

ΣΟΦΙΑ—SOPHIA

Editorial

The formation of citizens: utopias and realities

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In contemporary societies, education is torn between tensions and ironies that it has not yet managed to reconcile: while, on the one hand, it promises freedom, happiness, progress or equality; on the other hand, thanks to the pressures of the labor market, it ends up negotiating these utopias and hopes, in order to comply with training for bureaucracy, discipline and competitiveness.

In the context of these contradictions, it is important to reflect on the responsibility of education to teach human values and citizenship, in order to sustain democratic system in open societies; however, the discussion must contemplate that our educational apparatus has also been complicit in the false moralism of modern democracy, in which, according to Chomsky, the democratic is reduced to: “A system of government in which certain elements of the elite, who rely on the commercial community, control the state through the mastery of private society, while people observe in silence” (Chomsky, 2007: 7).

Generally speaking, our academy teaches to solve the paradox by reducing the political value of citizen training to the simple electoral exercise of leaders who, in theory, “represent peoples’ interests.” That is why it organizes polls and elects student representatives without equipping them with tools to act and decide; while insisting on classes of democracy and citizenship about the importance of social participation for the advancement of nations. However, if schools were really democratic, it would not be necessary to reiterate with lectures on the importance of citizenship; it would suffice with actions and behaviors anchored in a *modus operandi* that, naturally, transmit a culture of life committed to the challenges and crises of the community.

However, it is also necessary to mention that, in our democratic system, citizen participation has been a well-publicized fallacy, since in reality, only a small group of people execute and make the decisions that move the economic and ideological threads of power of a whole nation, and which are spread with triumphalism by the main channels of communication, among them, of course, the school. From time to time, active society has the possibility to participate in the election of some leaders, but, as Chomsky would say: “Once they have approved this or that member of the specialized class, they must withdraw and become spectators again” (Chomsky, 2007: 7).

It should also be noted that the leaders of the social and political system fear the ghost of forms of emancipation, and that by all means they seek to sustain themselves by raising a mantle of resignation for the present, accompanied by promises of future development and progress for everybody. Nonetheless, widespread mistrust is a latent enemy of these false forms of participatory democracy.

Heir to industrialized modernity and as an annex to disciplinary subjects, democracy in academia translates in terms of “competencies” and “indicators” in the best style of an industrialized skills checklist. The problem is that citizenship is not a common competence, because it goes beyond a conceptual scheme that is solved with theories, being a matter related to awakening the awareness of being a political subject. It’s not a matter of preaching or electoral suffrages, it implies a transformation of the being that is not supplemented with chairs or traditional competences. It is sad to admit that, under the current parameters that guide citizenship training and that are intended to be extended with systems such as tertiary education, this type of responsibility has remained at the same level as any other technical or scientific training. The students go from a laboratory practice to an ethics lecture and all this leads only to the accumulation of academic hours and credits, until obtaining a technical or professional degree.

We could infer that the kind of humanity formed from education in the societies of consumption and economic exclusion is far from a true civility. We should recognize that our society grows in dehumanization, while it is strengthened in:

- A routine life that demands greater speed, liquidity and lightness.
- An accentuated selfishness and individualism that increases barbarity as a species.
- The love of consumption that promises happiness, but which actually homogenizes buyers and frustrates the ones who cannot access.

- A disdain for knowledge that is not practical or utilitarian, which is called unnecessary, vague and meaningless.
- A lost struggle between competitiveness and ethics.

For Chomsky (2007), the ruling class has imposed this type of antidemocratic task on education, while rewards teachers to spread the imagery of academia as a space where values for civility are taught. Thus, the teacher is expected to be responsible for a “state-paid official” (Chomsky, 2007: 11), who is of course required to commit to: “Ethical, social, political and economic reproduction, (which is) designed to shape the students in the image of the dominant society.” (Chomsky, 2007: 11). In fact, it is part of technical instruction for insertion in labor market, that humanist and democratic formation that today is practiced in wide sectors of the academy. An education in which subjects are molded in such a way that end up endorsing with (their) silence the structures of power without questioning their implications, since it is privileged the instrumental and cumulative approach, while little is promoted the ability to critically read the facts of the world. Macedo and Chomsky (2007) argue that our society has allowed the influence of large corporations to translate the goals of education into pragmatic ends of the market and therefore students are trained to be submissive workers, anxious consumers and passive citizens. There remains a great task pending for an education that in fact, with honesty and transparency, wants to bet on the formation of political subjects.

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