

Memory education and its relationships with knowledge

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Abstract

The article presents the results of the investigation that aimed to understand the relationships with the knowledge attained by students graduating from Basic Education with the memory of the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship. Starting with the contributions of the historical-critical pedagogy and the studies developed by Bernard Charlot, the epistemological reference is the dialectic relation between the social and singular history of the subjects in order to problematize the tensions and contradictions that exist due to plural realities which are present in the formal education environments. The subjects of the investigation were students from Projeto Socioeducativo Cursinho Popular³, structured questionnaires were used and the objective social position of the subjects under investigation were used to group the data, which from a dialectical perspective were treated according to their quantitative and qualitative relevance. Conclusions point out that the relationship with knowledge is also a relationship with the world and that for the popular classes memory education implies the possibility to relate to giving up a memory that does not affirm one's interests, that denies one's rights and makes it impossible to take a place as a historical agent who interacts with the world and with others.

Keywords: Education, Memory politics, Relationships with knowledge, Military dictatorship.

Introduction

Brazilian society has constantly had to deal with a past that does not go away and which carries the marks of severe human rights violations, which can be seen in the perpetuation of violence in our society and in the (in)visible permanence of practices established during the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship which are still present in different social instances.

As highlighted by Soares (2013), the strengthening of democracy drives the demand for memory protection with a focus on rejecting serious human rights violations. From this perspective, this article seeks to problematize, in the educational field, the transmission of memory to future generations, taking the contributions of the studies undertaken by the French sociologist Bernard Charlot on relationships with knowledge as reference.

In accordance with the highlighted reference, the results of the research carried out with students who graduated from Basic Education and participated in Projeto Socioeducativo Cursinho Popular on their relationships with the knowledge and the memory of the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985) are presented.

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Fundamentally based on the concreteness of the investigated subjects, the study is aligned with the understanding that the individuals' school history is dialectically social and singular, and there is no opposition between them, since, as expressed by Charlot (2001), from a sociological perspective, it consists of social history and, in a psychological perspective, it consists of singular history.

Relationship with knowledge in Bernard Charlot's work

Bernard Charlot's efforts to problematize school success and failure in a broader way boosted studies which aimed to question crystalized ways of understanding school failure. Leading the Education, Socialization and Local Collectivities – ESCOL, research team, which is part of the Department of Education in Paris VIII University, in the 80s he coined the expression “relationship with knowledge” in the educational field to refer to the relationships established between the subjects, their experience in school and the world.

In Charlot's work, considering the limits of the reproductive analyses which see school failure as being determined by the social background and the sociocultural deficits of students and their families, the school failure phenomenon is analyzed starting with the relationship established between knowledge and school, in order to understand the importance of the teaching practices in the classrooms and the specific policies of the school establishments as having the potential to differentiate from the reproduction of social inequality, also as a reason why some students, although living in more difficult conditions outside school, may find a way to overcome difficulties and find some pleasure in their relationship with the knowledge they build.

By undergoing these investigations, Charlot (2000) gives a contribution to the debate on the humanization process of the subject and how education takes place in popular classes. Understanding that incompleteness is a fundamental characteristic which is given to the human being at birth makes history singular and also the story of the human species as a group of relations and interactions by which the subject occupies a place, sees him/herself, interacts with the world and with others.

In this process, according to the author, the subject constantly faces the need to learn, which happens through the relationship established with an object, a content of thought, an activity, an interpersonal relationship, a place, a person, a situation, an occasion, an obligation, in other words, with him/herself, with the other and with the world, through a long path that never really ends, and is called education.

In this direction, Charlot's studies dialogue with the perspective of critical education, which defends the idea that the human being is formed in the midst of social relations, and education is only possible in this environment, which in the words of Sousa (2010) means to say that social relations are the generic essence of human beings, considering that they are built in relationships, are (trans)formed in the social relations established and are based on work.

With this understanding it is possible to say that in Charlot education is made up of a triple process based on hominization, socialization and singularization, which can be seen as the capacity to produce and to be produced in a singular and socialized way. For André and Junckers (2012) this means the subject is simultaneously singular and social, which implies taking ownership of the world based on the interrelation of different dimensions of knowledge: the epistemic relation, the identity relation and the social relation.

