogy of this value.

Given these implications, the understanding of the acts of thought also requires analytical displacement. I insist that the critique of reflective thinking derives from the critique of the sovereignty of Western culture. Thought as a conscious reflective act is presented in a specular way – a kind of expressive form of reason. I propose to take it now as an unequivocal effect of the arbitrariness plotted in the contingencies of language and power.

Heir to the untimely Nietzsche, Foucault (1997, 1999a, 1999b) updates the critique of this privileged place that the modern Western culture has reserved for reflective thinking, exposing its status as a technology of power contemporarily involved in the conduct of forms of life.

In discussing the emergence of man as an object of the humanities, the thinker forges unusual correlations between language and thought. Let us highlight a strategic moment in which the author invokes relations between the Cartesian “*cogito*” and what he takes as the unthinkable:

Wasn't it also on the basis of error, illusion, dream and madness, all the experiences of the unaccounted-for thought that Descartes discovered the impossibility of there not being thoughts – to such effect that the thought of the ill-thought, of the non-true, of the chimerical, of the purely imaginary, emerged as the possible locus and the primary irrefutable proof of all these experiences? (Foucault, 1999b, p. 446)

Let us consider the uniqueness of this argument: the emergence of the “*cogito*” derives

exactly from the conditions of possibility of a wandering thought. The irrefutable evidence of the “I think” is a result of the wandering of thought, and not a supposed *a priori* rationality. It is the turbulence of errant thinking that engenders the certainty of the punctual nature of reason.

This image suggests the existence of an imponderable space of thought as the articulator of its own conditions of thought. Foucault (1999b) calls this imponderability, this chance of thought, “the unthinkable”. And he adds:

Man has not been able to describe himself as a configuration in the episteme without thought at the same time discovering, both in itself and outside itself, at its borders yet also in its very warp and woof, an element of darkness, an apparently inert density in which it is embedded, an unthought which it contains entirely, yet in which it is also caught. (p. 450)

So, the darkness of thought is its own production condition. Because it brings in itself the unthought, thought keeps its own unthinkable. The interplay of exteriority that is stated here is exciting. The unthought is not located inside man, it is not the manifestation or expression of the interiority of a supposed ontological subject. On the contrary, the unthought, the unthinkable of thought, is a force coming from the exteriority, from the outside of man.

Foucault (2001) borrows from the writer Maurice Blanchot such seizure of the exteriority of language, then called a thought from the exterior or a thought of the outside:

The thought that stands outside subjectivity, setting its limits from without. [...] A thought that, in relation to the interiority of our philosophical reflection and the positivity of our knowledge constitutes what in a phrase we might call “the thought of the outside”. (p. 222)

The displacement of language and thought to this de-subjectified place of exteriority affronts the security of reflective centrality as a condition of mature thinking. By radically transgressing the assumptions of modernity in relation to the sovereignty of the subject, of reason and of their immanent policies of truth, this situation would potentiate man's encounters with other possibilities of language, and thus other existences to be forged. Foucault (1999b) also says:

The *cogito* does not lead to an affirmation of being, but it does lead to a whole series of questions concerned with being: What must I be, I who think and who am my thought, in order to be what I do not think, in order for my thought to be what I am not? What is this being, then, that shimmers and, as it were, glitters in the opening of the *cogito*, yet is not sovereignly given in it and by it? (p. 448)

In a radical twist in relation to the modern truth, the statement suggests that the *cogito* does not refer to the closure of the certainty of the being, but, instead, it is the occasion of opening the thought to the questions, forcing it to move towards its "outside". It is necessary to point out that such "exteriority", such condition of the outside of thought, is not as a place of exemption in relation to power. Rather, it is the very condition of facing power with another language that singles out its exteriority.

From this perspective, the exercise of thinking would not be confused with reflective thinking, as the modern tradition postulates, but it would exist exactly in this possibility of creating a unique thinking and thus another language.

This way of taking the thought produces intense reverberations on the horizon of knowledge. If the language of knowing invests in reflection as a condition for formatting and seizing oneself and the world, such technology necessarily produces

the conformation of the limits of things, circumscribing the territories of the thinkable.

Captured linguistically and politically, and in the perspective of a critique of the truth, knowledge would be nothing more than an effect of the articulation of networks of knowledge and power that, materialized in culture, produce and conduct life forms qualified as virtuous.

