

Looking at the other, looking at the self, looking together

In *Wooden eyes* (2001), Carlo Ginzburg wrote about a sense of being astray as a fundamental criterion for the production of knowledge. In the preface of the work, he advocated what can be understood as an epistemology of distance, an indispensable condition to perceive the other and, in the opposite direction, what we are. Further ahead, in one of the essays that make up the book, called “Distance and Perspective”, after historically reflecting on the use of these concepts and aiming to counter radical relativists, he states:

[...] they ignore what in the past made perspective such a powerful cognitive metaphor: the tension between subjective point of view and objective and verifiable truths [...]. If this tension can only be kept open, the notion of perspective will cease to be a stumbling block between scientists and social scientists and become instead a space to meet – a square where we can converse, discuss, and disagree.¹ (GINZBURG, 2001, p. 197-198).

The selection of articles that make up this issue of *Education and Research* has been guided by these ideas of perspective and distance, with which I have sought to organize the texts of this volume in three areas: the first group of articles addresses education and school in different indigenous communities in Brazil and other Latin American countries. In those articles, two aspects are evident: on the one hand, the violence of an education that, disregarding the differences and specific modes of each group, either sought conversion or subjection, both associated with an Eurocentric ideology of culture; and, on the other hand, not only the struggle of these populations for their rights – to education and identity –, but also that we have a lot to learn when we speak of a school that meets the desires of its subjects. Therefore, another perspective arises as a parameter for the production of knowledge.

Aline Abbonisio and Elie Ghanem have researched on a Kotiria school located in São Gabriel da Cachoeira city, in the Brazilian Amazon, and show the commitment of the group to transform old and traditional educational practices into something that makes more sense to them. Khumono Wt'ũ Indigenous Municipal School has become a place where they learn about their own culture – about the knowledge related to agroforestry, fishery, and medicinal plants, for example – and about the culture of the other, with the knowledge that, in their view, can provide them with greater autonomy. The reading of “Indigenous school education and community projects for the future” helps to think of school experiences committed with an effectively collective social project, in dialogue with other social projects.

Building on the assumptions of ethnography, Carolina Tamayo-Osorio addresses the teaching of mathematics in an indigenous Gunadule community, located in Alto Caimán, Colombia. The author shows that, in mathematics teaching practices, teachers

1- Excerpt in English extracted from: GINZBURG, Carlo. **Wooden eyes:** nine reflections on distance. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001, p. 156.

act as “beings of the border”, crossed by the knowledge of a Western school and, at the same time, by the knowledge of their own group. The text “School curriculum, [mathematical] knowledge and social practices: other possibilities in an indigenous Gunadule community”, written from collaborative research, seeks to show the community’s work to appropriate the *official* mathematical knowledge to (re)signify it within their own culture and in relation with local wisdom, cosmology and practices.

In “Spiritual, symbolic and affective elements in the construction of the Mbyá-Guarani school”, Beatriz Osorio Stumpf and Maria Aparecida Bergamaschi examine this will of self-management of education and school, this time studying schools of Mbya Guarani populations scattered in different municipalities of Rio Grande do Sul state. They highlight the principle of living well, which characterizes these schools, where teaching includes the knowledge of the national hegemonic culture, seen as an empowerment tool, and simultaneously preserves an effort of identity distinction. For the Mbya Guarani, this living well can only be achieved if education is flooded with spirituality, sensitivity, cosmovision, symbolism, and art, which are its attributes.

In the three texts, recognition of the gap between conventional educational school practices and community knowledge; in the three, the effort to seek paths of affirmation of alterity, making school in these communities be more than the reiteration of exclusion. The three articles are in line with what Carlota Boto defines as a “third generation of the right to education”. The more we are able to implement, in a distributive way, a school that prioritizes people and social groups historically excluded from formal education, by the absence or suppression of their specific cultural modes, the more consolidated such right is. In such school, the principle of equality does not mean the annihilation of identity (BOTO, 2005).

