Between Global and Local: Adult Learning and Communities Network

Learning and Living in Diverse Communities

ESREA BGL-ALC – University of Pécs

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Preface: Living and Learning in Diverse Communities

In the previous conferences of 2017 and 2018 at the University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław and the Dante Institute in Opatija, central themes were the tensions across Europe and elsewhere caused by a rise of populisms and the tasks and challenges confronting the research community in response to the global targets for adult learning set by the UN 2030 Agenda. In sum, both sets of themes had to do with the changing contexts in which adult learners and communities now find themselves, and with the alternating pulls and pushes of neo-liberal or backward-looking conservative governments and the increasing demands for empowerment and self-development contained in international policy documents. A situation that requires new answers, new research practices and that asks us to look at new phenomena developing in the local and global.

The June 2019 Network Conference, the 11th of the Network since 2006 in Faro, which was hosted and organised by the Institute of Human Development and Cultural Studies at the University of Pécs and the House of Civic Communities in Pécs - Hungary, continued the discussion where it was left off in Opatija, Croatia and addressed the broad question of 'Living and Learning in Diverse Communities', communities confronted by the chances implicit in the growth in importance of Lifelong Learning policies and the enhanced possibilities of adult learning which the local implementation of widened access to learning delivers, while at the same time communities - in Europe and beyond – have been involved in conflicts around scarce learning resources and about 'entitlement'. Peaceful co-learning and co-development have been questioned or threatened by chauvinism while cultures of openness to others are still branded as naïve, impracticable or downright harmful.

This Network returns always to the centrality of the notion of 'living together' as a challenge to the tensions innate to the global-local experience. The concept of living and learning together in peace shapes and engenders the work of researchers active in varying forms of participatory research into adult learning and the learning lives of and in communities around our continent and beyond. 'Living and learning together' can give sense to what happens in people's lives, in their communities, their work, families, and in the social initiatives and movements they are part of. Living together and learning together predicates and privileges the practice of dialogue, of reflexivity, and solidarity. If we accept that diverse communities include within themselves all the diversity of the people living in them, then in this sense it can be affirmed that communities are places to learn in, places both of shelter and of conflict and debate, where 'living together in diversity' is debated, fought for and defended.

Accordingly, this volume is a collection of papers which resonate some challenging aspects of adults' living and learning in diverse communities through particular dimensions of critical insight. As Editor-in-Chief of the e-book series of the Lifelong Learning Research Centre of the University of Pécs, let me hereby thank each and all authors for their input and, moreover, the convenors of the ESREA BGL-ALC Network, Prof. Ewa Kurantowicz, Prof. Rob Ewans and Prof. Emilio Lucio-Villegas for having made strong support and work for holding the 11th Network conference in Pécs.

Papers of this volume were reviewed by Prof. Dr. (h.c) Dr. Heribert Hinzen, honoris causa professor of the University of Pécs in adult learning and education.

Pécs, March 2020.

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Adult learning and education in diverse communities: Cultural invasion or dialogical action for liberation? Revisiting Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed[2]

Abstract

At different scales and involving various dimensions, adult learning and education take place in diverse communities. Cultural, linguistic, religious, gender, ethnical, class and economic differences, among many others, may be sources of discrimination or of democratic dialogue and conviviality in political and social terms, also including adult learning and education environments.

Based on a Freirean perspective, and especially on his major work Pedagogy of the Oppressed, a critical analysis of adult learning and education policies and practices as "cultural invasion" for discrimination or as "dialogical action" for liberation is presented. Observing global and local policies based on rational-instrumental conceptions of adult learning which stress in a hyperbolic manner the promotion of individual skills as the main solution for economic competitiveness – which may be considered as a sort of oppressive pedagogism –, possible impacts on communities and societies will be discussed in terms of democracy and active citizenship, solidarity and cooperation, the process of humanization of human beings and their capacity to live together in diverse communities.

Introduction: monocultural policies for diverse communities?

As human communities become increasingly diverse and heterogeneous as a result of various migratory flows, the recognition of political and social rights and freedom of religion, active gender equality policies and a whole range of social policies aiming to combat discrimination in all of its forms, adult learning and education face new challenges. The challenge is not simply to adapt to changes to contemporary society, but rather to participate in the processes of cultural and educational transformation. In diverse and pluralistic communities that seek peaceful coexistence and dialogue between cultures and subcultures, cooperation and solidarity and the ability to live and learn together, adult learning and education policy and practice cannot be driven by monocultural agendas and narrow political and economic interests, or exclusionary processes of modernization and competition. Education policies that promote dialogical action, active democracy and citizen participation, participatory research methods, reflexive community work and practical experience of organization, self-governance and

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sustainable development are essential to the democratization of adult learning and education policy and practice. Moreover, both historically and to this day, there is a significant connection between popular and community education and the promotion of democracy and citizenship (eg. Walters & Kotze, 2018).