In the Nietzschean-Foucauldian key, thought would not fit the peaceful condition of guardian of modern culture and values, making reverberate the compliance of man with the supposed ontologies of the world and himself. Refractory to any form of complacency in the face of the conditions of living, thought would have a highly combative character: a vector of force that would be continuous in the power interplay, producing the transgression of the thinkable as an unconditional gesture of resistance.

The radical nature of the experiment of thinking would be in a strategic fold in the plan of our questions and our positions towards life: first, the refusal of a paradoxically docile way of questioning, which remains oblivious to the need to confront the naturalization of the world; then the investment in the act of questioning the linguistic conditions of production of this world, and especially of the production of ourselves in this world.

Such limit-experiment is expressed by Foucault (1998b) in the following passage:

[...] The only kind of curiosity that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the kind of curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself. After all, what would be the value of passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeable and not, in one way or another in the knower's straying afield of himself? There are times in one's life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks,



and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. (p. 13)

In this philosophy as an attitude, the challenge of living affirmatively lies in the courage of this clash in the vectors of knowledge-power that subjectivate us. This invention of the exteriority of thought as a political act; this estrangement of oneself and the things of the world and, ultimately, of the language itself which produces and territorializes this world, seems to be the condition of the strength that enhances the non-reflective thought – thought of the unthought.

Thus, this foreign, nomadic, untamable thought would open up fissures in the language of knowledge, forging thus the overcoming of the boundaries of the thinkable. The opening of this kind of “breach” in the language, this gap that makes the unlikely of the thought outbreak, would be the condition to think the unthinkable – the impossible of thought itself.

Therefore, the French author insists that the question of thought is ethical and political, since it doubly involves our relations with the world and with ourselves. Foucault (1998b) provokes: it is a philosophical exercise – “learning to what extent the effort to think one’s own history can free thought from what it silently thinks and so enable it to think differently”. (p. 14) At the same time he calls us: “we are prisoners of certain conceptions of ourselves and of our conduct. We must liberate our subjectivity, our relation to ourselves”. (Foucault, 2003, p. 318)

The visceral contact with actuality forces us, ethically and politically, to do the work of thinking about thought itself. Because it does not take place in the impunity of culture, the act of *thinking differently* refers to the political attitude of resistance. Commenting on the status of thought in Foucault’s work, Gilles Deleuze (1992) states:

The moment someone takes a step outside of what was once thought, when someone ventures out of the recognizable and reassuring, when one needs to invent new concepts for unknown lands, methods and morals collapse, and thinking becomes, as Foucault says, a “risky act,” violence that is inflicted upon oneself first. (p. 128)

Launching oneself onto this “outside” of thought, onto the experiment of exteriority that asserts itself so unyieldingly, upsetting the endogeneity of the subject and knowledge, seems to engender the experiment of resistance itself. Hence the statement of Foucault (1999b) that thought “is in itself an action – a dangerous act” (p. 453). Ultimately, this experiment puts at risk what makes us familiar or foreign to ourselves: language itself. Deleuze (1992) tells us that, for Foucault, “thought itself appears to him as a war machine” (p. 128).

Thought as a resistance experiment necessarily establishes a plan of creation. Such an act is performed as a kind of “fold” of thought, in which it is the language itself that is *sub judice*, exhausted in the face of the endless rebounds of the acts of reflection – the specular game of representations and their reverses.

The analytical hypothesis of the *thought of the outside* is of strategic interest to us as it seems to present itself as a hinge that articulates a number of other inflections about thinking in Foucault’s work. It is about launching the thought out of the canons that permit thinking, towards another thinking. The exteriority introduces a performative territory to experience non-reflective thought which would operate by affirming the status of a *difference*. Here to think is to make differ – thus, a risky act.

In order to explore the uniqueness of this way of thinking that seeks tirelessly to access its outside, I propose an approach to thinking about the difference, taking into account the extension of such debate in the field of education.