The effort to find the other’s perspective also guides the following studies. This time, however, it is about understanding students’ views about their education pathways, their future expectations, their ways of seeing the world, paying attention to those who are often the least studied subjects of education. Researchers from Universidad Autónoma do Chile and from Universidad de Valparaíso seek to understand the attributes that students of an education college give to those they define as good professors. By means of quantitative and qualitative resources – questionnaires and interviews respectively –, researchers were able to conclude that a professors’ good relationship with students and the mastery of the content they teach are the most highly valued qualities. “Good university professors: what do students say about them?” alerts to the fact that, from the perspective of students, good professors are those who harmoniously combine educational, human and ideological aspects. Thus, the article promotes reflection on teacher education processes in the context of neoliberalism and the increasingly widespread false belief – see the discussion, for example, of the School Without Party project –, that good training is the possession of a supposedly neutral educational method, chosen for its allegedly

intrinsic efficiency, and that the education of future teachers consists of training them to use tools, which results in the superficialization and the weakening of broader theoretical training (LIBÂNEO, 2012).

In “We are all together: the closing of the rural school from the children’s perspective”, Carmen Glória Núñez, Mónica Peña, Francisco Cubillos, and Héctor Solorza, also Chileans, have addressed the speech of children who attend a small multiserial rural school in the coastal region of Chile, one of the many which, in neoliberal times, have received notice of its closing. Conversing with boys and girls aged 8 to 11 years, the authors show that this closing is seen as a threat and disregard: In the first case, as loss of social cohesion and meaning of the group; in the second, as one more signal of the marginalization of the poor. It is sensitive work that brings the speeches of children, their fears, resignation, and protests.

Another Chilean article takes part in this set of texts guided by listening to students. “Assessment of reschooling programs in Chile: the students’ perspective” works on young and adult students of educational programs aimed at those who were not able to complete primary and secondary education in the expected time. Operating with data from 523 participants who attended some form of “re-schooling” – three modalities are referred to –, the authors show that the students who present themselves the most critically are exactly those who belong to groups of greatest social vulnerability. They also indicate the need for further reflection by the state on the programs aimed at young and adult students, whose results are clearly related to other aspects of the life of the subjects involved, especially to work and social inequalities arising from it.

The origin of these three articles – Chile – should be noted, as well as their (explicit or not) relation with the educational contexts and policies most recently adopted in that country. The neoliberal matrix that guides these policies, centered on the view of education as a commodity, focused on developing competencies desired by the world of work, guided by a productivist logic of efficiency and evaluation, has been a heavy blow on the social expectations of the most impoverished social groups (AGUILERA, 2015).

The following two articles also listen attentively to students and seek to encompass views of adolescents about their choices, everyday doings and worldviews. Written by researchers from Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, “Free time and its uses by 12- to 16-year-old adolescents in Spain” investigates how young people attending compulsory secondary education in Spain use their free time. Data were obtained from questionnaires completed by more than 3,000 boys and girls aged 12 to 16 years, who indicated that personal computers, family and TV were the most common elements in leisure and rest time. Although the authors recognize the right to free time as assurance of quality of life, they worry about the lack of qualification of these activities – in the sense that they fail to promote subjects’ greater autonomy – and suspect the loneliness that accompanies them.

Written by Alejandro Rico Méndez, “Social representations of a group of Colombian university students about the environment” seeks to know the meanings given by students of Technology in Pharmacy and Chemistry of Corporación Tecnológica de Bogotá to environmental themes and issues. The author spoke with young people aged 16 to 22 and, building on the theory of social representations and sociolinguistics, sought to categorize the information obtained. According to him, the discourses of the students show higher incidence of an anthropocentric view of environment, which hierarchizes relations between men and nature and thinks the preservation of nature from the point of view of the needs of men. This is groundbreaking research in environmental education, since, far from more pragmatic and prescriptive intentions, it seeks to know the views of students, and also analyzes the relationships between their views and the differences in gender, age and living conditions of those involved.

