

THE SYMBOL AS A FIELD OF PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

El símbolo como ámbito de reflexión filosófica de la Sociología de la Educación

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Abstract

Western civilization has restricted the understanding of social phenomena to the processes proposed by the scientific method. However, reality presents greater complexity, and this method is shown to be insufficient for a comprehensive understanding. The educational phenomena in the context of the society in the 21st century has become more complex and heterogeneous, depending on a society in constant change and which requires immediate responses from educational institutions. Stakeholders and involved scenarios are diverse, and the demands of attention, urgent. The response to it must be the education is a field of study of the sociology of education which must be reflected and which motivates academic new answers. The path of study, presents the symbol whose constant in history of humanity offers the scholar a common thread. The symbol has special features that allow a supra-national understanding. It is necessary to analyze social and educational phenomena through a hermeneutic exercise of the artistic and religious symbols present in all societies. Art and religions, since their beginnings, have been mechanisms to carry out this exercise and symbols have been their common means of language. Proposing these expressions as a field of study and the symbol as an axis of understanding the socio-educational phenomena is a necessary task for the study and the construction of new stages of human development. Rethinking the educational task from a rereading of the myths and from an update of certain rites of society will allow a dynamic process of continuous reflection and educational improvement, in addition to integrate social processes to educational practice.

Keywords

Symbol, myth, Western civilization, art and religion.

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Resumen

La civilización occidental ha restringido la comprensión de los fenómenos sociales a los caminos propuestos por el método científico. No obstante, la realidad evidencia mayor complejidad y, este método se muestra insuficiente para una comprensión integral. Los fenómenos educativos en el marco de la sociedad del siglo XXI se han tornado más complejos y heterogéneos, en función de una sociedad en continuo cambio y que exige respuestas inmediatas de las instituciones educativas. Los actores y escenarios involucrados son diversos y, las demandas de atención educativa, más exigentes. La respuesta que a ello debe dar la educación es un ámbito de estudio de la Sociología de la Educación que debe ser reflexionado y que motiva del académico nuevas respuestas. Un camino de estudio lo presenta el símbolo, cuya constante en la historia de la humanidad ofrece al estudioso un hilo conductor. El símbolo presenta particularidades que lo permiten una comprensión supranacional. Es necesario analizar los fenómenos sociales y educativos a partir de un ejercicio hermenéutico de los símbolos artísticos y religiosos presentes en todas las sociedades. El arte y las religiones, desde los orígenes, han sido un camino para ello y, el símbolo su forma común de lenguaje. Proponer estas expresiones como un ámbito de estudio y al símbolo como un eje de comprensión de los fenómenos socio-educativos es una tarea necesaria para su estudio y para la construcción de nuevos escenarios de desarrollo humano. Replantearse el quehacer educativo desde una relectura de los mitos y a partir de una actualización de ciertos ritos de la sociedad permitirá un proceso dinámico de continua reflexión y mejora educativa, además de que integrará los procesos sociales a la práctica educativa.

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Palabras clave

Símbolo, mito, civilización occidental, arte y religión.

Introduction

In analyzing the limitations that the modern Project - Modernity - presents the objective of achieving a better life for all human beings and, if we recognize the crisis that institutions and the same educational phenomena present in a society as changing as the one today, it is necessary to reflect on new possibilities for understanding pedagogical action. A possible space, treated by many authors, such as Cassirer, Eliade, Durand, Mélich, among others, is the study of the symbol and its manifestation in human history, especially in art and religion. For this, a hermeneutical analysis of the symbolic expressions in the educational processes will be carried out.

If one starts from the absence that the study of the symbol has in many fields of contemporary sociology, it is urgent to reflect it within the educational processes, since it is urgent to propose new forms of approach to the study of phenomena, actors, processes and educational demonstrations.

Sociology in the framework of modernity

Western modernity brought with it the dizzying development of science. This became the tool by which the human being would affirm his trans-

forming presence in the world. The fire had been stolen from the gods and given to men. New power claimed the light of reason. This immense project, modernity, brought with it a time marked by utopias and critical thinking, by revolutions and the search for perpetual peace. It is a time when the human being will feel, again and now definitively, as administrator and lord of the world that surrounded him.