These interrelations do not exist in a fragmented way, but in “reference to the history of the subject, his/her expectations, references, conception of life, relationships with others, and the image of him/herself and that he/she wants to give to others” (CHARLOT, 2000: 72), which means being related to the other physically in his/her world, but also in a virtual way, because everyone brings the other as an interlocutor within him/herself.

Thus, Charlot (2000) helps us to reflect on teaching and learning from the perspective of the relationships with knowledge, which are required and used in different situations by the subject, seen as someone who interprets and acts in the world.

With all of this in mind and considering memory to be a complex historical and social production structured in a scenario of disputes, conflicts and political battles, being constituted in a subjective context which is anchored in experiences, symbolic and material milestones, but also a collective human production intertwined with material activity and symbolic and personal exchange, the investigation aimed to identify the relationships with knowledge established by basic education graduates with the knowledge and the memory of the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship.

Education in memory and its relationships with knowledge

Memory education implies the intentionality and materiality of pedagogical practices in memory, which means channeling efforts to deal with the challenge of addressing complex as well as traumatic themes, such as those related to the South American dictatorships.

This perspective is related, on the one hand, to the relevant role that education as defense plays in the formation of the new generations in opposition to the human rights violations and the repetition of atrocities, but, on the other hand, to the need to overcome exclusionary models and an effective commitment to humanizing practices.

In the words of Dussel (2002), it means “laying the foundations for the condemnation of any other dictatorial and genocidal attempt” (p. 267). This perspective is based on the ethical and moral imperative of non-repetition, which is evidenced by a broad prism of colors and nuances, but with greater emphasis since the analysis of Adorno (1995) on the role of education after the trauma caused by the human regression materialized in Auschwitz.

According to Adornian thinking the limit set by current economic system hinders profound changes in the presupposed objectives that legitimized (and continue to legitimize) the unjustifiable, massive and bureaucratic extermination of human beings which, in turn, makes him defend education as a strategy to promote inflection towards the subject, that is, action capable of making one recognize and awaken general awareness of contraposition to brutal acts.

Considering the limits of assigning to the education which is held in formal spaces, in the current historical moment, the role of educating subjects who oppose barbarism, even because within the capitalist system the logic of the valorization of capital reduces the human beings to the utilitarian form, the social importance of school as a contradictory territory and concrete space of action in which the dispute for different projects of society can be noticed is assured and the possibility of working class access to historically produced knowledge and the memory of devalued social groups is materialized.

Thus, taking into consideration the observations made by Adorno (1995) on the aspects of psychological development of human beings related to the assertion of identities and in opposition to the standardization of thoughts that result in human barbarity, atrocities undertaken during the dictatorship do not bear the marks of sadistic minds, or monstrous identities, but the objectification of a system that dehumanizes and impedes full human achievement.

Therefore, an educational project committed to opposing the social forces that defend the serious human rights violations which occurred in the dictatorship rather than just committing to human formation for the opposition to the regression trend, for objectification of consciousness that transforms its ownership of things, must be committed to the transformation of society, which means opposing the objectification of human beings as a commodity, for, as the Marxian tradition expresses, in relation to the production of the commodity, “its production represents its value and its value is only considered when it contributes to the accumulation of capital” (MARX, 1989: 159).

In Brazil, the debate over the importance of starting memory education at school has evolved in the last decade, but in some Latin American countries, such as Argentina and Chile, this discussion has a greater scope. In the singular case of Argentina, academic production is recognized as significant because it expresses the inheritance of the struggle against dictatorship, for being associated with the policies of reparation for violations committed by the authoritarian state, and for rejecting the enormity of crimes committed in the 1970s.

For Amézola (2003), the issue of memory entered the Argentine educational scene since the educational reform process started in 1993, which was intended to train the new generations to understand the world in which they were growing up in the light of a democratic conception of citizenship.

On the other hand, in the decade of 2000-2010, with the implementation of governmental human rights policies, the problem of memory education was projected by being bound to the need for justice as far as the crimes that occurred in that period, being recognized as an action against the omission of the State throughout the 1990s.