Although the declarations of principles of the major international and supranational organizations frequently allude to the relationship between adult learning and education and human rights, democracy, citizenship and social inclusion, business has increasingly encroached on the world of education, calling for "entrepreneurial spirit" and managerialist approaches, human resource management and policies that focus on the qualification of human capital. In the specific case of the European Union, the subordination of adult learning and education to employability targets, economic competitiveness and increasing workforce productivity places greater stress on adaptation, competitiveness and rivalry between citizens than on the values of social transformation, solidarity, dialogue and cooperation. The hegemonic approach of learning for economic competitiveness tends to adopt a monocultural perspective in which capitalist business assumes institutional centrality, disseminating a pedagogy of entrepreneurialism and competition, which undervalues cultural diversity, dialogue and action. Rivalry between citizens within educational and learning environments risks becoming a key principle of one pedagogical approach, against the other.

Half a century after its publication, against this backdrop of instrumentalist educational policy, Paulo Freire's masterpiece, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, a seminal work in the field of Critical Pedagogy written in Chile between 1967 and 1968 and published in English for the first time in 1970, remains a powerful resource for criticising technicist, instrumentalist approaches to education, training and learning, as opposed to education as a means of constant problem-posing and an active practice of freedom, proposed by the same author in his previous book Education as the Practice of Freedom (Freire, 1967). Political pedagogy and the concepts presented in Pedagogy of the Oppressed and revisited and developed in the following decades can serve as a basis for analysing many of today's prevalent education policy documents, particularly European Union texts, but also those produced by other bodies such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and debating the shifting definition of education under an agenda driven by skills, the strengthening of human capital and the promotion of employability and competitiveness.

In what I will refer to as an entrepreneurialist pedagogy – one based on promotion of entrepreneurial spirit, with the purported aim of filling gaps, scarcities and shortages of skills and qualifications – by nature tailored to the new capitalist economy, the promotion of employment and social inclusion, this paper will interrogate the focus on qualifications as a phenomenon of "cultural invasion", "accommodation" and "deproblematization of the future" (Freire, 1975a). In more general terms, the frequently depoliticized and socially atomized stress placed on the right skills, purportedly tailored to the job market, presents an inherent risk of becoming an oppressive pedagogy. If we declare the other to be uncompetitive and unsuited to the world –, even to the "world of oppression" which today presents many facets and forms –, it becomes necessary for them to be immersed in

programmes, often "extensionalist" or charitable by nature, transforming them into a "pure object of their actions" (id., ibid.: 186).
This conditioning – though presented as the result of a free choice without rational alternatives –, is based on the reification of the subject, transforming him or her into an essentially passive target, the object of economic and managerialist dictates that claim to guarantee employability and inclusion of all individuals capable of managing their individual learning and strengthening their skills as "a core strategic asset for growth" (European Union, 2012: 2). As such, it breaks with the problem-posing, participative and discursive approach of liberation pedagogy, which, according to Freire (1975a: 78), cannot result from donation or from pseudo-participation, but only from "true organization", in other words, non-oligarchic organization "in which individuals are subjects in the act of organising themselves" (id., ibid.: 207) and where the exercise of leadership is incompatible with acts of managerialism and vanguardism.

Education as a process of humanization

According to Freire, education is, ultimately, an ongoing process of humanization and liberation of human beings. Therefore, the pedagogy he proposed was a pedagogy of the oppressed and not a pedagogy for the oppressed. The central idea of this work is that if the oppressed "host" the oppressor within themselves, it is through the process of becoming aware that they may free themselves from the oppressor while, simultaneously, freeing the oppressor from their condition. This process demands, and also contains, a pedagogy:

> The pedagogy of the oppressed, as a humanist and libertarian pedagogy, has two distinct stages. In the first, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage, in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation. (Freire, 1975a: 57)