Auguste Comte, in 1838, will define sociology as a new science that would propose laws for the study of society, just as so many others had been discovered for nature. For this, the same research methods as the physical sciences should be applied.

In this way, the development of Sociology goes hand in hand with the so-called Modern Project. Comte would propose, with his theory of the three stages, scientific knowledge as the highest level in the human species, the culmination of development and progress. Comte will call the upper stage as positive or scientific and can be studied through scientific explanation based on observation and experimentation. At this stage citizens establish relationships of cause and effect. The ordering of the world which, claims positivism, is of a fundamentally rational nature.

Sociology, as a science, responds to an understanding and a way of conceiving progress and development in a linear manner and based on the principle of causality. The social phenomena that it studies respond to this modern project. Ramos (2017) states that:

Modernity has become a way of proceeding and ordering the whole world, or, rather, in the unique and hegemonic form of order; this obviously implies a methodological form, a procedure, or the quasi single dominant procedure for ordering and producing modern progress as a general value. Modernity is also a social dynamic, not only the creator of method and methodological procedures in modern sciences and professions, but also of knowledge worthy of being known. Thus, sociology in modernity has been erected as the social science that studies and analyzes modern society, and at the same time produces a methodology oriented towards progress or towards social change, towards the knowledge that supposedly makes it possible. In this way sociology and its method arise linked to a Western social dynamics and from there we can interpret and observe other societies as different as the Eastern ones. Thus, the Western idea of modernity is confused with a purely endogenous conception of modernization (Touraine 1992: 18), that is, with a form of universalized alienation that exhibits a compulsive action in the direction of progress and transformation modern world through actions called rational (p.259).

The instrumental reason and the logic of causality are those that have guided the work of the sociological sciences during the twentieth century. However, the current Latin American reality and its different contexts are manifested as multiform and complex. A univocal form of understanding appears limited in solving both the problems arising from theoretical reflection and, even more, those arising from everyday human activities. For Ramos (2017):

Neither conservatism, liberalism nor communism as ideological currents of the twentieth century, have managed to constitute the unique formula that allows to eliminate ambiguities and theoretical differentiations; nor to establish a type of social order, an ideal type of State or a unique type of methodological procedure to know and analyze the social. In fact, the methodological contradiction between the individual and the social has not been explained, they are de facto defined as exclusionary exclusions and recurrent themes of modern society (p.264).

And in the twenty-first century, thanks to the new theoretical contributions from Latin America -Bolívar Echeverría, Alonso Quijano, Santiago Castro Gómez, Raúl Fornet Betancourt, Mauricio Beuchot Puente- and to the political processes that Latin America is experiencing, it can be concluded that this unique form of analysis and social understanding has not solved the problems of the Latin American society.

Education is developed thanks to the intervention of various actors, regardless of their modality or way of doing it. Sociology is in charge of studying the different social phenomena involved in human endeavor. These two sciences combine their efforts in the study and understanding of the phenomena that link human groups with learning processes. For this reason, the Sociology of Education would be the field of science that studies the social function of education and the influence in the social sphere of the different actors and educational means.

In the current globalized context, this study becomes more complex due to the immense development of the digital world, the advances of virtual education and ICT, as well as the immense human mobility that characterizes human beings and contemporary societies.

The Sociology of Education, as a science derived from Sociology, focused on the processes and actions carried out in the school environment, it has, among others, the following objects of study¹:

- The educational system as a historical and social construction.
- The social functions of the school.
- The education system and social stratification.

- The system of education and work.
- The process of socialization and school.
- The relationship between sociology and curriculum.
- The school organization.
- Teachers as a social category and educational agent.
- The students.
- The inequalities of class, gender and ethnicity in education, educational reforms, school and community.

In the context of the crisis of the so-called modern project, evidenced in European and North American societies, in the face of a consolidation and development of neo-populist leftist government models, with definitions such as “Good Living Projects”, “Socialisms of the 21st Century” “And others, and in the face of the new theoretical contributions of Latin American theorists and academics, it is urgent to reflect on new spaces and possibilities of life in the new fields of academic-disciplinary reflection, it is urgent to reflect on the forms, spaces and incidence of the new contexts - political, ideological, technological - in the educational activities of the countries of the region. The new scenarios cannot go unnoticed in the face of the challenge of rethinking educational practice.

