

PUBLISHING

SOCIAL EDUCATION, OR THE RIGHT TO A COMMON GOOD BEYOND SCHOOLS

In an intriguing although unequal contribution that a wide number of authors make to the political dimension of human rights in the 21st century (VVAA, 2015), they have been displayed as a battlefield where they have found unlike discourses and practices, often irreconcilable. So much so, they admit, that the most traditional approach to human rights, involving inviolable attributes adhered to people once and forever without exception, ceased to exist. Or at least, they exist in the way agreed seventy years ago, back in 1948 –due to the urgency caused by horror, devastation and misery that the Second World War led to–: in a *common ideal*, recognizing the intrinsic dignity of people and nations, anchoring freedom, justice, peace, tolerance... as inherent principles to human family.

The realities in the world today, which spread from sociopolitical and economic positionings of the powers that be to unfair and inexcusable poverty, exclusion, abuse and violence conditions in which billions of people live, grow away, more than ever, from the hopes that encouraged the drafting of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, as well as from the explicit willingness to find a balance between formal and material dimensions. Accepting that maybe there would be no need for these rights “to be protected, reclaimed, achieved and ratified by a multitude of conventions and social practices” (De la Rosa, 2015: 19), we keep on feeling compelled to embrace the impossible... building new scenarios of opportunities, reflection and critical action, of proposals and accomplishments leading the yearning for a

fuller life, individually and collectively, to everyday situations.

We affirmed that years ago when we considered the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* as the only plausible explanation, despite the questionings provoked by its ambition to fulfill every need, for any change of course with transforming aspirations, freeing mankind from the multiple bonds which have imprisoned them for decades. A liberation that the expansion of markets and its insatiable stock values arrogate to themselves, as if production and consumption –evident bastions of liberalism and its neo manifestations– could incarnate all the ethical, civic and cultural values that are required in local / global cohabitation, peaceful, harmonious, among humans and in relation to biodiversity on Earth.

We are talking about a huge and challenging task, in which education and culture are called to play a crucial role: the role to be assumed by every person and community in order to build a civilizing mapping alternative to our mindsets, *modus operandi* and ways forward, mainly inherited since the industrial revolution. That is to say, to establish a way to exist and coexist in a planet that is out of control, holding cities which are continuously growing while its inhabitants are more and more immerse in its risks and uncertainties.

As is well known, the article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* expresses – unequivocally, it might be said– that each person has the right to free and compulsory education, which can provide decisive results to the total development

of human and social personalities, understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations and ethnic and religious groups.

However, this education, considered into the framework of schools, rather than likened to schooling and school system –the so-called educational system–, is reduced to the formal context (official, regulated, academic, systematic, etc.); education is reduced to elementary education, pedagogical culture to teaching culture, knowledge and teaching and learning to the curriculum vitae, to the specific subjects of a syllabus and its effective communication, childhood to students, life to a single phase...

It is even when, with the best of intentions, education proclaims the needs to radically reconsider itself in order to face the complex social and environmental problems of our world (García, 2015), through new concepts and educational, academic, organizational, curricular methodologies. Picturing “another possible education”, we reduce its options to teach “students to face uncertainty and the unexpected, assuming a perspective opposed to the logic of the predominant school culture, which remains committed to transmit convictions, unchangeable truths with reference to the interpretation of the world” (*Ibid.*: 158-159).

The alternative to conventional education is “another” school, not *other* educations which are even not considered existing. In the account of the many different ways to educate and get educated in society, however much memory and history enable the reporting of its respective identities, remain partial. And this is how we always turn back to traditional education, insisting in a new approach –although it is not new if we bring justice to reformist hypotheses of *Progressive Education* and other initiatives focused on educational innovation in classrooms and educational centers– which explains that educational problems should be reformulated from a didactic perspective. We agree on that; however, it do not seem enough.

The topic of “facing” or, most sympathetically, “complementing” formal and non-formal education has many ideological and typological diversions, where international organizations and a significant part of educational theorists have inclined to. Even when recognizing that culture, world, plurality of knowledge and life run out of control through wide avenues, it is becoming increasingly evident that education cannot flow through the narrow path that is school. The incalculable sea of education, beautiful metaphor by Violeta Núñez (1999) cannot and must not be subdued to a single river, necessary and important although this water is to inscribe education in the course of life, in each and every ecosystem in which we live from childhood to old age.

Arguments, or the lack of arguments, transcend authors in order to acquire greater significance in institutions, when –as it occurs in the latest report by UNESCO (2015a)– with the intention of rethinking education in a rapidly transforming world, political and pedagogical debate is sought to be stimulated regarding the aims of education and learning organization, in a society which is turning increasingly complex, unforeseeable and contradictory. An education characterized as a universal common good, inspired in a humanistic vision of development, based on respect and dignity, equality of rights, social justice, cultural diversity, international solidarity and shared responsibility for a future hoped to be ecologically and socially “sustainable”.