The key ideas of the work include criticism of "banking education", "cultural invasion" and the "slogan", and the concepts of "problem-posing education", "dialogical education", "critical consciousness", "generative themes", "freedom" and "authority", "immersion/emersion", "lifting the veil", and "the viable unknown" (or untested feasibility), among others. Criticisms of "banking education", oligarchic and bureaucratic structures, vanguardist and managerialist leadership, dogmatism and propaganda, the "objectification" of the masses and "populism" and "elitism", as forms of sectarianism, are among the key principles of Freire's radical democratic pedagogy. The epistemological and pedagogical consequences of this radical nature are a common thread in much of his work, associated with notions of radical, participatory democracy, participation, citizenship, permanent education, etc.
However, Freire does not stop at denouncing oppression and the reproduction of injustice. He proposes alternatives, presenting a world of possibilities for transformation,

and, through words and acts, proclaims the power of dream and utopia. This theme, which frequently recurs in his work, is also clearly visible in the speech given at the Complutense University of Madrid, on 16 December 1991, when accepting an honorary doctorate (honoris causa) (Freire, 2017: 1):

> Men and women are historic beings precisely because we do more, far more, than simply adapt to the world. Within history itself, we become capable of creating it, and, by doing so, we recreate ourselves. And it is not possible to make history and recreate ourselves within it without a dream and without a utopia. Without dreams and without utopias, each generation arriving in the world would simply have to adapt itself to what was left by the previous one.

Freire presents an alternative to what he calls "humanitarianist", "paternalist" and "assistentialist" approaches, refusing to adopt a view based on the salvation of the oppressed and, by extension, the unqualified, those with low levels of education, or with few skills. As Freire wrote (Freire, 1975a: 72), "Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building".

Therefore, Pedagogy of the Oppressed has great potential for criticising the technocratic, modernising and normalising positions that dominate today, the theory of skills gaps, and the approach that reduces lifelong education – from birth to death –, to a matter of continuous training and human resource management, subject to the fetishization of "narrowly defined" skills, supposedly capable of attracting investment in an increasingly competitive market (Mayo, 2014: 9). Freire is notable for his political and educational clarity and his epistemological and pedagogical approach to permanent education, currently neglected or underappreciated, and his rejection of the vocational and technicist approaches which have, conversely, become dominant. As he later wrote, in Under the shade of this mango tree (Freire, 1995: 79),

> The technicist view of education, which reduces it to pure, and moreover neutral, technique, works towards the instrumental training of the learner, in the belief that there is no longer any conflict of interests, that everything is more or less the same. From this view, what is important is purely technical training, the standardization of content, the transmission of a well-behaved knowledge of results.

In his final book, Pedagogy of Freedom (Freire, 1996: 15), he was yet more emphatic: "I insist once again that education (or 'formation' as I sometimes call it) is much more than a question of training a student to be dexterous or competent".

However, the Freirean approach to permanent education finds no place in the political rationale of lifelong acquisition of skills and qualifications, which gave rise to the creation of a European space for the promotion of "entrepreneurial skills and competences", aimed at tackling the problems of "skills shortages" and the "need to upgrade skills for

employability", in order to increase economic productivity and growth (European Union, 2012: 2, 6, 16).

In archetypal "human capital theory" and "human resource management" approaches, and according to the logic of clients and consumers of educational products and services, traded in a global "learning market", the subjects of training are viewed as "raw materials" – objects to be shaped, adapted and accommodated. They are often viewed, in the words of Freire, as "patients", undergoing "treatment" or "therapy", through the provision of commodified services capable of offering the required training solutions (Lima, 2018).

Therefore, contrary to a long tradition of thought, particularly in the fields of adult education and popular and community education, it is based on a negative; on the perceived deficiencies or limitations of the "recipients" or "target groups", which it attempts to overcome, rather than building on participants' culture, lived experience and "reading of the world", with a view to revitalization and critical problem-posing. It fixates on vocational approaches and functional modernization, exogenous and hierarchical in nature, either through training service provision and the learning experience market, or through assistentialist public programmes. In both cases, it creates a significant risk of a return to "extensionism", and its antidiological dimensions of "domestication" and "normalization", analysed by Freire (1975b), for example in his work Extension or Communication? Such approaches are typical of the technocratic view of learning for employment, and ignore the fact that not all forms of technical and vocational education can be considered to be decent and fair, with democratic and social qualities, necessarily incorporating participative decision-making processes and discussion of the values, objectives, content, processes, organization and assessment of the professional training by the learners themselves.

The view of permanent education as a means of humanization and transformation is founded on drastically different reasoning, which Paulo Freire justifies in the following terms:

> Education is permanent not because it is required by a given ideological approach or political position or economic interest. Education is permanent because of, on the one hand, the finitude of human beings, and, on the other, the awareness human beings have of their own finitude. (Freire, 1993: 20)

As the author makes clear, human beings are not simply unfinished beings; they are also the only beings to be aware of their own unfinished nature:

> This means that humans, as historical beings, are finite, limited, unfinished beings, but conscious of their own unfinishedness. Therefore, they are beings in constant search, naturally in a process, beings that, having humanization as their vocation, are, however, faced with the incessant threat of dehumanization, as a historical distortion of this vocation. (id., ibid.: 18).