Mélich (1996) asserts a theoretical crisis in Sociology: “The most serious problem in the human sciences today is the theoretical void that invades us, the” theoretical crisis “(p.35). And in the footnote states: “Sociology is in a theoretical crisis. The empirical research, with great success, has made our knowledge grow, but it has not led to the formation of a specific theory specific to its subject matter“(cited by Luhmann, N., 1993).

From this framework, the following reflections come: Is it possible to conceive of new categories for the understanding of social and educational phenomena that, in the aforementioned context, allow the construction of new scenarios of understanding, analysis and human development? Is it possible to find in the symbol a category that allows us to understand it? Does the study of the symbol allow a greater understanding of the educational processes of the region and of the country, which contextualizes its actions and responds to the complex requirements of formation of the 21st century?

The symbol: starting point for understanding of educational action

The symbol has been, since the origins of humanity, the most diffused and more complex sphere of reflection and communication. From Al-



tamira's paintings to WhatsApp codes, the world in which human beings live is full of symbolism, and all of them convey a way of relating to the transcendent world, with our peers and/or the natural world that surrounds us. For Mélich (1996), "symbolic figures are not arbitrary creations of the human" soul, but the necessary points of reference, values that give meaning and significance to social actions and, in our case, to educational action" (p. 92). The educational processes, characteristic of each cultural space, find in the symbol axial elements that allow an interpretation and understanding of the world.

One of the keys of the understanding of the symbol, within the perspective of the hermeneutics of Beuchot (2005) we find it in the semiotics of Peirce. From the postulates of Peirce, all the sciences use, for their development and understanding, signs. Peirce's semiotics is of a pragmatic order, that is, that privileges the practical as a criterion of philosophical value.

The classic affirmation of the sign *aliquid stat pro aliquo* (something that is in place of something else) asserts its relational dimension: a present object is related to another that is absent and this deepens the vehicular character of the same. In this way, Peirce argues that:

Of course nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign, but the character which causes it to be interpreted as referring to its object may be one that could belong to it irrespective of its object and even if that object had never existed, or may be in a relation to its object that would be exactly the same if it were interpreted as a sign or not (Peirce, 2005, p. 149).

As a background of all activity expressed in signs is the reality of being, the reality of everything about which it is possible to say something or simply think it and, consequently, represent it with signs. The sign offers data on the represented reality, but it is also an interpretation of the represented reality, the same that must take into account the different moments of the hermeneutic act, that is, the text, the author and the reader, the same ones that respond to a context and a particular intentionality.

Every sign has the following characteristics:

- A physical form by which it becomes perceptible to the senses.
- It must refer to something other than itself.
- Someone must recognize it as such, that is, as a sign (Zecchetto, 2002, p. 37).

For Peirce (2005) the sign has a triadic conformation, formed by the representative (which functions as a sign for someone to perceive),

the interpretant (the idea of the representation in the mind of the perceiver of the sign) and the object to which the representative refers).

For Peirce (2005) systems of signs take a universal nature independent of historical, social and cultural conditioning. This universal nature of the sign applies to the human being.

Man is nothing more or nothing less than the idea of man, which in turn can be defined or analyzed as a conjunction (every variable that is required) of other ideas. Leaving perhaps some logical stages, Peirce concludes that the man is also a sign (Reynoso, 2007, page 8).

The purpose of the sign is to establish communication through social relations. The sign thus becomes an instrument to mediate the behavior, beliefs and perceptions of the other. In this way, the sign changes to the same subject. It is a process of internalization of the linguistic sign, through which some aspects of culture externally shared are mediated semiotically, are incorporated in the internal plane of an individual or a particular group or community that have agreed in their use.

Peirce states that a symbol is a sign whose relation to its foundation or to “reality” is of a totally arbitrary character. On the contrary, the relation between the sign and the thing is natural.

The understanding of the symbol can be given from different levels and senses. It depends on its understanding and its significance. The symbol has both transparent and opaque meaning.