The final text of the second set, “From the manufacturing of school choices to support information resources: adolescent discourse under analysis”, explores the vocational choices – and the justifications for these choices – of Portuguese young people at the beginning of secondary education. The authors put in tension the speech of students, which emphasizes their autonomy and freedom, and the conditions under which these choices are made, focusing on the relationships with their school, family, the media, and the Internet. They work on two fronts: on the one hand, the meaning of this affirmation of freedom and autonomy within the individuation processes of adolescence; on the other, the relationships and social influences involved in these choices. The text also helps to know the Portuguese education system, which, since the entry into secondary education, directs students to different vocational areas. It concludes that parents, teachers and friends have a prominent role in the composition of these preferences.

The texts of the last set inquire about teaching, its concepts and practices, and the centrality of the teacher in this process. Thiago Miranda dos Santos Moreira investigates the meaning of teacher authority from the notes of philosopher Hannah Arendt. Her intention is to show that such authority is not, at least it should not be, synonymous with submission and obedience. On the contrary, she argues that the authority that originates in the recognition of the other as someone able to introduce the young into a place of knowledge of the cultural heritage of the world is positive. Therefore, denying all authority of parents and teachers, for example, implies the refusal of responsibility with this heritage and its transmission. Accepting the responsibility of the authority, far from any praise of the asymmetry of relationships, implies committing to what is collective and public. “Teacher authority: rethinking a concept” helps reflect on two important aspects of teaching: first, a kind of initiatory commitment to those who need the older to enter their own world; second, the limitation of this practice when it is understood that the school’s function must submit to the rules of the world of work, which means that such initiation is superimposed by a technical competence of the teacher to train children and youth for the future. The author suggests

that authority is committed to the past and the future and can, therefore, be the guardian of the values that we seek to preserve in the organization of public life.

In “The lesson ritual in pedagogy: performative aspect”, Rosângela Tenório de Carvalho thematizes the situations of teaching and learning from the study of texts of Jesuit and modern pedagogy, and suggests that we understand *lesson* as something more than the literal meaning that is frequently attributed to it. Building on Foucault, among others, the article takes the lesson as a discursive practice and identifies, despite the secularization of education, the permanence of traces of religious rituals in its performative aspects. Values, gestures and behaviors are learned by the individuals through these rituals, in a transmission process in which how we teach says more than what we teach. Thus, the ritual of the lesson ultimately produces differentiations, identities and subjectivities.

Also in this issue, Jesús Romero Moñivas analyzes the professor-student relationship as a moment which generates “rituals with high emotional energy”. Dealing specifically with higher education professors, he argues that the professor’s function cannot be limited to the transmission of information, an important but not exclusive function, and that professors should also create conditions for the exchange of emotions, indispensable for the training of the student. “Professors as emotional energy catalysts in the face of the ambivalence of the new techno-educational context” addresses this aspect – taking as a starting point the presence of new educational technologies – and, refusing both an absolute denial of these new resources and their praise, understands that we need to address the problem from the perspective of the interests of students. The author distinguishes, for example, older students, who already work, interested in specific information relating to their jobs, for whom virtual media can be of great value, from another group, interested in their constitution as a person, for whom physical presence and the relationship with the professor are key.

Teaching is also the subject of Romélia Mara Alves Souto, who examines it from a study conducted with graduates of a Mathematics teaching course in Universidade Federal de São João Del Rei. The author seeks to identify the problems faced by these new teachers and the reasons why many of them leave the teaching profession. The article, which takes as sources questionnaires answered by 89 of the 114 teachers who graduated from the institution until 2012, notes that a significant part of them, 53%, does not or no longer wishes to pursue the profession, due to professional devaluation, poor working conditions and the lack of interest of students. “Mathematics recent graduates who are no longer teachers: reflections on teaching condition and profession”, although focused on a specific course, promotes reflection on the problems and challenges faced by young teachers, unfolding itself in discussions on training on the one hand, and on working conditions on the other.

