New active policies in lifelong learning

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to Ettore Gelpi, in memoriam

Thinking on the possibilities and obstacles, presences and absences that are true undeclared policy options, actions emanating from the State and micro-level individual actions under the general topic of lifelong learning, was the option considered to organize the 13th issue of Rizoma Freireano. We thought it appropriate to give voice to different realities – from Brazil to Malta, from South Africa to Canada – asking to each of these looks to interpret socio-educative realities in their own way, under the generic theme we have proposed: “new active policies for lifelong learning”. This at the very historical moment that could be considered as of maximum de-politicization of lifelong learning and education, carried out especially by supranational instances, international agencies and by the retraction of the State and of public policies in many contexts, regional and local. The different responses offered, now shared publicly, led to a set of interesting and original texts, beyond intertextualities and common themes, some of which we will briefly highlight here to the consideration of readers.

In the context of the reform of the Welfare State that we lived with different intensities, in the transition from the “Educator-State” to the “Evaluative-State” (Neave, 1988), process in which capital and its various allies are fully engaged and in which reforms are carried out in schools, educational organizations, hospitals, prisons… while it is emerging the supervisory society which is related to the Evaluative-State, as Deleuze (1995) points out, through “lifelong learning, continuous monitoring” connected with evaluation, and in short, “as the company takes over the factory, continuous training tends to replace the school, and continuous monitoring replaces the test. That is the surest way to place the school in the hands of the company” and, in this landscape, it is not so easy to recognize and to study active policies for lifelong learning. More generally, one might well

question the continuation of the enactment by the state of education policies of structural and universal nature, as public measures now considered as *traditional*, before the emergence of the new strategies based on a priority setting that is no longer carried out exclusively by governments. The opening of the political agendas of education to new social actors and to new mandates accompanied by the adoption of contracts with groups and market sectors and civil society organizations – that is becoming less civil and more, much more of a business corporation type -, now represents according to Griffin (1999) an indicator of "educational strategies": creating conditions, establishing generic priorities, stimulating society, the education market and individuals responsible for their own choices and learning biographies. Mixed forms, or intermediate modes of educational governance emerge everywhere, such as the centrality of governance through "programs", as shown in the article by Timothy Ireland, usually of limited time, with pre-established resources and goals to be achieved under contracts, according to benchmarks and various forms of external assessment. Such programs, while developed through the initiative of the state and based on important public resources, tend to be fluid in structural terms, of an "adhocratic" nature. This does not mean that new forms of bureaucratic control and standardization do not occur simultaneously, and even in a more intense way than in the past but these are control devices that operate in harmony – for example, continuing education programs with programs addressed to fight the vulnerability and social exclusion of women – and through modulations of women and men, between them and against each other, with a strongly 'self(de)formant' perspective of competition-competence. But once completed or replaced by other programs, they tend not to leave permanent structures or permanent educational networks, becoming easily disengaged from the educational provision that had been previously created, from the entities that they set, and even from the professionals who were hired before, almost always under strong instability and precariousness. Now, it is sufficient a governmental change, and not necessarily the replacement of the previously ruling political party, for strategies and educational priorities to be profoundly altered.

And this is perhaps the new emerging regime in the field of lifelong learning, a regime that despite reforms and programs, is in liquidation – both in the sense of disappearance of the actions themselves or in the aspect of liquidity, the momentary state of movement of these new goods that leave no trace nor provide an appearance of solidity, only one mutation that never ends and does not have nor can provide resilience or resistance – this makes it impossible to finish anything because educational activities and policies... take the forms of unstable

environments.

Not by chance, various authors have noted the political transition from the concept of “education” to the concept of “learning” (for a synthesis: Licínio Lima & Paula Guimarães, 2011), and this transition denotes the transfer to, and the accentuation of, learning as a willingness to learn, and involves an implication of men and women market-oriented, guided-competition provision and also adaptability, which involves flexibility – maybe we might have to delve into the relationships between these concepts of lifelong learning and industrial policy, practices and services of *flexicurity* and formability – deformable and transformable – to new conditions and situations that conceive capitalism in its new spirits and combinations. It is, as Peter Mayo said in his paper, *a nothing innocent change*. This change becomes much more the result of the changing role of the state in public education and of the influences exerted by the European Union and several international instances (OCDE, World Bank, etc.), than the effects of inherently educational and pedagogical changes. An increasing “colonization” of education by the economy has revealed the centrality of pragmatic and instrumental conceptions of lifelong education and learning throughout life, in many cases through a process of individualization of responsibility for education and lifelong learning now subordinated to the resolution of all problems of economic and social order. Central to this movement is individual learning for employability and entrepreneurship, for economic competitiveness and for economically valuable skills in the global market. This is a concept of lifelong education and learning strongly adaptive, functional to capitalism and to the so-called new challenges of the “knowledge society” and of the “information society”. However it denies the basic humanistic roots of lifelong education (Freire, 1993), preferring the beam of the balance towards domination of the many by the few and putting the process of lifelong education between domesticating actions – tamer and discontinuous professional qualifications – now I am training, now I am in the company, now I am unemployed… – all of them serving the market – “The only universal in capitalism is the market”- and large financial corporations, a capitalist system that moves and expands each time its boundaries, canceling also the borders between territories, areas… and establishing instant communications that facilitate the necessary control to the new spirit of capitalism.