In the Argentine case, it was with the National Education Law no. 26,206 / 2006, enacted and promulgated by the President, during the government of Nestor Kirchner, and the structuring of the program called “Educación y Memoria: between el pasado y el futuro” (Education and Memory: between the past and the future), implemented in 2006 by the Ministry of Education of Argentina, that the issue of memory became part of the actions of national public educational policies in that country.

In the Brazilian conjuncture, the debate over the relevance of starting to deal with the memory of the dictatorial period at school emerged from the struggles for human rights, truth and justice and, unlike what happened in Argentina, it occurred in a pulverized way and with less support from the population, having been restricted for quite some time to the scope of social groups representing the victims of the authoritarian state.

Only with the institution of the Plano Nacional de Educação em Direitos Humanos (National Human Rights Education Plan) – PNEDH (2006) and the Programa Nacional de Direitos Humanos (National Human Rights Program) – PNDH3 (2009), during the presidency of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, as a result of the commitment of

the Brazilian National State with the implementation of human rights and the constitution of the Comissão Nacional da Verdade (National Truth Commission) – 2012, under the presidency of Dilma Rousseff, did the issue become more important and generate greater interest in the field of education, being included as a theme in the formulation of teacher training proposals.

Efforts from different sectors have made it easy to perceive the interest in memory education both in school and non-school settings of education, which in turn imposes the need to think about the possibilities and limits of the pedagogical practice in memory and the role of the school, since this is an institution created as a necessity of capital in the context of the reproduction of social relations of production, but also because it constitutes disputed territory for those who believe in the possibility of the development of educational processes that assure values, attitudes, feelings and knowledge which contribute to the emancipation of the working class.

Studies by Raggio (2004) point to a double challenge for the promotion of memory education. On the one hand, the need to consider the plural realities that are present at school or are expressed as a reflection of the social reality which it is part of. On the other, the different logics and institutional practices present in the different levels of the educational system.

Greater attention to the realities that are presented in the school context makes problems related to the pedagogical treatment with the recent memory of conflicting periods evident, since this one, more than others, brings the complexity of focusing on the personal experience of the different actors of the school, their families and the group they belong to, being understood essentially as a conflictive question.

The assumption of the conflicting and controversial character of knowing that the memory of the dictatorial period is a contested field can be understood to a certain extent because it constitutes a political theme, which brings up recent marks of teachers and learners' experience as victims or direct relatives of victims, as witnesses, as protagonists, as direct or indirect supporters or even as complacent spectators, that is, as actors and heirs to a nightmare.

Taking on the challenge of memory education and transmitting to future generations the knowledge referring to a past marked by human rights violations, which a democratic nation can never, in any way, be proud of, on the contrary, reveals the social behavior of many citizens still active in different spaces. This means it is necessary for the school to pedagogically treat the critical appropriation of a knowledge that speaks directly to and about the present time and its permanences in society, with the terrorism of State and with the ills coming from a system which denies the existence of the human being every day.

Thus, faced with the complexity of the pedagogical treatment of the memory of the dictatorial period and taking from Charlot (2005) the comprehension of the subject who produces meanings about him/herself and the world, it is relevant for the investigation taking place to identify the relationships with knowledge that are posed by graduates of Basic Education, since learning is a condition in the subject's constitution process, which means:

Learn to live with other men with whom the world is shared. Learn to take ownership of the world, of part of this world, and to participate in building a pre-existing world. Learn in a story that is, at the same time, deeply mine, for it is unique, but which escapes me everywhere. (CHARLOT, 2000: 53).

Methodological development

The focus of this investigation was the understanding of relationships with the knowledge and memory of the dictatorial period starting at school. The subjects of the investigation were students in their last year of studies and Basic Education graduates, who were regularly enrolled in the Projeto Socioeducativo Cursinho Popular, developed by the city government of São Roque, a municipality located in the state of São Paulo, in 2016.

The group under investigation was composed of students with differentiated school trajectories, coming from the public network and/or holding scholarships in the private education system, belonging to families with low financial income, agglutinated around the interest of joining public institutions of higher education.

