

# ***Educating in other Ways: Alternative Pedagogies and Different Schools in The Second Half of the Twentieth Century***

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**Abstract:** The monographic issue of *Espacio, Tiempo y Educación* presented here seeks to promote a critical reflection, based on a support of historiographic research, about the experiences of alternative pedagogies and different schools developed between the 50s and 80s of the twentieth century and with reference to the present. Particular attention is given to the various metamorphoses of the progressive tradition and to the way in which the ideas underlying these projects and movements have circulated internationally and have been creatively appropriated in various local contexts.

**Keywords:** Pedagogical innovation; Different school; Tradition of innovation; Circulation; Appropriation.

## **1. Introduction**

The monographic component of this issue of *Espacio, Tiempo y Educación* is dedicated to the pedagogical renewal efforts undertaken since the middle of the 20th century. The 10 articles that comprise it cover, in particular, the time span between the 1950s and the 1980s of that century. A substantial part of the historical-educational research on the subject of pedagogical innovation focused for a long time on the first decades of the 20th century, that is, on the typical period of the so-called New Education. It is important now, to know the various manifestations of this will to change schooling in the decades following the end of World War II. Here, it is represented in the initial reflections of Angelo Van Gorp, one of the authors who contributed to this monographic.

The notion of the moment, which is proposed to us in the article by André Robert and Jean-Yves Séguy, is important to understand the trajectory of innovative ideas. We can find, in the last decades of the 19th century and in the transition to

the 20th century, a moment that precedes New Education itself, but where some of its ideas can already be glimpsed. Nanine Charbonnel calls it the «Compayré moment», Marta Carvalho the «modern pedagogy» and Maria del Mar del Pozo Andrés the «regenerationism», all of them having as reference the respective cases (French, Brazilian or Spanish) (Pintassilgo, 2006). It is a moment very marked by the prevalence of the intuitive method and the object lessons. The first decades of the 20th century are, par excellence, the moment of New Education, the one in which the main theses that characterize this «Copernican revolution» are present, with emphasis on active methods and self-government (Pintassilgo, 2018). In some contexts, such as the Portuguese, the following decades witnessed conservative and, in some cases, Catholic appropriations of New Education with reference to the slogan «active school» propagated by Adolphe Ferrière, but then interpreted locally in a different way. The refusal of secularism, self-government and *école unique* are some of the options that detract from the previous methods (Pintassilgo & Andrade, 2018). In the decades following the end of World War II, although the inspiration for New Education is still visible, it is Freinet pedagogy that emerges as the aggregating element of many of the renewing initiatives, in particular with regard to schools for the young (Pintassilgo, 2019). This is very present in the articles by Michela D'Alessio and Mirella D'Ascenzo in the Italian case but also in Rita Hofstetter's from the example of French-speaking Switzerland, and it is also visible in Portugal, for example in *Escola da Ponte*, studied here by Carlos Manique da Silva, particularly in its initial phase, but still present today in various practices. The cooperation becomes one of the main slogans of that moment, along with the idea of a school for life and the ubiquitous «Freinet techniques».

The final decades of the 20th century and the transition to the 21st century are, due to their complexity and diversity, more difficult to define using the notion of the moment. We find both appropriations of some of the main traditions of innovation that have developed throughout the 20th century, such as those inspired by Steiner (Waldorf pedagogy), Freinet (Modern School movements) or Vygotsky (socio-cultural constructivism), and we can appreciate options in which the use of technologies emerges as the main driver of pedagogical innovation, in the case of ideas such as a school for the 21st century or experiences (physical and virtual) in environments such as the classrooms of the future. Even traditions more solidly anchored in time, such as «Ignatian pedagogy», seek new paths for the future, as the experience of the Jesuit colleges of Catalonia shows, but which is not the only example in the Catholic field with regard to schooling in confessional contexts.

The proposed sequence cannot be understood as linear; quite the contrary. Secondary education, for example, has a dynamic that is very much its own as shown in the article by André Robert and Jean-Yves Séguy on the French *nouvelles classes* of the 40s and 50s and the article by Norberto Dallabrida about how this experience was appropriated in Brazil in the 50s and 60s, at the same time as the appropriation, in Catholic schools, of the personalist and community pedagogy of the Jesuit Pierre Faure. This experience, which Robert and Péguy consider to define a proper moment in the trajectory of French secondary education, although anticipated by the *classes d'orientation* at the end of the 1930s, has undeniable roots in New Education, as shown by the proposal of active methods, the will to

democratize and the commitment to school orientation. The search for an articulation between autonomous work and cooperative work and a privileged contact with the environment and the community are other distinctive features of that moment. Still in the field of secondary education, Myriam Southwell tells us about an experience developed in Argentina in the transition from the 60s to the 70s (but with expression in other South American countries), and resumed in the 80s and 90s, the *Escuelas de Familia Agrícola*, inspired by similar institutions developed in France, and which sought to achieve a pedagogy of alternation, between the school and the family home in a rural environment, anticipating one of the main strategies of recent vocational education but which also has some points of contact with current projects in the field of domestic education.