The signifier is an image, a figure, a drawing, a stroke, with a rather obvious but relatively understandable meaning, it is not conventional. Its second meaning... points to the historical-cultural level, the symbol belongs to a culture... Its hermeneutics depends on the knowledge of that particular, worldview... A third intention points to personal intimacy, a secret that is alive, a mystery which is reissued in each subject... (Ruiz, 2004, p. 46).

For Peirce society and culture generate meaning, not nature. In his perspective, the subject is an interpreter and maker of signs. What makes a sign such is not that it is composed of signifier and meaning, but is interpreted as sign. It is, in this context, where the interpretation and negotiation of meanings originate. These mental representations are subject both to the subject’s cognitive performance and to the cultural tradition of each social group. Meaning is not a finished, immovable product; is a process characterized by constant negotiations between users to agree and internalize a “common” meaning from the sociocultural



conditions common among people. It is in this process in which the triad constituted by the referent, sign and interpreter are fundamental for the elaboration of meaning. For Peirce, meaning is a process demarcated by the constant negotiations carried out by users among themselves, to agree and internalize a “common” meaning from the context of a particular human group. In this way, the signifier remains but has motivated a change in the community that agreed on a certain meaning, updating and contextualizing it.

For its part, the symbol has particular characteristics, which differentiate it from the sign:

It is a language that departs - like all language - from a set of signs, meaning signifiers that evoke an image, produce a behavior or refer to something, but its voice is privileged because its meaning is given by superadded levels of meaning. The different languages correspond to the various ways of constructing reality, to the chains that we attribute to different perceptions and rationalities, but among all forms of communication the symbol stands out, because it has an original disposition, it is an ontologically outstanding expression, it points out the gradations of reality which are considered to be the highest and the primordial, precisely those which are called sacred because they are charged with ‘being’ (Ruiz 2004: 46).

This plenitude of being expressed by the author differs from the sign. The first shows an ontological reality and, the second, it manifests a convention; the symbol can remain during the time, the sign changes according to the requirements of the society. The symbol carries a greater semantic load and strengthens the identity of a culture. The symbol allows a greater understanding of the same culture through its diachronic development, thanks to its ability to integrate the nature or way of being of those who use it in its expressions and social manifestations.

The symbol is characterized by its ability to synthesize through a sensitive expression - representation - all influences of the unconscious and the conscious - and its construction would be influenced by cultural differences - as well as to synthesize contradictions and harmonies within each man (Seguel, 2005: 126).

In all cultures the symbol has served as a representation that propitiated a common language among those who integrated them and, even more, will allow a more complex and profound expression of those realities that were often ineffable or incomprehensible for the languages with which they were related. In addition, it were these symbols that, in some

ways, allowed in the different cultures an inner harmony and their bond with the environment, we have the case of the mandalas in the East, the fish in Christianity, the prayer in Islam, etc.

From the various sciences, such as psychology and sociology, the understanding of the symbol has been enriched and allows for greater understanding and reflection from different contexts. The understanding of the symbol therefore addresses both an individual and a social sphere; that is, to all areas of human and cultural endeavor.

The concept of symbol has two meanings: the first means to emit, to throw; the second relates to putting, insert, gathering. Through these two movements the notion of symbol becomes an “operator of meanings and relations”, which prevents it from pointing in one direction only. At the same time as it proposes or carries a meaning in the framework of a community or human group, it gathers them around the common language that this symbol represents. So:

The symbol would be exceptional in its ability to synthesize through a sensitive expression - representation - all influences of the unconscious and the conscious - and its construction would be influenced by cultural differences - as well as to synthesize contradictions and harmonies within each man (Seguel, 2005: 134).

This expresses the significant cultural value of a symbol for a human group, especially when it is gathered (in physical or virtual form) from a motivation, manifestation or educational action.

In addition, the symbol has both a transparent and opaque meaning (Ruiz, 2004). As transparent, it reflects directly its meaning; as hidden, invites a deeper and different interpretation of the reality that combines and integrates. Its elaboration is not simple and its historical character holds more value: it is used as the foundation and vehicle of the identity of a community. The signifier is an image, a figure, a drawing, a stroke, with an understandable and unconventional meaning. Additionally, it points to the historical-cultural level. “The symbol belongs to a culture... Its hermeneutics depends on the knowledge of that particular, world-view... Finally, it also points to the personal intimate, to a secret that is alive, to a mystery that is reedited in each subject...” (Ruiz, 2004). The symbol, at the same time, is intentional and represents the concrete.