And perhaps as noted by Andrea Fumagalli, “*the more vocational training is expanded, the more widespread ignorance is, in the etymological sense of the term which means ‘no knowledge’ and ‘no understanding’*” (Andrea Fumagalli, 2010), which makes up a landscape of frankly alienating characters and the establishment

of a pedagogy of debt – the invested capital in the form of training loans requested by students and workers... in the liquid and conversion of their potential learning capital and thus being able to compete in the knowledge and information society – which take us into debt and fixed us, women and men, in the pedagogy of capital (Antonia de Vita, 2006).

It is exactly in this field increasingly confined to the adaptation to the world, according to certain definitions and certain private interests, that lifelong education risks losing its democratic and transformative meaning and power of change, at least when compared to its critical and humanistic project, able to transcend the ambiguities of a generous concept, increasingly subject to contradictory appropriations since the 1960's: either emphasizing education for adaptation and productivity or insisting on the potential of its transformative project in the struggle against alienation (Ettore Gelpi, 2005). In short, simplifying the constitutive ambiguities of the concept, lifelong education soon realized a permanent ambivalence among the purposes of socialization of a "new man" (according to various ideologies), vocational pragmatism of "recurrent education" (requested by the OECD), the confusion with formal education and extensive continuing education (taken by the school and universities), the reformist ideology of a social-democratic, modernizing and central role given to the State (the report "*Learning to be*" coordinated by Faure [1972], is a milestone), its metamorphosis as learning as a qualification for work and economic competitiveness (a central idea in the European Union), including radical and libertarian pedagogy, the "critical awareness" and "education as the practice of freedom" (as in the case of Paulo Freire [1967, 1975], for example) or the de-schooling of society, to make it possible to move from a "*manipulative institution*" to new "*convivial*" and autonomous educational institutions, that is, organized according to principles opposed to those of "industrial productivity" (according to Ivan Illich's thesis [1976, 1977]).

However referring to active policies and other initiatives with transformative potential in terms of lifelong education, all the papers presented here are confronted with possible contradictions and drifts: individualistic and de-politicizing, adaptive and human capital training, homogenizing and indifferent to the differences, schooled and purely compensatory in the case of adults...

The risks of a lifelong education project which was presented in more or less epic terms of discursive and conceptual celebration and of hyperbolic type are now amplified by the fashion of learning throughout life, an economist feature of adaptive and atomized nature.

The contributions in this issue of Rizoma Freireano do not forget to take into account the problems we are facing today, rejecting easy solutions and celebratory discourses, yet pointing out to the transformative power of lifelong education through the most varied processes and organizational forms in connection with diverse societies and cultures, policies, various institutional contexts, considering the active participation of multiple social actors. This is what links different analytical papers and approaches including “interconnected development” and the idea of learning throughout life as the organizing principle of human development and sustainability of life, as noted by Shirley Walters; the potential of schools as community learning centres as proposed by Peter Mayo, open to critical thinking, to epistemological curiosity, to the empowerment of individuals and of the local community; the impact of self-directed learning and health literacy developed by volunteer women in health care activities, which is according to Lorraine Sheehan and Darlene Clover increasing autonomy, confidence, initiative and potentially greater organizational capacity to claim and exercise power in relation to public health authorities. Other initiatives and practices were characterized by a commitment to the social-construction of ordinary solutions for the common good, establishing a bridge to understand and act in society, politics and education in a different way, from a different approach to economy and lifelong education focusing on a practical problem emerging from everyday life, for example: “*Women, in fact, because of a conjunction of historical factors and especially of the political and cultural work done in recent decades, are more likely to live the present more as an opportunity and less as a loss, avoiding the critical infra-valorization of the development of new capitalism and even adding more tools to decipher the symbolic work carried out by capital which, paradoxically, rightly insists almost mimetically and through interceptor methods on the same female lexicon horizon, on the same keywords, however of opposite sign, of the symbolic female labour*” (María Giovanna Piano, 2005)-; public policies in the context of a large country in Latin America, with its strengths and weaknesses, looking for a joint production with other areas of social policy – because education alone does not make everything possible -, fighting against the fragmentation of social policies, of educational programs and logics of action in the same Ministry of Education, trying to coordinate without homogenizing, looking for new articulations in the search for a “pedagogy of heterogeneity”, as proposed by Timothy Ireland.