## **“Thought of the outside” as differential thought**

Considering the question of thought as a political problem is at the heart of both the critique of Western culture developed by Nietzsche and the problematization of the policies of truth in its/their actuality, led by Foucault. In order to clarify this unique place of thought, let us consider Nietzsche’s irony regarding concept formation:

Every concept arises from the equation of the unequal. Just as it is certain that one leaf is never totally the same as another, so it is certain that the concept leaf is formed by arbitrarily discarding these individual differences and by forgetting what is distinctive, and it then awakens the representation, as if in the nature beyond the leaves there were something, which were “leaf”, possibly a primordial leaf, according to which all leaves were woven, drawn, cut, colored, crimped, painted, but by unskilled hands, so that no copy had gone correct and reliable as a true copy of the primordial form. We call this man “honest”; why has he acted so honestly? – we ask. Our response is often: because of his honesty. Honesty! This means, once again: the leaf is the cause of the leaves. (Nietzsche, 2008, p. 56)

The thinker enunciates the critique of a thought forged in a cultural arena whose language is based on identity operations of “equation of the unequal” and therefore of exclusion of the unequal. In the language, the interplay of identities and their antagonisms is legitimated, as well as the multiple relations between these categories arranged beforehand in grids of knowing.

Incisive, the statement calls us to take our own acts of thinking – or rather, the very topicality of these ways of thinking – as a political issue and therefore as the target of our criticism.

These acts of formatting the world and ourselves, driven by the effort of domestication of recalcitrance, that is, of co-option of the “unequal” to the grading of the “equal”, here seem to configure the place of the ethical issues that imply the depotentialization of our living.

Assertive, the Nietzschean spear also points out the successful inversion that has historically produced and updated the legitimacy of the language of thought. Such an inversion, by taking the effect for the cause, establishes the knowledge – in its political form of “concept” – as the *a priori* organizer of the truth of life forms.

This is a striking example of a thought that, materialized as a language operation, insists on the work of modulation of the world guided by the effort of submission of the unequal – that is, of the *difference* – to a grid of variation around certain values taken as foundations. Thus frontiers of thought are drawn to ban the unthinkable.

The effectiveness of this enterprise lies in the language operation itself that establishes the historical struggles of the truth. A single stroke produces the effect and the necessary condition for the operation of invention and legitimation of a truth. In other words, the same movement that produces a truth and a horizon of thought that makes such truth reverberate. The legitimation of the truth is inseparable from the mechanisms of legitimation of the language that produces such truth.

This way the authorized arena where the struggles about the true saying take place is demarcated; in the rebound, this is the same arena that produces the contingency and intelligibility of the new struggles. Considering the problematic of power, we can say that the political-strategic condition of the language seeks to shape beforehand the landscape of struggles that *may* occur, that is, they only become valid because they stay on the horizon of the thinkable – a kind of strategic rationality that updates the possible thinking. The thought is shielded in the cloister of the infinite

reverberation of itself, ironically in the guise of multiple themes with alleged variations.

The historic and successful repetition of these mechanisms calls for an attitude of suspicion of the thought and the thinkable, and it requires thinking with a language that has for a vector no longer the identity effort of qualifying and naturalizing the (in)equality, but the political urgency of creating difference.

Foucault (2005) discusses a thought of the difference in a work entitled *Theatrum Philosophicum*, in which he comments on two publications by Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense*.

*What is thinking?* This is the question that drives this essay. The thinker anchors his analysis in the problematization of the difference, a theme introduced and formulated by Deleuze. And he then says:

Let us take the difference. It is analyzed, usually as the difference *of* or *in* something: behind it, beyond it – but to sustain it, place it, delimitate it and thus to dominate it – together with the concept, it is put the unit of a genre that the difference supposedly fractionates in species [...]; then the difference becomes what should be specified within the concept, without going over it. (Foucault, 2005, p. 243)

The idea of difference is usually discussed as something relational, an element that is compared and distinguished in a predictable identity series. It is a way to dominate the object that is deviant of the series and name it, qualify it always in relation to something previously considered as a reference unit. Foucault tells us that in that context the concept – synthesis of identities – includes the difference within it, qualifying it as something that is defined by levels of closeness or distance from the pre-configured identity. In this sense, the difference is specified in the concept, without going beyond it. The thinker adds:

[...] The difference is established when the representation effectively no longer presents what had been present, and the test of recognition is placed in check. To be different it is first necessary not to be the same. And it is on this negative bottom, above this dark side that delimits the same, that are then enclosed the opposite predicates. [...] The difference is dominated by a system that is the system of the oppositional, negative and contradictory. (Foucault, 2005, p. 244-245)

This critique raises questions about the unique coexistence of the *same* and the *other*. The grading around the same – with its shades of equalities, similarities, and antagonisms – is the very map in which the difference will be classified as not similar, unequal. Built into the known series, the difference is made docile – specular materiality of one *other* substantiated by the denial, by the oppositional, by the radical reverse of the *same*. On the board of values, the other exists as mere variation of the same. This is the pitfall of this language that, capturing the difference, holds hostage the thought of the operations of reflexivity and takes away the opportunity to experience its own exteriority.