These are words which, perpetuating the inherent motivations of *Millennium Development Goals* (2000-2015) and *Sustainable Development Goals* (2016-2030), claim in asserting that “education is the measure and premise of progress”, “education above all”, or “sustainable development begins with education”; expressions which remind to the commitments undertaken in Jomtien (1990) and Dakar (2000), ratified in its expectations in the *Declaration of the World Education Forum*, held in Incheon (2015), when endorsing that “quality, inclusive and equitable education, promoting ongoing learning through every life stage must be guaranteed”.

A laudable pursuit; nonetheless, after decades of attempts, it is not being consistent with the achievement of a “universal primary education” –more than 60 million children do not go to school nowadays and more than 120 million do not complete elementary school–, nor with the main target on the *World Declaration on Education for All* (EFA): to fulfill the basic learning needs, with emphasis on the consideration of education as a fundamental human right; the opportunity for mankind to become more human.

There are evidences, as confirmed year after year by the Education for All Global Monitoring Report, with meaningful titles to prove the frustrated transitional phase from “should” to “be”; among others, those titles displaying “commitment to gender equality”, “the imperative of quality”, “literacy as a vital factor”, “reaching excluded people”, not to overlook the “undercover crisis of military conflicts and education”, placing among the priorities “of youth and competences: working with education” or enabling education and learning to achieve quality for everyone. All of them have been overshadowed by the conclusions of a report by UNESCO (UNESCO, 2015b: 3) which balanced the period from 2000 to 2015 and admitted unreservedly that “educational

inequalities have increased, and poor and disadvantaged people are suffering the worst consequences. The probability of not being in school is four times higher among the poorest children in the world, and it is five times more probable not to complete elemental studies. Conflicts still remain tremendous barrier to education, and the already huge proportion of children out of school living in conflict zone is on the rise. Globally, poor quality education in elemental school causes millions of children to drop out of school without a basic knowledge”.

Facing these and other circumstances which make more visible the existing distance from the current education to the education that we actually need –and claim–, we have recently argued (Caride, 2017: 33) that the right to educate is indissoluble to the right to get educated anytime, anywhere, beyond curricula –regardless its importance and significance–, attendance to school and academic success or failure reflected in grades and reports, whatever the institutional accreditations required in a local, national or international ambit.

In other words, it is not enough, just as new and old discourses by the UNESCO (2015a: 51) said, to say that “learning in class faces a challenge after the enlargement of the access to knowledge outside schools, universities and other educational institutions”; or that, perpetuating this reasoning, social media or massive open online courses (MOOC) are establishing “synergies between formal education and training institutes, so that the current context of transformation of the educational landscape provides opportunities to reconcile all learning spaces, experimentation and innovation”.

Certainly, a step forward, in the paths to a visionary conception of education and training. However insufficient, we must say, if we do not refer to Social Education, Popular Education, Socio-cultural Animation or others which might achieve what is missing, according to the same Report: “a more fluid approach, which considers learning as continuous, displaying a closer relation between educational institutions (and formal education) and other educational experiences less standardized” (UNESCO, 2015a: 51), since childhood to every life stage. As far as we can see, it is less controversial to talk about what is *formal* and *less*

formal in education than to talk about “other” formal education, as *formal* as it can be in its identity and socio pedagogical entity.

We will conclude noting that it will be less credible that teaching and learning can be “permanent” without a Social Education that make them possible in each and every family, community, institutional, civic, etc. reality in which –with different degrees of formality– they are inscribed, and without acquiring, from itself and from society, the level of knowledge and recognition that it is reaching in Universities and in professional practices, in research and in daily action-intervention.

This recognition is no stranger, given the intention of conferring Social Education with a “law”, the sooner the better, in the terms that it has been demanded for the past few months by social educators through a campaign promoted by the *General Council of Associations of Social Educators* (CGCEES), which the *Ibero-American Society of Social Pedagogy* (SIPS) has adhered to with the firm belief of its necessity and with the changes that may be introduced into its regulatory processing. Its justification refers to considerations and fundamentals which, claiming that education ceased to be an exclusive prerogative of school, go beyond the legitimation of socioeducational processes of a training-profession transforming contexts and people. Moreover, it makes it indispensable by expressing that “Social Education enables the incorporation of the subject of education to the diverse reality of social networks, understood as development of sociability and social movement, and cultural and social promotion, understood as an opening to new opportunities to acquire cultural goods that will broaden educational, working, leisure and social participation perspectives”.

It can be said louder but not any clearer. The proposal has been made; the answers –as Bob Dylan would say– are blowing in the wind: Is there anybody on the *other* side who listens to these “formalities” as well? Will education be a right for everyone? Will this right mean a right for every education and for everything in education? Could education be reconsidered without changing the ways to name it in a world which is changing its own ways to be named? Will Social Education and its Pedagogies have the opportunity to be “formalized”?

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