

Is it Possible an Alternative to Education Policies Issues from Neoliberal Globalization? Some Modest Proposals

António Teodoro
CeIED, Lusofona University, Lisbon

Réseau 28. Sociology of Education

Understanding the movements resisting the implementation of standards issued from globalisation. A challenge for social sciences of education?

ECER 2017, Copenhagen
22-25 August 2017

My previous departing point

- ▶ Neoliberalism was not just an economic doctrine. It is a whole new rationality (Foucault 2004; Harvey 2007; Laval and Dardot 2009) based on the idea that the market is omniscient and that competition is the only human action generating innovation and progress. On this assumption, this new rationality has penetrated deeply in public education policies. Locating the assumptions and consequences of this rationality and building other rationalities constitutes one of the missions of (educational) thinkers, scholars and political agents engaged in overcoming one of the most dangerous periods in mankind's recent history.

My central assumption: The Human Condition and the Universal Dignity of the Human Beings

- ▶ I propose to revisit the important philosophical contribution of Hannah Arendt to understand the Human Condition (1958):
- ▶ With the term *Vita activa*, Arendt propose to designate three fundamental human activities: **labor, work, and action**

Labor is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose spontaneous growth, metabolism, and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life process by labor. The human condition of labor is life itself.

Work is the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence, which is not imbedded in, and whose mortality is not compensated by, the species' ever-recurring life cycle. Work provides an "artificial" world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings. Within its borders each individual life is housed, while this world itself is meant to outlast and transcend them all. The human condition of work is worldliness.

Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world. While all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically *the* condition—not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam*—of all political life. Thus the language of the

Education policies as an *Action project* of social justice

- ▶ If we understand education (including higher education) as a **public good**, this implies that it can not be dominated by market dictates. Its **relevance** lies in its contribution to the development of a more just society, transcending the demands of the productive sector, that is, it determines its purpose for **building public citizenship in democratic, sustainable and fair societies**.
- ▶ Social justice, referred to fundamental notions of equality of opportunities and human rights, transcends the traditional concept of formal justice, which gives rise to a new dilemma, that of establishing socially fair criteria to determine the social and public value of the collective asset that is education.

Justice as equity

- ▶ The challenge of considering *justice as equity*, while part of the social relevance, responds to a distributive concept of resources built upon three axes: (i) *the principle of equal freedom*, where the fundamental freedoms are ensured for all; (ii) *the principle of equitable equality of opportunities*, where equal access possibility is provided to all regardless of their social and economic origin; and (iii) *the principle of the difference*, where differences in gender, skin colour or ethnical origin, sexual orientation, or religion are respected.
- ▶ **Distributive justice** stems from a moral principle that establishes how *human beings* must be treated, protecting the individual freedom and the social, cultural, and economic needs of the organized society.
- ▶ This theory of Rawls' moral being is characterized by (i) recognizing in humans the capacity to construct an effective sense of justice and (ii) to form, revise, and rationally promote a conception of good (Rawls, 1971).

Justice as distribution of capabilities

- ▶ In this context, Amartya Sen's position is strongly supportive of our view when he claims that it is not *enough* to think of ideal models of justice based on the distribution of economic resources, but also proposes a *distribution of capabilities* (Sen 2009). According to Sen, the axis of analysis must shift to people's ability to achieve certain situations considered fair, which implies generating possibilities for freedom which enable them to choose between different ways of living.
- ▶ The notion of capabilities has been fundamental in the approach to *human development* (“*capability approach*”), which values the increase in wealth of human life and the amplification of their options.