From the political point of view, this qualification of the difference from a supposed negative valuing condition – whether as a category of contraposition, opposition, contradiction, and so on – invariably displays it in a reactive mode. In this key, the difference is defined, reactively, by “what it is not,” or the degree of detachment in relation to something which is defined *a priori* as the “identity” or “the same”, or, what it should be.

The concept of difference that Deleuze’s work enunciates and that will be object of Foucault’s discussion is radically different. Since the difference, substantiated as variation around the identity, is trapped in the concept, Foucault (2005) argues that:

[...] The freeing of difference requires thought without contradiction, without dialectic

tics, without negation; thought that accepts divergence; affirmative thought whose instrument is disjunction; thought of the multiple – the nomadic and dispersed multiplicity that is not limited or confined by the constraints of the same; thought that does not conform to a pedagogical model (the fakery of prepared answers) but that is dedicated to insoluble problems. (p. 245-246)

In Foucault's provocation, the thought of difference is defined by the affirmative scope, never by a reactive condition. This means that such thought is not opposed, but it imposes itself in an irreverent and unique way as an intensive power. Hence its multiple character, disaffected with the simple logic of variability or modulation around an identity axis. Its motion refers to the chance of disjunctions and not to the predictability of polarizations or modulations that maintain the same and the other as effects of the same language game.

According to Judith Revel (2004), "it is necessary *to think the difference differently*, that is, to restore the positivity that is inherent to it." (p. 80) So the thought of the difference is also a no-category thought. Categories make the thought captive, training it and leading it to routes previously delineated. Unexpected, given its potential multiplicity, no-category thought asserts itself regardless of any language projections.

From the political-strategic standpoint, the affirmative condition of the thought places it differentially in power relations. To think differently would be mainly a political act of producing other effects of truth in all the truths legitimated. To think would be to establish a difference or, more precisely, an effect of differential truth that would not be housed in the thinkable.

In his fine essay *The lives of infamous men*, Foucault (2003) tells us that what stirs the thought experiment is a boundary condition, when we confront or clash with the power. In this combative view, it is up to the thought, as

a war machine, to surpass itself. Here to think is to make differ, never to (make) reflect. Referring to his own work as an intellectual, the author impeccably states the specificity of this mode of political belligerence:

[...] In fact, what I want to do, and therein lies the difficulty of trying, is to operate an interpretation, a reading of a particular reality which would be such that, on the one hand, this 'interpretation could produce effects of truth and that, on the other, these effects of truth could become instruments at the heart of possible struggles. To say the truth is to make it attackable. Deciphering a layer of reality in such a way that the lines of strength and fragility, the resistance points and the possible points of attack, the paths drawn and shortcuts emerge from it. It is a reality of possible struggles to bring up. [...]. The effect of truth that I seek to produce lies in the way to show that reality is controversial. (Foucault, 2003, p. 278-279)

The affirmative condition of thought and of this form of struggle is in the act of producing other effects of truth in order to confront the prevalence of a given game of truth. The power of this strategy lies in the displacement of the language of war: here, thinking would not refer to the supposed reflexivity as the foundation of enlightenment about the truth. It is the effort for the differential production of other effects of truth, so that the diagram of winning forces may be permeated and destabilized by foreign forces of resistance. In this condition, to think is to resist.

## **A horizon of thought and its implications for education**

This debate has a strong provocative effect in the educational field. At the beginning of this journey, I pointed out the diffuse question that, in its many variations of styles, makes up the problematic present of the educational field

– *what is the act of thinking, in education, in contemporary times?*

When I problematized the act of thinking in education, I evoked two genealogically articulated fronts. In the first one, we can locate the ways in which acts of thinking constitute the educational practices. Here pedagogical practices are the materiality itself of the thought. In the second front, we can take the ways the questions about those acts of thinking (constitutive of educational practices) become the object of another thinking, qualified here as educational thought.

While in the first case I referred strictly to the experience of acts of thought produced at school's everyday life, in the second case I referred specifically to the thought experiment that takes place in the acts of educational research.