For Giménez, following Geertz:

The symbolic is the world of social representations materialized in sensitive forms, also called “symbolic forms,” and which can be expressions, artifacts, actions, events and some quality or relationship... everything

can serve as a symbolic support of cultural meanings... the symbolic covers the vast set of social processes of signification and communication (Giménez, 2005, p.5).

It is important to place the symbol in the context of cultural endeavor, in which it makes sense: “culture or civilization, in a broad ethnographic sense, is that complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, customs and any other habits and capacities acquired by man as a member of society” (Kahn, 1976, quoted by Giménez, 2005, p.7). From this understanding the symbol can be understood as a structuring element of society. This is why Giménez considers whether “it is possible to assign a specific and relatively autonomous field to culture, understood as a dimension of social life, if we define it by reference to the symbolic processes of society” (Giménez, 2005).

In this way, culture would have to be conceived as the set of symbolic facts present in a society. Or, more precisely, as the social organization of meaning, as patterns of meanings “historically transmitted and incarnated in symbolic forms, by virtue of which individuals communicate with each other and share their experiences, conceptions and beliefs” (Thompson 1998, cited by Giménez, 2005). The symbol integrates these meanings, “keeps” them throughout history and allows human interaction within a community, strengthening it in its identity and traits and, generating the changes that the new realities demand, not forgetting its fundamental axes, the ones which reflect their identity and characterize their actions.

This is the reason why, from very diverse sociological and anthropological perspectives, a compression of the symbol within the framework of culture has been attempted. It is important, now, to understand education within its cultural dynamics: all aulic or external actions that affect the formation of the subject, the transmission of values and/or the transformation of society are a fundamental part of that changing and continuous dynamic whole called culture.

It is important to take into account the reflections that Siacca and Giménez, when referring to the etymology of the word “culture” and its analogues cult (towards transcendence) and agri-culture (oriented to the field and nature), for which “should be said that culture is the action and the effect of symbolically” cultivating “the inner and outer nature of the human species, making it fruitful in complex systems of signs that organize, shape and give meaning to the totality of social practices” (Giménez, 2005, p.7).

One of the great problems of the social processes of signification and communication, in the understanding of Giménez, is:

The problematic of the interpretation or the recognition, that allows to understand the culture also like “grammar of recognition” or of social “inter-knowledge”. Taking this point of view, culture could be defined as the interplay of consolidated or innovative interpretations present in a given society (2005, p.9).

Therefore, no form of social organization could be understood outside a symbolic dimension.

The reality of the symbol also includes the different jobs that, by meaning, make it the members of a community to act on the world and transform it in function of their interests. Put another way: symbol and culture cannot be conceived exclusively as “texts”, they are also tools of intervention in the world. It is not possible to conceive of these two realities as static and immutable. The social interaction of these two, through different actors and scenarios in time and space, allows not only an interpretation of meanings, but a way of influencing and responding to the new requirements of society. The symbol integrates the culture of a community, while modifying, dynamizing and updating it.

Different societies often propose systems of symbols that “are part of culture insofar as they are constantly used as an instrument of ordering collective behavior, that is, to the extent that they are absorbed and recreated by social practices” (Durham, 1984, pp. 74-75), so symbolic systems are at the same time representations (“models of”) and orientations for action (“models for”), according to Clifford Geertz (1992, quoted by Giménez, 2005). In this way the two aspects mentioned above, which characterize the symbol, are integrated. Its role as a “computer” of collective behavior, its “integrating” nature of identity and social practice, as well as its capacity of representation and of implicative for action, make of the symbol a cultural element of an essentially ethical nature.

The symbol as mediator of educational action

While it is true that many of the sciences use symbols for their understanding, study and development, the symbol is an essential element that constitutes the cultural task of the human being. Religions, the business world, communicative processes, now computer science and, in general, all human actions are mediated by the symbol. The symbol is not irrational. Their understanding must be given from the fullness of being, from

the point of departure of meaning. This symbolic nature allows today, in a world characterized by a hegemony of reason and in the face of the crisis of values, an integration of the affective and axiological dimensions of human beings and educational processes. Far from being “irrational,” the symbol engages the human being, involves it, makes him a participant and integrates the context to which it represents and offers meanings.

