MATRIZes

The virtual *bios*, local perspectives and the role of diversity in education
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Abstract
Muniz Sodré's most recent book, *Reinventing Education: diversity, decolonization and networks*, analyzes historical aspects of pedagogy in Brazil from a trans-disciplinary perspective and it proposes an urgent redefinition of the role of the school and the teacher in the context of a hypertextual culture and the prevelance of the virtual *bios*. Considering that today's youths base their life experiences on "eternal entertainment", particularly through media, there is, countering this trend, the arduous reality of the education dilemma encountered in Latin American countries, which needs to be analyzed from the standpoint of cultural diversity and the criticism of the homogenizing and universal thinking prevalent in modern life.
Keywords: culture, education, pedagogy, educational sociology, technology.

What can one say about the most recent work written by one of the most important Brazilian thinkers in the field of communications and what does it bring to the table in the complex debate on education at a time when Google has acquired the popular "status" of the most important source of knowledge?

In *Reinventing Education: diversity, decolonization and networks*, Muniz Sodré presents us with the challenge of observing several different aspects of the issue of education in current times, including pedagogic insight and practice, whilst linking them to different fields of knowledge. The book achieves this without neglecting the grueling historical reality regarding the formation of Latin American societies and the outlier country we are living in; it fulfills its purpose without, however, supplying pre-formulated answers to professionals from both fields and other researchers interested in the subject. On the contrary, it reiterates the arduous debate around the role of the school, the teacher and the student by sketching a panorama that cannot be considered very easy, but that will never fail to be observed from the critical viewpoint of the author. In this context, the school assumes an "established place in the social system

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where the movement for the production of knowledge is reconstituted, but always as an effect of class relations". (p. 25) Perhaps the main lesson that readers can take away from the book is a new vision that permeates already-formulated theories about education, the active role of communications and what is now commonly called the "knowledge society", observed, in its previously primordial and now multiple aspects, from a critical point of view that takes into account contexts and ideologies subsumed into globalized society.

In the first chapter, entitled *Culture and education*, Muniz Sodré deconstructs and exposes the persistence of a "knowledge monoculture" cultivated by the hegemonic modern, universal and western ideal "of the truth of scientific knowledge", pertaining to other forms of knowledge originating from cultural traditions relegated to the status of myth in colonized societies. According to the author, this was one of the main beliefs spread by colonialism and Eurocentrism, beginning in the 16th Century in Europe, and subsequently "accelerating in the two following centuries, linked to the ideal of progress, and maturing in the 19th Century with the Industrial Revolution, led by the bourgeoisie" (SODRÉ, 2012, p. 43). The tradition originating from colonial powers was instituted as *domination*, especially of a cultural nature. It was thus that different weights or values were attributed to the knowledge instituted by the colonizers, to the detriment of local knowledge, handed down throughout generations of peoples that inhabited this land prior to colonization. This is the basis of the pertinence of the *decolonization* proposal that is "simultaneously epistemological and political" (p. 44), with regards to the *cosmopolitan Euroamerican ideology* that originates from what the author calls "pan-Europe" (p. 55) and which reverberates in modern times, mirroring the *skin color of our culture* in the field of education. In order to break down this paradigm, the author presents a proposal for recognizing a knowledge ecology that is part of our cultural formation, even though it degenerates under the gaze of several political instances. In conjunction with the day-to-day reality of students and teachers, this process of recognition requires that we go beyond the sphere of the school and, at the same time, never neglect to include it in our actions.

In the second chapter, entitled *Space and cognition*, two concepts are

fundamental: *place* and *community*, because both of them have an indelible effect on the *ways* of learning.

> Different from the abstract space, the place is the location of a body or an object, therefore it is an occupied space. *Territory*, a more modern word, is an expanded place. Thus, today we can say that territory is the space affected by human presence and therefore it is a place of anthropic action. But this place does not necessarily need to be physical; it can be a common property of a set of geometric points on a plane or in a space. Thus, our reference is no longer topographic, but rather topological - the logic of the articulations of a place, therefore the theory of forces, tension and attraction lines, present in the invisible bond that defines the city as a place (*koiné*) or community (*communitas*). (SODRÉ, 2012, p. 74).

The place and its points of tension define concrete forms for the existence of things. These are essential references for any anthropic action. This form is institutionalized culture in the space-time continuum, just as the concepts of a certain field of human knowledge take *shape* in specific epistemological fields. According to the author, *the school is equally a shape* (p.81) and the nature of this shape is not in the content which we have the duty to transmit, but in the cultural aspect that outlines it, "actually working as an adaptation machine cognitive to the personification required by the dominant mode of production. It is a shape that socially metabolizes the reproduction parameters of the system". (p. 81). Thus the place (location) establishes an intrinsic relationship with the educational forms that are culturally propagated throughout society. This consideration leads us to regard educational theories in a unique manner, always connected to a certain location and space-time continuum in the history of humanity. In other words, thinking on education has not waned over time, but rather it needs to be reviewed according to political and historical contexts. Accordingly, no theory may be considered innocuous. Similarly, the discussion on the community raises an important referential question, since we no longer organize ourselves according to an apparent topology, but rather by means of relationships that make up a network of flows, or, in the author's words, the new *socius*. In the center of the

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community, there is communication that enables an interest in common sharing, "Communicating is the action of always, ad-infinitum, establishing the common in community (...)" (p. 94). The location of learning is defined as a location of action that renews itself and enables the community to continue existing. Accordingly, there are possibilities for approximating knowledge by means of the affects and creative appropriation of content with certain provisos, since aspects such as "prejudice" or "imitation" originating from certain locations touches on learning and may compete with the learning-creativity relationship.