According to the argumentative path of this article, I argue that both plans have historically moved in a language game conducted by reflective thinking. I suggest that the meeting of education with the exteriority of its thought or with a thought of the difference can trigger continuous confrontational movements in relation to the policies of truth that have de-potentiated contemporary pedagogical practices.

I signaled two articulated movements which in my view can contribute to the intensification of such problematizations.

The first movement has to do with the school's everyday life and its pedagogical practices. It is above all about radicalizing the problem of knowing in contemporary times, emphasizing, as the arena, the educational practice itself.

From the standpoint of pedagogical practices, this requires work of thought that goes beyond the practice of knowing as a merely reflective interplay of language. This demands forging acts of thought as gestures of intensive problematization of the value regimes that shape, coin and legitimize a socially authorized thinking. Such target is

justified by the fact that such regimes establish the epistemological objects, their respective fields and disciplines which enshrine them by means of passwords and moralizing subjectification grids.

Finally, it is a political attitude of refusal of the naturalization of the linguistically produced regimes of truth. This confrontation takes place in the field of language because the objects of struggles are practices of valuation of the world, as well as the ways education becomes the language of this valuation operation.

Therefore, to live the school's everyday life differentially demands to inhabit this uneasiness of the language, assuming the work of thinking as a gesture of affirmative disagreement in search of creation, refusing docile reflexivity towards understanding.

The second movement refers to how the thought experiment itself becomes an object of *educational thinking*. I am in the arena of educational research, in which the very experience of investigative thinking becomes the target of my inquiries.

From the perspective of a thought of the difference, facing such a problem implies an attitude of radical criticism of the scientific and philosophical language in education in order to trigger the evaluative operations that have taken certain values for foundations of educational truths, particularly in the context of modernity and its contemporary developments.

If the question of valuation adds tension to the acts of knowing and thinking, the very knowledge that is produced in the educational field through scientific research and philosophical productions also becomes problematization matter for such differential thinking. Here the very educational truths tailored by the historically backed pedagogical knowledge demand another thought experiment.

In order to clarify the debate, I shall pinpoint a problematic that, in my view, is strategic for the resizing of the thought experiment in education on the horizon of research.

In a classical perspective, pedagogy, educational sciences, as well as the spectrum of their interdisciplinarity, have been the legitimate platforms to offer privileged analytic emphasis capable of dealing epistemologically with their respective objects.

The educational field has been guided by the classical categories that give ballast to the research: curriculum / knowledge, teaching methodology, student-subject, teacher-subject, teacher-student relationship, didactics, teaching, learning, management and so on. Despite historical variability, we can say that these investigative benchmarks tend to reverberate strongly in contemporary times, keeping the organization of debates in the field.

This way of taking education with further cuts is resonant with the way modern heritage has undertaken the work of knowing. Somehow, the research questions or hot topics in education tend to find a legitimate space for problem formulation and authorization for thinking in the sedimentation of these categories.

One of the possible effects of this movement is the risk that the thought linguistically obliges itself to establish a necessary and reflective correlation between categories and problems. I affirm that this rigid amalgam is positioned as one of the deadlocks in the face of the field of possibilities of the experiment with differential thought.

Some investigative consensus regarding the classical pedagogical categories of educational research makes explicit the strength of what we qualify as educational knowledge, or, more critically, machinery of production of educational truths.

The assertion of a thought of the difference implies resisting the assumption that such categories as anchorage – references of truth – for thought.

I emphasize that this analytical attitude does not mean the mere substitution of certain themes, theories or concepts to the detriment of others. The radicalness of this thinking disrupts

the groin of its own questions, clouding the consensual horizon of the so-called educational problems, as well as of the theoretical and conceptual arsenal that give materiality and contenance.

In the Nietzschean-Foucauldian view, the creation of other modes of problematization is possible as an attitude of refusal in the face of the consolidation of representational assumptions that shape language and thought. Pragmatically, we can say that the linguistic condition for the formulation of other problems is the radical estrangement from the thematic and theoretical-conceptual spectrum legitimated by a particular field of knowledge.

I argue that it is in the interruption of the expressive and representational addiction of the reflective machinery, with all its identity reverberations of knowing, that the unthinkable difference opens in the same stroke.

To formulate other problems in education; other ways of formulating problems in education. This double implication is tied to how we seize the condition of the outside of thought in education, or, more poignantly, of differential thinking in education.