In the end, after reading the four texts, despite their differences and significant singularities, we are left with the idea that what does link them is, on the one hand, the same demanding and rigorous conception of lifelong education and learning

based on hope and aware of its possibilities of social transformation and, on the other hand, a practice based on these new policies, ranging from policies first made by women and men in their daily lives – at school, on sustainability and health…- to second policies – as in the case of Brazil – which should always be at the service of, and linked with, the first ones, which are the ones that constitute us and may strengthen us in our human condition, as men and women, intellectuals and shapers of new horizons of freedom, of resistance and of unique and social creation. The authors acknowledge many uses, modes and impacts of lifelong education; they are separated by geography, history and culture; their objects of study are different, as different are their proposals; the interpretive approach of each author is also varied, from a macro level of state and central government, to the level of individual and micro-politics, from school as a starting point for non-formal community education, to the indispensable contributions of education for sustainability and integrated human development. At the end, it is lifelong learning and education as a process of humanization of human beings, capable of contributing to the critical interpretation of the world and to the active participation of citizens in its transformation, that is, lifelong education which results from the fact that we know we are unfinished, conditioned but not determined (Paulo Freire, 1993), that makes all the difference in that unity in diversity that the authors offer us. By reading the texts, the reader will find signs of what we have just stated here, not only in the lines of each text, specifically, but also between the lines, implicitly.

As a possible synthesis inspired by the authors published here, even in a free, non-linear or literal way, the concept of lifelong education which results from their inputs is, for us, a continuous process, with the vocation for humanization, including dimensions of mobilization, active participation, self-determination and self-government, more or less tied to social struggles, but also to other processes of transformation, aiming at changing power relations, including ethical and political dimensions, solidarity and the common good, justice and the care of other persons or groups. Lifelong education is permanent and over a lifetime, also based on life experience as something which is intrinsically pedagogic; it is an experience that may occur in virtually all social spheres, from the public domain to the domestic world; it is epistemologically based on the principle of curiosity, the intellectual condition of every human being and the reason for potential interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary knowledge; it is a global, integrated, multifaceted project of holistic nature, against fragmentation. It is that holistic perspective of lifelong education that makes it a project as powerful as difficult to perform because it requires global approaches and comprehensive coordination systems of multi-

centric type endowed with great autonomy and with the ability to transcend traditional boundaries and divisions, trying out new connections and avoiding fragmentation and atomization; it also requires individual mobilization, but not exhausted in merely biographical solutions or individualism; it demands a response to practical problems without incurring in pragmatism, practicalities or spontaneous solutions; it includes social mobilization but refusing dirigisme, the oligarchic organization or the avant-garde power structure; it is not indifferent to the struggles for power, however it is committed to the democratic transformation of governance; it continues to contribute to adaptation and integration of human beings in the world in which they live in, however rejecting their functional adaptation and the perpetuation of inequalities, engaging individuals and groups in the active participation process of changing the social world.

Permanent education, therefore, as a singular, communal and self training form of organization, as an entrepreneurial education, as politics and ethics, as a form of building cooperation and freedom, as a loving *matrix* and as *common fare* driving dynamics... and, considering all questions and inquiries, reading and writing the world, implementing processes of questioning the world, make real and present the hypothesis suggested by Ettore Gelpi : "*The hypothesis of lifelong education – that educators necessarily need to be professionals trained in education centres or universities – suggests research that may examine the contribution to educational activities by (a) workers, who have their own specific knowledge; (b) the parents; (c) those who have been involved in political and social life; (d) artists, (e) scientists; (f) any adult with capacity for learning and teaching"* (Ettore Gelpi, 2005). We mean active policies for lifelong learning which are constituted on the basis of the principle vector of the utopia of everyday life, that is, an educational option and style that is based on the logics of planning, implementing and valuing the performance of education, there where these policies are first created – first person singular and plural – and evolving from that domain and from what happens in it, develop each and every one of us, women and men, through a working class program-project-process which is cultural, ethical and political, and from there to those other second policies – and institutions – which promote the change of civilization, far from both the pragmatic and functional paradigm, the authoritarian and conservative anti-dialogical and unfair…to rethink, again with Ettore Gelpi, the questions at the heart of reality: "In our days, what struggles, what proposals, what alternatives?" (Ettore Gelpi, 2004).

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