In each of the recorded moments we always find elements of permanence combined with elements of change. This means that education is not a permanent battlefield between tradition and innovation. The relationship between these two apparently antagonistic poles is more complex than the rhetoric of New Education, repeatedly evoked, which made the fight against the «traditional school» one of its main flags (Cros, 2001; Canário, 2004; Hameline, 2001). This is what makes it possible to think of the possibility of the existence of «traditions of innovation» (Burke, 2007) or «progressive traditions» (Jackson, 1986) in the educational field of which some of those already identified here are Waldorf pedagogy, Freinet pedagogy or, in more general terms, constructivist pedagogy. It is worth emphasizing the not only living but also plural character of these traditions, in addition to the diversity of their paths which, as Angelo Van Gorp's article on Decroly's educational legacy shows, have been the subject of successive processes of appropriation. In some cases, as the same author notes, more orthodox approaches prevailed, concerned with preserving the purity of the ideology. Nevertheless, in many other situations, there were moderate, eclectic or hybrid appropriations in which the inspiring pedagogical models were interpreted in a free and creative way, in addition to being combined with elements from other models, something that we can find in many of the different school experiences of today. We must therefore take into account the different «forms of existence», a concept used by the same Van Gorp, or, to put it another way, the metamorphoses suffered, at different times or in different contexts, by pedagogical models that are part of the aforementioned tradition of innovation.

A central element linking the set of articles is the emphasis given to the transnational circulation of the models, ideas and innovative practices referred to therein. This is true, in particular, for the Decroly method, for the *nouvelles classes*, for the *escuelas de familia agrícola* and for the Modern School or Educational Cooperation movements, without excluding any of the other cases. Thus, what is emphasized there is the way in which local actors appropriate these models, ideas and practices, the senses and the purposes they attribute to them, in addition to the international networks of circulation of ideas that are being built around a set of both personal and professional solidarity. On this same level, the articles by Rita Hofstetter and Tamar Groves take into account another movement that has had wide international repercussions, the student, youth and intellectual movements that developed around the «long 60's» and the intense politicization of this moment that had expression in the teaching work and in the radicalism of some of the experiences.

Another aspect that links the set of articles is the protagonism that is given to a wide range of educational actors, some of them often neglected or marginalized. This is clearly the case for teachers and students at the Oakland Community School promoted by the Black Panther Party, one of the most alternative experiences surveyed here and analyzed by Robert P. Robinson. As the author notes, the research on progressive pedagogy - the New American Education - and on the educational alternatives promoted by it has built a narrative from which the school initiatives promoted by African-American communities were excluded. To problematize this narrative, the author uses archive documentation but also the voices of former students. This does not prevent him from reflecting on the problem of political inculcation in the early days of school life in a context marked by strong racial tensions and extreme positions. The protagonism assumed by common educational actors is also highlighted in the articles of Rita Hofstetter on the pedagogical activism of groups linked to educational cooperation in Geneva from the 60s to the 80s and of Michela D'Alessio on the innovative work developed by Arturo Arcomano, the anonymous teacher of a school located in a small village in southern Italy (Roccanova, Basilicata). In the latter case, the author uses, among other sources, the personal archive of the said teacher. Also in Mirella D'Ascenzo's article on the renewal movement undertaken in Bologna between the 60s and 70s by the reformer Bruno Ciari, in this case a better-known protagonist, recourse is made, in an attempt to penetrate the heart of the movement, to the ego-documents of an educator who collaborated with him. Carlos Manique da Silva also resorts to an unusual source, the photographs taken by visitors to *Escola da Ponte*, the most emblematic of the different Portuguese schools today.

The school experiences listed here show us, in their diversity, that there is no single way to be a different school. Different schools try to be different in relation to the school form of education but they are equally different from each other (Prost, 2005). They have in common the fact that they try to question, partially or globally, in a more moderate or radical way, this paradigm. They differ in the type of alternative they propose, in the rationale behind their pedagogical model, in the educational project they build and in the concrete practices they develop. It is important to take into account, in this regard, that there is no pedagogical innovation outside of a context or of a given temporality, which leads us to the need to avoid reducing, decontextualized or teleological glances, but also to guard against the sacralization of any of these experiences (Viaud, 2005). The passion for the object of study should not call into question the objectivity of the historian and, in this respect, all the articles included in this monograph are exemplary.

The importance of concepts such as form, model or grammar of the school for the study of pedagogical innovation (Barroso, 2001; Tyack & Cuban, 1998; Vincent, Lahire & Thin, 1994), although it pervades the set of articles, is particularly present in Carlos Manique da Silva's text on *Escola da Ponte*. The innovations can only be understood in counterpoint to the dimensions inherent to that form, model or grammar. It is this same theoretical construct that helps to understand the resistance, of various kinds, to the implementation of reform or innovation processes as well as the ephemeral character of many of them, a subject that is present, for example,

in the aforementioned article but also, among others, in the contributions of André Robert, Mirella D'Ascenzo or Rita Hofstetter.

Finally, we would like to stress the importance of the notion of contemporariness proposed to us by Angelo Van Gorp in the attempt to critically access the legacy of New Education in the post-World War II period and, more specifically, to seek answers to questions such as the following: Why do today's educators continue to adhere to models (among others) like those of Decroly, Freinet or Montessori? What does it mean today to be Decrolyan, Freinet or Montessori? What is the point of continuing to assume such labels? In other words, what is the current state of affairs of the ideas and practices that have been incorporated into the progressive tradition? And in what ways and forms can we (or not) appropriate this heritage and memory by inserting them into our conceptions and current educational practices, even recognizing the diversity of the moment and the context? These are some of the dilemmas to which Angelo Van Gorp's reflections refer us and which question and challenge the fascination we continue to feel for the proposals of a new education or an education of the future.

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