The approximation of the discussions about the thought of the outside and the thought of the difference with the educational field still demands some notes on the potential of such interlocution.

First, it is essential to state that this displacement of the discussions on reflective thinking to the ambit of exteriority, or of the difference does not intend to propose another approach or educational strand germinated from one more critical strand of pedagogical practices. The rigorous commitment of this analysis lies in the radical refutation of any prescriptive possibilities of another pedagogical truth.

A second inflection follows, ie, to point the place of that critique within the field. In this key, it is about overcoming the status of the analytical-comparative critique and its consequent evaluations of different authorized

approaches that enunciate an educational thought. The criticism formatted now focuses on the historical conditions of valuation that have shaped the emergence of certain educational truths to the detriment of others. Language and power are inevitably taken as inseparable forces, and above all, as producers of the very objects onto which they intend to lay the encrypted meshes of knowledge – as we have seen both in the field of pedagogical practices and of educational research.

The uniqueness of this criticism brings about a third aspect of utmost importance for the area: it is to locate the way this criticism operates, evoking ethical-political educational commitments. It is noteworthy that the deconstructive operations of the language and thought do not act as mere rhetorical devices, but they are, in the very analytical act of these deconstructions, the establishment of a linguistic vector triggered by the movement of

the difference. It is the crossing of this vector in the very arena of the educational debate that starts to work ethically and politically as an element of resistance and resizing of the truth interplays. Returning to Foucault (2003), in this struggle, the truth becomes attackable, making it emerge through another truth interplay.

If we somehow align ourselves with the heritage of the critical tradition in relation to the issues of education and power in modernity, articulating it with the critique of modern culture developed by Nietzsche as well as the analytical hypotheses proposed by Foucault in relation to power, language and thought, it is necessary to suspect the virtuous act that, by naturalizing the classic relation between knowledge and education, ends up feeding back and strengthening the language machinery, taking away from life the possibilities of thought experiments.

## References

DELEUZE, Gilles. **Conversações**. São Paulo: 34, 1992.

FOUCAULT, Michel. **História da sexualidade I** – A vontade de saber. 12ª ed. Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1997.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Microfísica do poder**. 13ª ed. Organização e tradução de Roberto Machado. Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1998a.

\_\_\_\_\_. **História da sexualidade II** – O uso dos prazeres. 8ª ed. Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1998b.

\_\_\_\_\_. **A verdade e as formas jurídicas**. 2ª ed. Rio de Janeiro: NAU, 1999a.

\_\_\_\_\_. **As palavras e as coisas**: uma arqueologia das ciências humanas. 8ª ed. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1999b.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Ditos & escritos III** – Estética: literatura e pintura, música e cinema. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 2001.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Ditos & escritos IV** – Estratégia, poder, saber. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária: 2003.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Ditos & escritos II** – Arqueologia das ciências e história dos sistemas de pensamento. 2ª ed. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 2005.

GARCIA, Maria Manuela Alves. **Pedagogias críticas e subjetivação**: uma perspectiva foucaultiana. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2002.

NIETZSCHE, Friedrich. **Genealogia da moral**: uma polêmica. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1998.

\_\_\_\_\_. **A gaia ciência**. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2001

\_\_\_\_\_. **Sobre verdade e mentira.** Organização e tradução de Fernando de Moraes Barros. São Paulo: Hedra, 2008.

REVEL, Judith. O pensamento vertical: uma ética da problematização. In: GROS, F. (org.). **Foucault: a coragem da verdade.** São Paulo: Parábola, 2004, p. 65-87.

SILVA, Tomaz Tadeu. **O currículo como fetiche.** 2ª ed. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2001.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Documentos de identidade:** uma introdução às teorias do currículo. 2ª ed. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2002.

VEIGA-NETO, Alfredo. Olhares... In: COSTA, Marisa V. (org.). **Caminhos investigativos:** novos olhares na pesquisa em educação. 2ª ed. Rio de Janeiro: DP&A, 2002.

Received on March 03, 2010

Approved on June 24, 2010

**Cintya Regina Ribeiro** holds a Master's degree and a Ph.D. degree in education from the Faculty of Education of the University of São Paulo and a Bachelor's degree in Social Sciences from the Faculty of Philosophy, Languages and Humanities of the University of São Paulo. Cynthia is a professor at the Faculty of Education of the University of São Paulo and a member of the Collective for Research on Education and Power Relations (CoPERP).