According to Freire, over and above providing social skills, qualities and abilities that prepare learners for the labour market, permanent education makes an essential contribution to the humanization of human beings and the fulfilment of their intellectual vocation, through critical interpretation of the world and active participation in the process of transforming it. The unfinished nature of human beings, and not the rationale of shortages and gaps in the skills needed for growth and employment, provides substantive justification for permanent education. Therefore, it is not founded on a negative, but rather on hope, without which "there is no human existence, and therefore no history" (Freire, 2017: 1).

As we will see, the focus of education policy in the European Union and other international bodies stands in stark contrast, and often in opposition, to this view, replacing the ongoing quest to "make history" in a world of possibilities with truisms about the "inexorability of the future", almost always "considered to be a given", in the terms used by Freire (1992: 92 and 101-102) in Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed. This is why the European Union, adopting an imperative and at times slightly dramatic tone, constantly urges us to adapt or risk perishing. This applies in particular to individuals classified as lacking in "key competencies", or belonging to "target groups identified as priorities in the national, regional and/or local contexts, such as individuals needing to update their skills" (European Union, 2006a: 11) and reinforce their employability, defined as "the capacity to secure and keep employment" (European Union, 2000: 5).

Qualificationism as cultural invasion, accommodation and deproblematization of the future

Since the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (European Union, 2000) at latest, there has been strong insistence that "lifelong learning must accompany a successful transition to a knowledge-based economy and society" (ibid.: 3). Political discourse is centred on individuals, who are responsible for their decisions, since lifelong learning is defined as something that "[…] concerns everyone's future, in a uniquely individual way" (ibid.). "Levels of investment in human resources" must increase considerably (ibid.: 4), an essential condition for increasing economic competitiveness and employment within the European Union. All education, and in particular professional and vocational education, is considered to be a motor for change, within which "teachers and trainers become guides, mentors and mediators", helping each learner to manage their own learning (ibid.: p. 14). Social and community dimensions are erased by the competitive individualization of learning proposed by the EU.

In addition to its instrumental, corporate and managerialist language, and despite prevailing generic allusions to the exercise of active citizenship occurring hand in hand with employability without notable tension, (ibid.: 4), the general tone of this, and subsequent European documents, exhibits a degree of vanguardism and dirigisme, evident in its heavily prescriptive tone. The idea that the world has moved, and will, supposedly, continue to move in a certain direction is presented as irrefutable fact. Adaptation to this reality, market demands and new digital technologies is imperative in the technical determinist European Union approach to qualifications. To this end, its

documents state that, “lifelong learning needs to build on strong collaboration and synergies between industry, education, training and learning settings. At the same time, education and training systems need to adapt to this reality” (European Union, 2018: 2). Adaptation is the keyword, just as private sector business is the institutional archetype and the legitimate source of social and personal attributes in pursuit of business-related qualifications, “essential skills and attitudes including creativity, initiative taking, teamwork, understanding of risk and a sense of responsibility” (ibid.: 4).

Despite the complex, systematic consultations that the various European Union bodies claim to undertake, there is a clear political and institutional prevalence of economically-motivated, technocratic approaches, intrinsically aligned with various dimensions that Freire associated with the theory of antidialogical action, dividing, categorising, creating hierarchies and focusing on the accumulation of skills and qualifications that are, for the most part, predetermined and constantly refer to a banking concept of education and training. What is more, the prevailing theory of deficits not only gives rise to a one sided, monocultural approach, but also appears to dispense with pluralist and open discussion with respect to the “unveiling” of reality and the low intensity of democratic debate. The great challenges facing the world have already been identified. They are not an issue under debate, but rather an apparently unanimously agreed starting point revealed to us by the texts, which invite us to “sign up” and act accordingly. They aim to conquer us, paradoxically claiming to mobilize us at the implementation phase, having demobilized us during the construction process. This leads to a form of conditioning – a narrowing of options that promotes accommodation, “deproblematization of the future” and a rigid, culturally invasive agenda, which standardizes and “rolls out” its modernising and normalising efforts.

The qualificationist ideology imposes a worldview and a culture that is presented as rationally superior from the technical and instrumental point of view, supposedly the only one capable of successfully rising to the (also supposedly universally acknowledged) challenges of adaptation “to the increasingly inevitable changes in the labour market”, “employment and social inclusion”, “the ongoing digital revolution”, and “increasing productivity” (European Union, 2012: 2, 4, 11). As one European Union document, entitled “Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes” (ibid.: 17) concludes:

> Europe will only resume growth through higher productivity and the supply of highly skilled workers, and it is the reform of education and training systems which is essential to achieving this.