Data was collected through a structured questionnaire and we aimed to follow the path that has already been trailed by other studies, which investigated the relationship with knowledge, taking as reference the production of Broitman (2012) and André and Junckes (2012), which are based on contributions from the experience of the Education, Socialization and Local Collectives – ESCOL team, created in 1987, in France, by Bernard Charlot. The group develops research based on the balance of knowledge methodology and stimulates the subjects who participate in the research to evaluate their learning processes.

For this purpose, the following research dimensions were established: a) relationship with the school; b) relationship with studying; c) relationship with the memory of the dictatorial period and d) relationship with the memory of the dictatorial period at school.

The data treatment considered the information available in all the questionnaires that were answered, which were grouped according to the objective social position of the subjects under investigation. For that purpose, the following classification criteria were established: a) level of education; b) family income and c) type of school of origin.

Once the data systematization was completed, efforts were made to understand the political, economic and cultural context of the subjects under investigation. In the next phase, the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the information was performed, since according to the dialectical perspective these are not exclusive, but they collaborate aiming for the comprehension of the whole, configuring this as the moment of appropriation of the structure and dynamics of the object being studied, as it is in itself, in its actual existence, without disregarding the subjective social position of the subjects, as defined by Charlot (2005) as a singular way of giving meaning to the world and to oneself.

The procedures performed made it possible to apprehend manifest relations between the subjects of the investigation and their relationships with the knowledge and memory of the dictatorial period. Let us then pass on to the exposure and analysis of the results achieved.

Results

Research showed that 70% of the students declared that they came from families with an income of less than four minimum wages, and the other 30% declared that they had family incomes between four and eight minimum wages, meaning that the majority of respondents belonged to popular social groups, marked by the daily struggle for survival.

This information is extremely important, for it allowed us to understand that, in accordance with Charlot (2005), although there are external factors that classify students as belonging to a social group of popular origin, there are also subjective factors which allow them to interpret their social standing in different ways.

Regarding the age group, 46.7% of the students declared they were under 18 years old and 53.3% declared they were between 18 and 21 years old. No students over 21 were enrolled, which in turn revealed that even though they came from popular classes, students were able to complete their studies within the time provided for regular certification for Basic Education, but access to higher education was an obstacle for the continuation of studies.

The age factor was also expressive for the study in question, since the totality of the students declared to have been born after the publication of the Law of Amnesty (1979), the transition process from the Brazilian dictatorial regime to the democratic one (1985 - 1989) and the enactment of the Constituição Cidadã (Citizen Constitution) – 1988. Therefore, the subjects of the investigation did not experience the Brazilian dictatorial period or the struggle for democratic restoration, and their considerations are subjective constructions derived from inherited and socially validated experiences.

Regarding the level of education, the analysis of the data indicates that the group investigated was composed of: 40% of students who had graduated from High School, 53.3% from this stage of Basic Education, and 6.7% were identified without specifying the level of education, reiterating that the completion of the basic studies within the time defined by the national legislation is assured to the majority, but showing that access to higher education is an unresolved challenge and an unsecured right for a significant portion of the Brazilian population.

Regarding the type of school in which they would complete or had completed their studies, 86.7% of the respondents said they were in public schools, and 10% in private schools, which they have access to through some type of financial aid, but from the group of respondents 3.3% did not specify the type of school where they studied.

The data contributes to the understanding of the limit established by Charlot (2005) in relation to the reproductive analyses, because although the continuation of the studies constitutes an exception for the members of the social group to which these subjects belong, they increased the continuity of the studies and established themselves as agents with different positions in the social reproduction process.

Relationship with school

Regarding the relationship with the school, the level of importance attributed to this institution was ascertained. For 96.7% of the students interviewed the school is considered very important, only 3.3% classified it as important, and there was no record of interviewees who considered the school unimportant.

The high rate of students who expressed an appreciation of the positive role of the school in people's lives reinforces the understanding that even in social groups that think of education as a privilege and not a right, students did not behave passively as heirs to the denied right and showed their appreciation and recognition of the social role of school.

As far as the level of importance attributed to what is learned at school for their own life we identified that 80% of the students considered learning very important,

whereas 20% declared it was important, not having any record of little importance attributed to this type of learning.