In the same way that human action cannot be reduced to an exclusively rational analysis, the educational task cannot be known under the sole and only effort of rational logic. The complexity that human being and education have goes beyond Western scientific canons. Moreover, when modernity in the West has had particular characteristics. In Husserl’s words, the symbol is a way of being present in the “world of life”.

Mélich states:

All this does not mean a return to an irrationalist extreme, he warns, but we assume another mode of reason, another rationality, a symbolic reason that seeks to think connotatively, to think ambiguously, to think the uncertain, the insecure, in a vibrant manner. It is a question of extending our notion of reason, so that we approach the areas of reality that, with the positivist restricted mode, we should leave aside (1996, 24).

It is not, therefore, a reflection of the educational phenomena mediated by the symbol from the positivist and rationalist methods. The symbol expresses other areas of reality “hidden” for the limits of reason. Its inherent logic is not that of the scientific method, but neither can be understood by the latter. Reason is not absolute property of positivist logic, there are realities that are alien to it and against which it has not provided answers. The symbol offers us these “other spaces” of rationality.

Under the same approach, Santos Gómez (2013) asserts that:

Education is also something symbolic, ambiguous, referred to that uncertain penumbra. The word that we can use, in addition, connecting with the perspective of Gadamer, is “tradition”. There is therefore a tradition, but for it we must understand something that is dark rather than clear, and, following Mèlich, rather symbolic and mythical than symbolic and conceptual. It is not a regime of ideas, but words as condensations or fields of connotations, constituting openings rather than closures of meanings.... That is tradition (p. 6)

The educator’s work would not be another, in transmitting the tradition of a people than that of “hermeneutic instructors”, that is, of proposing to its students the way of interpreting the different symbols

that culture entails. Culture offers us the center from which to act in the world of life.

Santos Gómez (2013, p.3) cites Borges, in relation to the axial factor that the school has as a transmitter of culture. When he asserts:

... said Borges and it seems that this tension vertebrates the school. The need for a labyrinth center. Borges said in an interview that the horror was not that in the center of everything there was a hell or a bad god, but simply there was no center. That is what worse man can endure and for that very reason we create myths and we are symbolic. That is our night and our penumbra, which, according to Mèlich, a great part of pedagogy has eluded (p.3).

And it is that reason cannot be reduced to a scientific rationality. The symbol, with its particularity of showing also the “hidden side” of reality allows - in the sphere of educational processes - both the understanding of the whole reality and the implication of the whole subject in the teaching-learning process.

A door opens after the pretense of knowing this unknown face of reality. The rationalist understanding of the study of Western civilization has been insufficient. The analysis of social phenomena has been assumed, in the vast majority of cases, from war and trade. While these have set milestones in the history of humanity, they do not reflect its being in an integral manner.

Trade has been one of the most significant expressions of human material progress and, moreover, has been the basis and characteristic of a society marked by profit, but it has not yet achieved a deep understanding of the human species at a certain point in history. As an irrefutable example we have the teaching of history in the educational systems of the world: this has been reduced to a superficial study of war and economic development achieved by trade and technological advances. The Sociology of Education itself has been reduced to the practical, rational and quantitative analysis of social phenomena.

The arts and culture, manifestations that express the very essence of human nature, have been reduced to a fragmented and specialized study. Experts have agreed to their understanding, knowledge and enjoyment. Many cultural expressions, sometimes within the popular sphere, have been reduced to magical expressions and, at best, to folklore. But, its value as an axial of the culture and integrator of humanity has not recovered.

Areas that for some societies are part of their culture (magic, alchemy, astrology, etc.) are not possible to be understood by Western science.



The necessary approach to the myth: “To discover the night of education the pedagogue must begin in a new process of formation: mythical formation” (Mélích, 1996, p.25) and, according to the author, is formulated and developed through the speech of the symbol.