In coherence with the previous propositions about the school, the author begins rather ironically, and somewhat exhaustively, with an extensive panorama of the different pedagogic theories in the third chapter entitled *Pegagogy and the school.* It is ironic because it opens the debate with the thinking of authors from the 19th and 20th Centuries, for example Gabriel Garcia Márquez, by mentioning that "at the age of seven, I had to interrupt my education in order to go to school". This provocation gives rise to "a summary journey from the pedagogic field" (p.137) in a panorama that covers aspects from the dawn of modernity up until the present time, presenting different concepts that have already been developed by pedagogic lines abroad, prioritizing the Brazilian case, without neglecting the abolitionist concepts on primary and secondary education developed by Joaquim Nabuco, Mário de Andrade and the "subversive" pedagogy of Jacotot. The influence of names considered *paradigms of Brazilian pedagogy* are also covered (p. 128-129), such as Lourenço Filho, José Mário Pires Azanha, Cecília Meireles, Anísio Teixeira, Darcy Ribeiro and Paulo Freire. In this chapter, the author provides and even deeper explanation of the aspects pertaining to colonization and their effects on the educational *praxis* in the country, including the necessity to deconstruct the discriminatory clichés typical of the 19th Century (among them eugenics and urbanity) and the occurrence of emancipatory projects applied to the methods of *universal education.*

Converging on modern times, the concept of *virtual bios* and the reflection on the place of the teacher are developed in chapter 4, where the author covers the subject *Technology and diversity*. Starting with the seduction in the instance of our own power

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and sovereignty of the technological objects that surround us (p.157), passing through the development of technology up to the decentralized logic of networks, the chapter culminates with the diversity and plurality of inherent discourses that have emerged from the configuration of society in our time. Emphasizing the role of television as a *synthesizing medium* in the previous Century, the author mentions the phenomenon in which "The broadcast is thus being progressively replaced by the pointcast, which is the transformation of the collective into individualized aiming points, capable of causing the fragmentation of the public space amplified by the media" (SODRÉ, 2012, p. 171), justifying the appropriative use of the internet and the growth of pay TV in the country.

> The virtual *bios* is the prosthesis, not merely a communications machine that enables citizens to become informed about what is happening in the world, but rather a magnetic 'atmosphere' (an ethos made up of habits and affects) where, on one hand, consumption programmed by the latent socialization of the market and technological order is 'breathed' and a world of imponderableness, ubiquitousness and interactivity is 'inhabited'. (SODRÉ, 2012, p. 189).

The great question revolves around what happens to the role of the teacher when "information is unlimited and abundant, and knowledge is mobile and fast due to its accelerated transmission speed, or when hierarchal verticalization gives way to horizontal networks that move beyond managerial borders?" (p. 194) In other words, when do issues such as time and authority acquire new semantics? Within the diversity of the networks and the supremacy of objects, it is necessary to construct a *human* dimension from *awareness*; in other words, an education of awareness based on a new cognitive paradigm - *the awareness paradigm*, since: "(...) the driving force behind cultural diversity can be found in one's conscious awareness with regards to the Other; that is, in becoming self-aware in such a manner as to have contact with the contingent genesis of one's beliefs, values and attitudes." (SODRÉ, 2012, p. 185). Accordingly, the teacher still has an important role in education, even considering the dynamism of

technology. However, according to Muniz Sodré, a redefinition of the place of the teacher is essential, with regards to the hypertextual culture that is capable of translating into new forms of hybrid action between the fields of communication and education.

The book ends with an explicit criticism of neo-liberal economic policy, which has been trading off public policies regarding education in emerging countries, due to the formation of human capital that is favorable to transnational economic development. *Global monitoring* by international entities such as the UN, the World Bank and the OECD have contributed to this movement through an evaluative policy, whereby desirable indicators, comparative for each nation, have been instituted. In this context, it is intended to create a symbolic analyst "from that type of productive agent that offers the labor market a manipulation of symbols (data words, oral and visual representations) with analytical tools in any productive activity requiring creative effort" (SODRÉ, 2012, p. 235). This new form of transnational *imperialism* collaborates in the development of Brazilian policies that privilege the privatization and distension of the *economic value of formal education*, a process in which emerging countries respond through the formation of a kind of qualified and well-trained labor, thus fulfilling the demands of the globalized world.

Muniz Sodré's work does not put an end to the complexity currently faced by education. On the contrary, it handles it with wisdom and courage, taking on the modern dilemma that we face. *Reinventing Education: diversity, decolonization and networks* is an essential book for education professionals, considering the clarification if provides with regards to the phenomena in which educational practice is imbued nowadays. Similarly, it is also recommended for professionals in the communications field, so that they may comprehend the essential aspects of this new generation of students and teachers within the context of Brazilian cultural diversity, in a dialogical manner.

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