As for the motivations to go to school, quite diverse data were presented, and 44.7% reported motivations related to the interest in acquiring new knowledge or ensuring a good education. With regard to personal motivations, it was identified that 25.5% of respondents expressed such factors.

Despite the significant percentage of students motivated by personal factors, the number of students motivated by financial issues was higher, accounting for 29.8% of factors related to this nature.

It should be noted that most students presented factors of different orders, that is, the motivations for the studies present multiple configurations, merging personal, financial and related factors to the interest in acquiring more knowledge. Such expressions strengthen Charlot's (2005) statement about the need to value each student's unique trajectory.

Relationship with studying

Most of the interviewees, 53.3%, expressed high motivation for the studies, followed by 40% with average motivation and only 3.3% declared they have low motivation, followed by 3.3% who did not register their level of motivation.

As for the motivations for attending the Projeto Socioeducativo Cursinho Popular, multiple factors were identified, and these were grouped into agglutinating categories: a) personal motivations, b) financial motivations and c) motivations arising from the relationship with the school in Basic Education.

For 53% of the students, personal motivations are imperative in their commitment to the studies, while for 22% of them motivations related to the course itself are more important. 17% of the students stated that they were motivated by issues related to the experiences they were going through in Basic Education and, lastly, 8% said their motivations were related to financial issues.

When the motivations related to the interest in attending higher education were verified, multiple modalities were once again identified and were agglutinated in key categories: a) motivations arising from work, b) personal motivations, c) motivations related to knowledge and d) financial motivations.

Relationship with the memory of the dictatorial period

Once the elements that made it possible to understand students' motivations in relation to school and study were established, the research began to focus on the understanding of the relationships established by the respondents with the memory of the dictatorial period, considering this point of significant interest in terms of the objectives set by the research being carried out. First the level of importance the students attributed to the memory of the referred period was ascertained.

The data showed that the memory of the Brazilian dictatorial period was relevant for the students, since 46.7% of the interviewees affirmed it was of great importance, while 43.3% said it was of importance, only 6.7% attributed low importance to memory of the period, and 3.3% did not give any specification.

On the other hand, when asked to inform the level of importance of memory over the dictatorial period for their current worldview, 30% considered this memory

very important for their current worldview, while 63.3% considered it important and only 6.7% considered it unimportant.

The data presented allows us to infer that the memory of the dictatorial period is something valued by students for enabling them to understand the current world, among other reasons.

Considering the levels of importance attributed to the memory of the dictatorial period, and considering its relevance for the students, efforts were made to identify the strategies used to access the memory of that period.

First, the data showed that multiple strategies are used and, for study purposes, they were grouped into two categories, namely: a) personal strategies and b) educational strategies, the first being developed in a non-school environment and the second in a school environment. As for the personal strategies, those related to the use of informational resources predominated.

Once the strategies generally used by students to access the memory of the dictatorial period were identified, the investigation of the knowledge which is considered relevant to understand the present historical moment was carried out, having been listed by them: a) knowledge regarding the practice of censorship; b) knowledge regarding the violation of human rights; c) knowledge about state authoritarianism and armed violence; d) knowledge about the fight against dictatorship; e) knowledge about the practice of corruption by dictators; f) knowledge about media manipulation; g) knowledge about the interference of international interests in national politics; h) knowledge about the existence of hidden files; i) knowledge about the economic plans implemented in the period; j) knowledge about military action.

The qualitative analysis of the data made it possible to verify that even though there is significant reference to knowledge that reveals the authoritarian and unjust nature of dictatorial government, as well as the existence of practices that violated human rights in that period, there is still a lack of knowledge about Brazilian historical facts related to the violation of human rights, as well as the acceptance and even defense of the arbitrariness committed by the authoritarian state.

This finding was not sufficiently explored by the research carried out, but points out the need to broaden the studies about the role schools play in the strengthening and valorization of democracy, as well as on the permanence of the values instilled by the dictatorship in the social imaginary, and also on how memory education takes place in the school environment.

As a follow-up, it was verified that 100% of the students considered obtaining more information about the period of great importance, and different needs were presented as justification, such as: a) strengthening democracy; b) knowing the history of the country; c) promoting human rights; d) learning from the mistakes of the past; (e) preventing situations of human rights violations from recurring; f) facing authoritarian practices present in the current society; g) valuing the memory of dead and missing people.