In its efforts to “Create a European Area for Skills and Qualifications” (ibid.: 16) capable of harnessing “real world experience” – to be read as the world of business and economic competitiveness –, which identifies the study of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM subjects) as a “priority area of education”, (ibid.: 4-5), the qualificationist ideology not only limits the understanding, scope and content of education but, more significantly, tends to abandon the very concept of education itself. It adopts a

functional and adaptive approach, driven by the promotion of qualifications, skills, abilities and learning outcomes, all of which focus on tackling "skills shortages", "skills gaps and mismatches" and the resulting risks associated with "low-skilled people" (European Union, 2016a: 2). The same document, entitled "A new skills agenda for Europe: Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness", states that in a context defined by "human capital" requirements, and faced with the current "global race for talent" (ibid.: 2), it is essential to invest in skills that "are a pathway to employability and prosperity" (ibid.), as well as "entrepreneurial mindsets and skills needed to set up their own business" among young people (ibid.). Adopting a managerialist "just in time" strategy, the document adds that "The supply of the right skills at the right time is key for enabling competitiveness and innovation" (ibid.: 11), thus serving "to help bridge the gap between education and training and the labour market" (ibid.: 13). Curiously, there are constant references to pedagogy, which is considered to be innovative and flexible in spirit, or, in other words entrepreneurial:

> Particular attention will be given to innovation in pedagogy; this will include supporting flexible curricula, promoting interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches within institutions, and supporting professional development to enhance innovative teaching practice, including ways of using and bringing digital tools into the classroom and stimulating entrepreneurial mindsets (ibid.: 16).

"Education for entrepreneurship", from the primary level, "entrepreneurial education" and the "creation of an entrepreneurial culture" (European Union, 2016b: 12-26), are at the heart of current European Union education policy, which considers it "[…] essential not only to shape the mind-sets of young people but also to provide the skills, knowledge and attitudes that are central to developing an entrepreneurial culture" (ibid.: 9). The agenda presented is systematic, strongly prescriptive and employs arguments that aim to "persuade", to make people internalize its rhetoric and to dominate through "slogans" and what Freire (1993: 63) called the "acritical nature of clichés". It is part of a process of "conquest", and socialization – sometimes showing traces of indoctrination –, based on a qualificationist ideology that often makes promises it is unable to fulfil, thus constructing a world based on widely accepted myths.

The process of "mythologizing the world", which Freire (1975a) refers to in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, encompasses a vast body of myths, in a constant process of production and reproduction. Those previously identified by Freire (ibid.: 195-197) include the myth that "we are all free to work where we want", reinforced today by freedom of movement within the European Union, and the myth that "anyone who is industrious can become an entrepreneur", today viewed as more a matter of entrepreneurial skills and the right combination of intelligence and effort, resulting in a fair, meritocratic reward. In both cases, the permeation of business in education and culture has fostered and strengthened other, more powerful, myths, such as the link between qualifications and employment/unemployment, the right skills as a factor in attracting investment, the association between competitiveness, prosperity and improved quality, or the idea that

the key is to bridge the gap between education and training and the world of work, notably through dual education systems that will produce returns for businesses, as well as inviting business people into the classroom in order to improve learning.

Division, hostility, and the risks of an oppressive pedagogism

Despite the great educational, historical and cultural diversity that profoundly marks each European Union member state, the last two decades have seen increased efforts at harmonization and coordination, in particular through so-called "soft" rules and the "open method of coordination", integration schemes and the creation of common "areas" within the Union, sometimes even including third countries. While it is true that official EU discourse focuses on the advantages of the "European social model", social inclusion and cohesion policies and the fight against structural unemployment, in which lifelong learning plays a central role, these principles, as we have seen, are subordinated to targets for economic competitiveness on the global market. These targets exist against the backdrop of the European Union's repeatedly stated fears of an inability to successfully and rapidly transition to a knowledge-based economy, not only in comparison to the United States and Japan, but also relative to other emerging powers, particularly in Asia.
Indeed, in the major policy documents produced in the last two decades, references to training and learning are rarely absent, thought the extent of these varies according to the body issuing the text and its historical context. While such references are present, they rarely exist outside an economic context, stressing the need to train human capital in order to gain a competitive advantage. Education, referenced less frequently today and, more commonly, learning, are viewed as instruments; essential tools for creating a "skilled, trained and adaptable workforce" (European Union, 2001: 6); a productive investment in terms of employability, productivity and mobility, and therefore part of what is heralded as a "fundamentally new approach" (ibid.: 7) to lifelong education. This is a recurring theme, justified by a climate of economic instability and turbulence, leading to renewed emphasis of the importance of lifelong learning, since the acquisition of competitive advantages "is increasingly dependent on investment in human capital", transforming knowledge and skills into a "powerful engine for economic growth" (European Union, 2001: 6).