Doris Cristina Vicente da Silva Matos and Cristina Goenechea Permisán observe the difficulties and desires of the Spanish teachers who, in times of intense migratory movements,

receive foreign students, who, besides obvious language difficulties, also face the material and emotional suffering to which, for the large majority, migration is linked. Mixing quantitative and qualitative approaches, as the authors worked with teachers from the province of Cadiz involved in “language adaptation temporary classes”, the article, entitled “Intercultural education and teacher education in the current context of immigrant students in Spain”, shows the concern of the teachers who work with immigrant students with adopting a joint educational proposal which, besides language, involves the recognition and the appreciation of cultural diversity, and is capable of countering the frequent individualism, racism, discrimination, and stereotypes about foreigners. The text recognizes that education for respect for diversity, and especially for ensuring equal opportunities for minority groups, cannot be an individual task; it requires the involvement of the entire school community and, in the context of growth in hatred towards foreigners, of the whole society. Reading the article helps to reflect on the problems faced, on this side of the Atlantic, by teachers who also work with immigrant students and on the urgency of actions that can minimize the suffering of this experience.

Finally, from a specific context – a geometry class –, Eveline Vieira Costa and Maria C. D. P. Lyra emphasize teaching situations in which the teacher guides the work according to a collaborative principle, paying attention to students’ knowledge about the object studied. Relying on Bakhtin’s concept of *contact zone* as a process and movement (not as a place), “The emergence of singularity in a didactic scene of a geometry class” works on the analysis of a scene recorded on video to show a moment in which the students are taken as legitimate members of the school practice community, as much as their teachers, and as capable of seeking links between school content and life skills. In this case, we have another way of thinking the teacher-student relationship, as well as children’s modes of production of knowledge.

Together, the articles mentioned above think teaching beyond contents to be taught and a restrict concept of method. They focus on the affective and emotional exchanges that permeate the teacher-student relationship and learning situations. Authority, sharing, ritual, power, meeting, as well as difficulties, disappointments – words present in these texts –, invite reflection on the everyday craft of being a teacher and on broader wishes of students regarding their schooling. They show that elements linked to one’s trajectory, culture, sensibility, political position, among others, some intangible, although placed second – sometimes explicitly condemned –, provide support to professional practice and cannot be measured by universalizing evaluation standards (CUNHA, 2006).

This volume ends with the interview given by Thomas S. Popkewitz, professor of Curriculum and Instruction Department of University of de Wiscosin-Madison, U.S.A., to

Ana Laura Godinho Lima, from Universidade de São Paulo (USP), and Natália de Lacerda Gil, from Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). The discussion included topics such as educational statistics and their consequences on representations of students, teachers and curricula, transformation of scientific disciplines in school subjects, educational reforms, and views of childhood. This is a rare opportunity to know, in another situation, an author quite visited by researchers in education in Brazil.

Because of the references to students and teachers, their ways of thinking, feeling and acting, and the emphasis on education as a relationship between subjects, and between them and their world, this issue of *Education and Research* helps to reflect on ourselves and our practices. We resume thus the point at which we began this editorial: an epistemology of distance (GINZBURG, 2001) is also a return to what constitutes us, either by identifying common purposes, or by stubbornly refusing to submit to the neoliberal and individualizing logic that gives a pragmatic utilitarian character to our craft and our workspaces.

Finally, it is worth noting the large number of articles written by Latin American colleagues and the wealth of reflections they present, which are signs of resistance and vigor of traditions of struggle against the modes of domain that have been imposed on us since colonial times. Perhaps for this reason, when writing this editorial, I remembered so much *The book of embraces*, by Eduardo Galeano (1991). Speaking of so many Latin American peoples, so many cultural traditions and so much violence in the history of Latin America – colonial rule and its substitutes, the empire of the private over the public, the persistence of clientelism, the fragility of our democracies –, Galeano also recovers other more positive elements which constitute us, helping to woo other ways and other future expectations: “Community – the communal mode of production and life – is the oldest of American traditions, the most American of all. It belongs to the earliest days and the first people, but it also belongs to the times ahead [...]” (1991).

It is not little in such a gloomy period.

A final note: this is the last issue of *Education and Research* in print. From 2017 on, the journal will be published online only, with open access, a measure that takes into account not only the improvement of the digital infrastructure to make online periodicals available, but also the scarce funds available at Universidade de São Paulo in all instances. Our email addresses will remain the same:

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