In analyzing some of the topics proposed by the Sociology of Education as specific areas of study, one can discover in them knowledge in which it is possible to identify and determine symbolic elements that go through the cultural task, within the framework of society. Although the attention of Sociology, and its object of study, has been oriented from a rational understanding, it is important, following the contributions of Mélích (1996), “religion and art are symbolic forms, forms of knowledge that possess languages other than science and somewhat to philosophy. Scientific rationality is a way of knowing the human being, but not the only one” (p.24), to recover and integrate other forms of rationality into educational processes. These expressions, present throughout the history of mankind, show a symbolic character and allow a comprehensive understanding of the human being, allow seeing “the hidden face of the moon.”

In this way, in conceiving the educational system as a historical and social construction, the learner can establish in the different stages of history and in the different societies symbols that have characterized the various educational proposals and that, beyond argumentation, they distinguish it in an integral way.

This is the case of the elements used in theater and Greek literature and their link with the Paideia; the Middle Ages, in reference to its architecture of churches and cathedrals, and its reference to the Bible. Similar examples can be found in the different contributions of modern society and its multiplicity of manifestations in religion (and its architecture) and art (with its most diverse expressions (music, painting, sculpture, etc.) more so, in educational expressions in American contexts and/or in each geography.

In analyzing knowledge of the Sociology of Education, such as the educational system and social stratification, elements such as clothing, music, art, customs, language, narratives, etc., are identified, the same evidencing symbols used in the various human groups and that allow a better understanding of the different ways in which societies have established their social stratification. The language, through its different forms of narrative becomes an immense field of cultural manifestations that shows the culture and the work of a people, of the different societies. From the cave paintings of the Altamira caves to the painting of Dalí or the architecture of Gaudí express the complex, multidimensional and transcendent work of human nature.

The processes of socialization in society - and in the school as a mediator of society - respond to the way society wants to train those who participate in it. Mélich (1996) states that socialization:

It is nothing more than the internalization of a worldview, of schemes of meaning and, ultimately, of a symbolic universe. Visions of the world are objectified in the world of life in different ways (images, flags, totems...). In any case, the way to objectify a worldview is a game of language. What is decisive of both socializations² is the incarnation in a symbolic order. This is inseparable from institutions; especially of the two elementals of our world of life: family and school (p.43).

And, an important part of these processes of socialization are the rites of passage. Both religion (through its different symbolic expressions) and the school have different “rites of passage” that allows the individual to pass through the different levels of the teaching-learning process.

The school organization usually responds to management models and ways of conceiving social institutions, depending on the values that society seeks to convey. Solidarity, respect and teamwork are, among others, values that the school reflects and shares with the educational community according to its way of acting and being carried out within a society.

A diachronic analysis of school institutions and their relation to social values would result in the way in which they have been fed and mutually modified. The same social injustices, discriminations of various kinds have had their way of feeding in the school institution.

All societies, in one form or another, have had a group of “trainers” entrusted with the formation, growth and development of the “learners”. In the context of a society characterized by constant change, by transient links and fragile structures, it is necessary, within the framework of the reflection on the Sociology of Education, to understand the work of the teacher as the teacher in the world of the life.

For Habermas (Merich, 1996, p.46):

The concept of the world of life will be complementary to that of communicative action which is, in fact, what he is interested in developing” and, it is clear in stating that if communicative action is possible, it is on the horizon of the world of life. If education is a communicative action, the teacher is, therefore, a communicative agent and a transmitter of the same culture of life. “... communicative agents always move within the horizon that is their world of life; they cannot escape from it” (Habermas 1988, 176, quoted by Mélich, p. 46).



The school as an integrator and transmitter of the “world of life” motivates the teacher to take a different position. Therefore, the following must be taken into account:

1. The world of life is given to the subject in a manner without problematics. It is an intuitively present network.
2. The world of life is intersubjective.
3. The world of life is immune to total reviews. Situations change, but the limits of the world of life cannot be transcended.

These three characteristics can be taken by the teacher within the framework of new social understandings and promote them as a social agent within the educational processes today. The presence of the world of life is evidenced through the various elements that can integrate the so-called “hidden curriculum”, that is, through the various symbolic expressions, rites and activities that the school performs in an ordinary way. Daily life (not only problem solving), habitual pedagogical relationships and the daily routine of the educational process are ways in which the world of life is realized and updated every time.