Taking interest in obtaining more information about the relationship with knowledge and the memory of the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship, efforts were made in the direction of identifying subjective elements related to the relation of the student with the memory corresponding to the referred period.

The data revealed the negative character expressed by the students in relation to the dictatorial period, with predominating references to the feeling of revolt because

the country was subjected to such degrading conditions. For the majority, feelings were negative and affiliated with the traumas resulting from that period.

In order to better understand the motivations of the students to learn about the memory of the Brazilian dictatorial period, they were asked to point out the most significant moments in which the theme was treated, or experienced, at school. 84.4% of the students reported having significant experiences related to the subject in school contexts, while for 15.6% the school did not provide moments of this nature.

Final considerations

The main objective of the investigation was to identify the relationships established by young Basic Education graduates participating in the Projeto Socioeducativo Popular Cursinho with the knowledge and memory of the Brazilian dictatorial period. The research sought to understand the relationships established by these students with the school, the knowledge and the recent memory of the country.

The research was based on the theory of the relationship with knowledge, developed by Charlot, which advocates that the subjects organize their world and give meaning to their experience, and in particular, to their school experience. The Marxian tradition also composed the theoretical basis of the research because it enables a better understanding of the historical concreteness of the subjects and leads to a reflection on the contradictions that are faced in the daily school life.

We verified that, even when composing a popular social group, the subjects of the investigation interpreted, from the existence of subjective factors, their social position, their relationship with the knowledge and with the memory of the dictatorial period, but when asked about their motivations to raise schooling the relations established throughout the formative process came in second place when compared to the motivations related to material concreteness.

The investigation of the relationships established with the school showed how much value the social role played by this institution has in the subjects' lives, emphasizing that they identify it as a place where they can have access to knowledge which is relevant to their lives.

The relationships established by the subjects with studying were manifold, but strongly marked by needs related to their social position, with predominant factors related to work, the desire to guarantee a promising future and better living conditions.

We found out that for many of the subjects under investigation the memory of the Brazilian dictatorial period is of great importance, as well as their role in the constitution of their current worldviews, but access to it is restricted and is largely assured by personal actions linked to the use of information resources.

The relevance of the memory of the dictatorial period appeared to be linked to the interest in multiple knowledge, largely associated with historical, mediatic and human rights violations, making it possible to infer that the school deals with them in an unsatisfactory and superficial way, since these subjects recognize their own ignorance about the memory of the period.

In spite of the blatant silence at schools and the incipient efforts in memory education, the relationship of the subjects under investigation with the memory of the dictatorial period shows that the strengthening of democracy, the promotion of human rights and the confrontation of authoritarianism are necessary practices in

order to stand against autocratic, undemocratic governments which deny the rights of the population.

The identification of a lack of knowledge about the memory of the dictatorial period from the school contexts revealed, on the one hand, the need for systematic efforts in teacher development in order to deal with the subject, but, on the other hand, it showed that the impact of such opportunities causes significant marks in the relationships established by the subjects with the memory of the civil-military dictatorship, which begin to compose significant elements for the relationships they establish with the world.

Finally, we point out that Charlot's (2000) thesis that "there are no subjects of knowledge and there is no knowledge, other than in a certain relation to the world" (p. 63) and considering the results of the investigation, we are able to see the importance of promoting memory education, not in a purely factual, revisionist or ephemeral perspective, but in a situational way, allowing access to the historically produced knowledge about the period, in order to contribute to the appropriation of the subjects' identity process and to their understanding as historical agents.

If the relationship with knowledge is also a relationship with the world, for the popular classes memory education implies the possibility of relating to the world from the renunciation of a memory that does not affirm its interests, that denies its rights and makes it impossible to occupy a social place as a historical agent that interacts with the world and with others guided by the valuation of human rights.

Thus, this research contributed to achieving the proposed objectives and to better understand Charlot's (2002) statement about school being a place where teachers are interested in teaching socially relevant contents to students who are willing to acquire knowledge that enables them to understand and act in the world.

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