Justice as *reconnaissance* (acknowledgement)

- ▶ The recognition of all social groups and, especially, those that throughout history have been silenced, made invisible and oppressed (Estermann 2008), as well as their inclusion in the public sphere, involves the recovery of other non-colonial epistemologies from the perspective of colonized subjects.
- ▶ Overcoming the Western ethnocentrism and androcentrism, as well as the coloniality of knowledge (Quijano 2009), implies acknowledging other cultures, with other visions of the world and of life, and confronting their respective cultural othernesses. No culture can be self-designated superior and more important than any other, or consider itself as bearer of a single, true vision of the world. The possibilities and potential of the human being and the diverse ways of telling the world and life are not concentrated on a single cultural vision: «no culture, no philosophical *tópos*, can comprehend each and every possibility for mankind» (Estermann 2008: 27). The breadth of interrogations that philosophical and epistemological questioning can comprehend largely exceeds modern rationality, «with its areas of light and shadow, its strengths and weaknesses» (Menezes, 2008: 5).

Some modest proposals to Education Policies with Social Justice as a backdrop (I)

- ▶ 1. Political (and budgetary) priority to **Early Childhood**: Sociology of Education has long taught us that it is in the lowest ages that inequalities build and consolidate.
- ▶ 2. Political (and budgetary) priority to **Adult Education**: The rescue of those who have taken life away from school and access to knowledge.
- ▶ 3. A strong commitment to transform the schools as a **public space of living together**: leadership for equity and inclusion, and active practices against racism, sexism, and all forms of discrimination.

Some modest proposals to Education Policies with Social Justice as a backdrop (II)

- ▶ 4. A permanent effort of articulation between Curriculum Policies and Pedagogy: **What is learned is so important as the way it is taught.**
- ▶ 5. A “clinical” **Teacher Training**, and upgrading the **Teacher Condition.**
- ▶ 6. An **experimentalist State**: In view of the exhaustion of the school model, state policies should allow (boost) other forms of grammar of schooling.
- ▶ 7. To challenge in all international levels other ways of **transnational regulation**, having the different dimensions of social justice as core matrix.

The hard question: who could support this *modest* political agenda?

- ▶ I would propose to insert this question of (local and national) action project of Educational Policies into the **GLOBAL COMMONS** idea (& movement).
- ▶ Usually, **global commons** is associated to the consideration that our planet Earth is our own home and we must protect through sustainable policies and careful actions.
- ▶ But, we could add to other dimensions:
 - (i) **Global peace** is an intangible cultural good of humanity with immaterial value: a utopic but realizable human treasure
 - (ii) Global commons depends on the cultivation the human desire and ability to find ways for peoples **to live together democratically** in a ever more diverse world, seeking to fulfill their individual and cultural interest and achieving their inalienable rights to life, liberty, and pursuit of hapiness.

- Adapted from C. A. Torres, *Global Commons Review*, n° 0, Feb 2017

References

- ▶ Arendt, H. (1958). *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The University Chicago Press.
- ▶ Dardot, P. & Laval, C. (2009). *La nouvelle raison du monde. Essai sur la société néolibérale*. Paris: La Découverte.
- ▶ Estermann, J. (2008). *Si el Sur fuera el Norte. Chakanas interculturales entre Andes y Occidente*. La Paz: ISE.
- ▶ Foucault, M. (2004). *La naissance de la biopolitique. Cours au Collège de France (1978-1979)*. Paris: EHESS / Gallimard / Seuil.
- ▶ Harvey, D. (2007). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford,UK: The Oxford University Press.
- ▶ Meneses, M. P. (2008). Epistemologias do Sul. *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 80, 5-10.
- ▶ Quijano, A. (2009). Colonialismo do poder e classificação social. In Santos, B. S. & Meneses, M. P. (Org.). *Epistemologias do Sul* (pp. 73-117). Coimbra: Edições Almedina.
- ▶ Rawls, J. (1971). *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge,MA: The Harvard University Press.
- ▶ Sen, A. (2009). *The Idea of Justice*. Cambridge,MA: The Harvard University Press.
- ▶ Torres, C. A. (Feb. 2017). Editorial. *Global Commons Review*, 0. Paulo Freire Institute UCLA, Los Angeles.

THANK YOU

▶ António Teodoro

teodoro.antonio@gmail.com

www.ceied.ulusofona.pt

www.antonio-teodoro.ulusofona.pt