> In the face of the stated challenges of economic competitiveness and performance, lifelong learning must focus on addressing the needs and problems of Europe.
> Individuals must equip themselves with key skills that provide added value in the labour market, flexibility and adaptability, resulting from a combination of knowledge, skills and the right attitudes, functionally adapted to each individual context: greater flexibility, greater adaptation, innovation, productivity, competitiveness and quality of work (European Union, 2006b).

In practice, however, the purported harmonization and coordination often lead to increased uniformity and standardization, notably through the creation of convergence mechanisms, common concepts and categories, shared standards and goals, the

dissemination of “best practices”, the imposition of assessment and monitoring methods, the identification of “benchmarks”, etc. In all of these cases, the broad definition of “permanent education”, developed in the 1950s, notably through the actions of the Council of Europe and various developments in France (Hake, 2018), is increasingly absent from political discourse and its modern-day substitutes have heightened tensions between emancipation and the instrumentalization of adult learning and education (Alheit & Hernández-Carrera, 2018).

To an extent, some of the most significant developments in European learning strategy, which increasingly focuses on learning as the duty of the individual, with a view to economic competitiveness and growth, can be traced back to the aforementioned Memorandum on lifelong learning, published in 2000 by the European Commission. It marked the beginning of a clear shift towards individualization of responsibility for education and training for qualification and growth, and the spread of economically-driven approaches to lifelong learning, tailored to the needs of the individual and the economy: “All those living in Europe, without exception, should have equal opportunities to adjust to the demands of social and economic change and to participate actively in the shaping of Europe’s future (European Union, 2000: 3). Indeed, the Memorandum laid the foundations for a new strategic approach to learning, guided by a utilitarian viewpoint that is never questioned or debated, as the political rationale of development and human resource management for the purpose of economic growth and competitiveness is taken as an unquestionable, shared, societal goal, and a fundamental part of the European project.

Since the production of policy documents and, in particular communiqués, recommendations and orders, by the various European Union bodies is particularly intense, and reveals close links to other organizations and agencies (notably the OECD and, within the EU, CEDEFOP), and there is also strong intertextuality between these documents, certain concepts, key ideas and expressions tend to become “slogans”. At times, reading European Union documents proves tedious, filled as they are with repetitions and appeals to the same rhetorical devices, seemingly apocryphal in conceptual terms, frequently tending towards superficiality and a lack of expansion on the most commonly occurring expressions, the primary sources of which are almost always omitted, their theoretical and political discussion silenced. In most cases, they use circular, assertive arguments, claiming apparent consensus and at times employing an imperative and vanguardist style. Even when an argument is complex, requiring the reader to understand sophisticated internal EU regulations, processes and working methods, the texts are rarely explicitly informative, and rarely employ arguments outside of their frame of reference or make efforts to criticize or refute conflicting arguments or viewpoints.

In its discursive output, the EU never appears to have any doubts. It knows the path and it knows the processes, which, in the specific case of education and training, stands in stark contrast with the history and discourse of educational thought. However, this break with pedagogical thought and education research began some time ago. Occasionally, certain data is favoured as evidence in policy documents. However, in most cases, it is the

realms of professional training, business, the economy and human resources management that shape the lifelong learning approaches, concepts and objectives established by the EU. There has also been a resurgence in certain scientific and rationalist pedagogies, which many believed to have been critically discredited, such as Benjamin Bloom et al's taxonomy of educational objectives (1977), with its omnipresent "qualifications", "skills" and "competences" becoming today's "learning outcomes". This lineage or evolution is clearly expressed in the study carried out by CEDEFOP (2009), which considers widespread reliance on "learning outcomes" to be part of an innovative approach to vocational education and training.