While the world of life has no limits, it does establish them. Part of this delimitation is exercised by symbols, says Mélich that “as much as the world of life evolves, the essential symbols remain and reappear under different masks” (1996: 48). The symbol becomes the driving axis of history and not the object of history. Symbols are a structuring part of it and an axis for its understanding, rather than its object of study.

Among other issues are the inequalities of class, gender and ethnicity in education an element that cannot be overlooked in the study of the Sociology of Education. The classroom and the educational institution are but a small reflection of society.

The relationships between the different human groups are an appropriate scenario for knowing, identifying and taking value and transformative positions in the various educational and social contexts. The way in which different human groups, and their manifestations of gender, ethnicity and class, find in the symbol a space of expression (thanks to its complexity and scope) allows to overcome an ideologization of the phenomena and allows a better approximation and understanding of these issues on the part of the students. From an appreciation of these realities and thanks to the symbolic character of the symbol, the student can take a concrete stance and commitment.

It is therefore urgent to recover in the study of education as a social phenomenon the structuring and meaning-giving axis conferred by the symbol. Mélich (1996) states that:

The three processes of symbolic reproduction of the world of life, namely cultural reproduction, cultural integration and socialization, are intimately related to education... In other words, the three processes are educational. Education is, from this perspective, the set of processes of symbolic reproduction in its three moments: culture, society and personality (p. 50).

The role of the school in the context of culture will be to continue and renew cultural knowledge, to transmit the tradition of a people, promote the stability and solidarity of the groups and, in the personality, promote the formation integral of social actors, empowering them to be active and critical in the different scenarios.

The Sociology of Education, as a science that promotes and supports the educational task in all its complexity, must transcend a rationalist approach and lead to a deeper analysis, to the interpretation and understanding of the symbols that the educational dynamic has within all Social surroundings. Cultural education, proper to the school, must be understood as mediation, as a way of constructing the world (Mélich, 1996) and all human society... “has a global construction of the world, which is precisely what gives meaning to existence” (Mélich, 1996, p.50). This construction, says this author, is all in the West, “the central archetype that had agglutinated the meaning, values and all the configurative elements of daily life” (1996, 58) has been broken. Education, conceived within a dynamic process, and the teacher’s work as a hermeneutic trainer is part of the change that will allow a new compass within the framework of the civilization crisis in which this part of the world is located.



Conclusions

Faced with a Western modernity, of a pragmatic and individualistic nature, which has not responded to the demands of integral human development, sustained progress, respect for various cultural manifestations, among other phenomena, reflection on the symbol as an alternative to overcoming of the discomfort of the culture proper to this civilizing space is evidenced as urgent.

A diachronic study of the manifestations and educational expressions of the different societies result in the crisis in which the educational

institution is found, as a result of a long crisis that has not been solved or reflected in an integral manner.

The different characteristics of the symbol, far from being simplistic and superficial, seek a commitment; commitment and a response of the human being of the 21st century are an alternative to the current educational exercise. The symbol, in the framework of art and religion, has been a constant in the history of humanity and allows to structure in an integrated way a new reflection on educational spaces and actors. Religion and art can not be conceived as privileged and exclusive spaces; are fully human expressions that realize the totality of the human being and embrace global humanity. It urges its reading and understanding in the framework of Philosophy and Sociology.

Artistic and religious expressions allow an integral, comprehensive understanding of the human being, in his individual understanding and as a species. And its reading and treatment corresponds not only to an aesthetic reading or from the history of art and religions. It corresponds to a hermeneutic exercise in which we have to establish both the analogies between the elements and actors of the educational process and the expressions that human beings have made in those traits that are essentially human and transversal to all cultures and societies. The mythical narratives and their archetypal presence are an example of this and, the Sociology of Education cannot remain outside this challenge.

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Notes

- 1 These themes are taken from the book by Francisco Fernández Palomares (2003).
- 2 Melich speaks of two types of socialization, the primary is family. The secondary is the internalization of institutional “sub-worlds”. The acquisition of language and ways of life of the different modes of social being, of the different roles or behaviors constitutes the background of secondary socialization.

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