Within this approach to political and strategic action, and, in a way, using the same iterative process that so often underpins European Union discourse, it is possible to affirm that its texts reflect a view of the individual in a constant process of moulding into a useful, highly flexible and mobile human resource. The social dynamics of community education and local development tend to be ignored. Social and cultural diversity are seemingly absent, or are implicitly regarded as a problem to be solved, given their potentially negative impact on global efforts to equip adults with skills, often presented as a monolithic project with no rational alternative. In the policy documents, human beings are considered in an atomized, divided and fragmented manner, hierarchically ranked according to their possession or lack of skills. For these men and women, it is no longer enough to "learn to be", in the sense in which this phrase is used in social-democratic approaches of a humanist or comprehensive nature, which place an emphasis on creative and cultural use of free time and human improvement, for example those of certain, vaguely Enlightenment-inspired, advocates of lifelong education in the 1970s (such as Lengrand, 1981; Faure et al., 1977). Today, however, the phrase "learning to be" may be considered overly generic and inadequate, even after the updates and additions made by Jacques Delors and his colleagues (1996) – learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together –, as it is the subject of cumulative, and potentially endless additions: learning to be… relevant, attractive, employable, entrepreneurial, well-adapted, flexible, competent, competitive, efficient, skilled, qualified, innovative, productive… In other words, it focuses solely on what I have, in other papers, referred to as the "right hand" of lifelong education (Lima, 2007, 2012a), which Ettore Gelpi (1998: 134) has also associated with "education as training", as opposed to "education as culture" (see also Gomes & Monteiro, 2016).

The moulding of a young human learner is not viewed as part of the humanization of human beings, as a result of their epistemological curiosity, from the Freirean perspective, in which they are political and cultural agents with the capacity to interpret and transform the social world – a collective construct lived and simultaneously constructed by the people (Lucio-Villegas, 2018: 165). On the contrary, it is presented as an essential mechanism for survival and functional adaptation to a new, complex world that is beyond our control. An appropriate slogan would be Learn to adapt and you may survive. Should you fail to do so, you will fall victim to your lack, or scarcity, of key competitive skills, unequipped to face a hostile environment that will, ultimately, reject you as a human resource, instead viewing you as a social problem and enrolling you in compulsory

second-tier integration projects, schemes for marginalized persons, or public assistance, rehabilitation and training programmes, or, as a last resort, a sort of palliative learning in which you will remain indefinitely, or cyclically "in training". In some cases, individuals remain "in training" simply to fulfil the criteria of certain legal statuses or categories, in order to access the corresponding social security benefits. Metaphorically, such training schemes serve as a "waiting room", from which most struggle to escape. Here, efforts are made to restructure the self of each unemployed, unqualified or marginalized person, managing their hopes and combating the desperation of individuals with a tendency to internalize personal failings and individual blame, without understanding the structural dimensions that condemn them to be defeated by life, "redundant" or "wasted", (Bauman, 2004), and therefore unable to make a mark, to take decisions, to act. In the conservative perspective, not only is lifelong learning for the purposes of cultural assimilation and functional and acquiescent adaption considered the civil and moral duty of each individual; it is also an institutional strategy for social control and combatting anomy, through the action of old and new specialist support agencies, and for fostering discipline and political passivity.

The current approach of training human capital, which is central to European Union texts, highlights the importance of seeking the right combination of knowledge, skill and attitudes, in order to succeed in the labour market. This market is implicitly represented as an unquestionable, predictable and knowable fact; a homogenous and autonomous reality, with inherent rules and intrinsic needs, which are accepted as being legitimate and, almost always, neutral and uncontentious. In response to the objective and imperative needs of the labour market, each individual must identify their "skills gaps", and make efforts to fill or compensate for them by accessing effective "training products" to ensure employability, productivity and economic growth, thus simultaneously guaranteeing greater competitiveness and improved social cohesion. The protagonists are now individuals and their families, as well as companies and the training industry. The State plays a limited strategic role in regulation, establishing partnerships and promoting funding schemes. The workplace emerges as the site of learning par excellence, especially where cohesive corporate cultures of continuing professional development within a company socialize and develop staff in line with corporate objectives, in other words moulding employees. Considerations of divergent interests, power relationships, conflict and the social struggle for more and better democracy are residual, and viewed as mere temporary difficulties – failings in communication and learning. Regular, active participation in continuing professional development programmes is a priority but, paradoxically, it is understood in depoliticized terms, disconnected from the exercise of democratic citizenship and the reinforcement of active participation in decision-making processes within communities and organizations, detached from efforts to disalienate labour and professional training itself.

Final remarks: education and learning as cultures of openness and dialogical action

Subordinated to market interests and the creation of value, lifelong learning and continuing professional development have been transformed into merchandise and subjected to the principle of maximising profit. Professional training is big business, and today encompasses a powerful and growing learning market, arising, for the most part, from the globalization of the economy, which "[...] seems to have blinded those responsible for education, who cannot see beyond the professional dimension" (Gelpi, 2009: 144).

The new professional training market adopts a blinkered logic of business, marketing, publicity and the conquest of new markets and learner-customers. It diligently pursues profit, disseminating the ideology of skills gaps, producing entrepreneurial pedagogies, training kits and franchise-based teaching systems. In this context, the training merchandise acquires a life of its own and is elevated to the status of protagonist, relegating the training subjects, the salaried tutors, and even the organizational leadership to the status of primary or secondary objects of training as provision of a service and acquisition of learning products, both of which exist within a market that produces and trains the humans of the future: flexible, competitive and useful technico-rational resources.

The usefulness of training is measured only in its exchange value – its capacity to provide what is considered a positive response to gaps or deficits in the training of the other, in a global context where the other constantly reveals his or her own incompetence and, consequently his or her skills gaps and learning needs. Within this frame of reference, individuals exhibiting a lack of competences tend to be represented as incompetent, and those who are incompetent are incapable of competing and, consequently, unable to progress. This is yet another form of social differentiation that discriminates against the other, sometimes offering conversion or acculturation programmes, while denying them recognition "as subjects with rights, knowledge, culture, identities, dignity" (Arroyo, 2017: 49).

In a society of constant competition, of ceaseless, merciless rivalry, there is no option but to acquire stronger skills in order to compete and win (Lima, 2012b). Training therefore becomes central to a new "art of war", with learning as its most effective weapon, in the wider context of a pedagogy that, by producing winners must also, necessarily, produce losers, and normalize their existence. In other words, based on a "naive optimism regarding the practice of education", which Freire (1994: 30) critically labelled "pedagogism" and which, according to the latter, in conversation with Ivan Illich, once "disconnected from power" is at risk of being considered "a lever that transforms reality" (Freire, 2013: 41), we face the risk of an oppressive pedagogism, aimed, in particular, at individuals considered "unskilled", at the masses considered reluctant, mediocre and static – the classic argument of all forms of oppression and elitism. As Freire (1975a: 131, 150, 153) wrote, this would be typical of oppressive education, based on the "absolutization of ignorance", the "intrinsic inferiority" of culturally invaded people, the "uncultured nature of the people", the "proclamation" of the ignorance of the masses. The

dominant terms associated with "high quality education" today are qualifications and marketable skills, competitiveness and entrepreneurialism, hyperbolically claimed to be capable of providing "the starting point for a successful professional career and the best protection against unemployment and poverty" (European Union, 2017: 2).

In any eventuality, the vanguardist utilitarianism afflicting adult education impedes critical distancing required to recognize new emerging "situations of oppression" (Morollón del Rio, 2018: 9), the imposition of accommodative models, and the normalization of oppressive pedagogical solutions and cultural actions. As Gadotti (1998: 118) observed in his interpretation of Freire, neoliberal pedagogy "limits the pedagogical to the strictly pedagogical". But oppression runs far deeper than marginalization or exclusion by the education and training system. As Carnoy and Tarlau (2018: 87) concluded, Pedagogy of the Oppressed includes efforts to liberate adults belonging to social classes subordinated to economic and social forces from various forms of oppression. Even in settings considered democratic, these forces subordinate education to new capitalism and its objectives of domination, adaptation and socialization, and can, therefore, give rise to a new pedagogy of oppression.

In such contexts, Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed remains an essential critical resource and an ethical and political call for "dialogical and problem-posing education" (Freire, 1975a: 261). It treats adult learning and training as a democratic and liberating force, rejecting processes of cultural invasion and monocultural, technocratic policies, blinkered by the logic of exogenous economic and corporate modernization and detached from the local sociocultural fabric and its rich diversity. Dialogical action, on the contrary, aims to create and strengthen cultures of openness, democracy and participation, favouring sustainable development over instrumental, expansionist modernization. It aims to prevent social structures undergoing transformation from being objects, shaped solely by the hierarchical external actions of those holding power or certain types of knowledge, instead making them the subject of their own transformative process, seeking to create what Freire calls "cultural synthesis" in communities viewed as complete in their own right and, simultaneously part of other larger and more complex wholes. In such communities, cultural, linguistic, religious, gender, ethnical, class and economic differences, among many others, may be sources of discrimination or of democratic dialogue and conviviality in political and social terms, also including adult learning and education environments. The latter perspective, which views education as a process of humanization and liberation of human beings is particularly indebted to the work of several authors, including John Dewey, Ivan Illich, Ettore Gelpi, among others, namely the authors associated with critical pedagogy today. In this field, Paulo Freire remains an essential author, and, half a century after its publication, his work Pedagogy of the Oppressed still exhibits the relevance and critical force of a magnum opus.

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