

# Freedom and obedience in western education<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract:* Education has to emphasize the characteristics which define Western democratic societies. In addition, it has to ensure the active and participative inclusion of each person in social life, where respect for human rights prevails over the person's preferred ideology. Promoting these values in citizens not only guarantees the stability of the state, but also its constant progression and improvement. Beginning at the elementary level, the promotion of students' critical spirit is recognized as a fundamental objectives. However, the structures which shape Western education in the 21st century do not allow for the development of completely autonomous thinking and critical thinking in students. In this article, we analyze the processes which comprise an education for obedience. Although obedience does not respond to conscious cognitive processes, it is present in the structural rigidity of education through the organization of the classroom. Our explanation is based on the Theory of Social Conformity, which will be presented as the antithesis of a person's individual freedom. Moreover, we will see how contaminated cognitive vicarious elements are promoted. Although they are endemic to people, they do not allow students to develop a critical spirit or to be educated for freedom.

*Key words:* education, obedience, freedom, social conformity, criticism.

## Introduction

In this paper, we propose the idea that instead of promoting personal autonomy, formal education in the West oppresses and educates students into obedience. To understand how education is designed to achieve obedience, we start from Erich Fromm's work, analyzing the processes involved in

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learning learner conformity, which we call *contaminated vicarious learning*, *contaminated vicarious teaching* and *learnt conformity*. This is fundamental to understanding how obedience, if viewed from the perspective of conformity, originated as an element of evasion which allows human beings to integrate within their social group. However, we review subsequent work in order to complement the concepts described by Fromm. Reason begins with the questioning of rules. It is possible that once we do this, we will come to understand that many of them are necessary and convenient. It is then that we are faced with positive authority, exercised with the approval of those who subordinate to it.

What we propose here is partly the universal assumption that education is about training people whose critical capacity allows them to think and act with autonomy, since doing so is, in short, a fundamental characteristic of the citizens of a democratic, free and equal society. However, nowadays, the rigid and authoritarian structure of educational centers and the nature of the relationships established between students and teachers prevent teachers from developing a critical spirit in their students. Education is increasingly defined and understood as a place of training, rather than a temple of dialogue, critical thinking and critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2012).

It is clear that authority and discipline are fundamental components of school life (Benne, 1970; Clark, 1998, McAllister, 2017; Smith, 1985; Wilson, 1971). Studies on the subject are based on the foundations of social theory, classroom research and research on school ideology, which offer interesting perspectives on the elements which constitute authority, contexts and realities. There are of course various types of authority, such as teacher legitimacy, student consensus, and shared moral order (Pace & Hemmings, 2007). Discipline must concern students and their interest in learning activities, a sort of discipline for wisdom in life and educational interest (MacAllister, 2013).

We are not questioning the need to educate *with* discipline or *through* discipline, understood as a set of rules or norms, which when complied with consistently lead to the desired and necessary result, essential to valuable and quality learning (MacAllister, 2014); We do not propose a theory that opposes the assumption of an autonomous moral which allows for an individual dimension of education, the acceptance of universal ethical principles of coexistence and social realization; we believe that the basic pillars of training are the moral dimension and the importance of social responsibility (Campbell, 2008). We do not defend an antisystem pedagogy

either. We start from a radical democratic pedagogy (Fielding, 2007) which is centered on the individual, and opposed to market dominance. We share with Michael Fielding and Peter Moss (2011) the idea that the public school must be a social and emancipatory alternative, a school that fights against power structures that discriminate by race or class and maintain historical inequalities (Casey, 2016). We consider the traditional education structure to impede the development of the child's personal autonomy, creating discrepancies between what is learned in school and societal demands. Nevertheless, we understand that Western education systems promote obedience and authoritarianism, based mainly on the elimination of critical thinking, reflection, dialogue and civism, which leads to ideological forms of domination of an educational nature based on anti-intellectualism and civic illiteracy, making it necessary to generate new spaces in which education policy and nature can be understood (Giroux, 2017). We agree with Peter McLaren (2016) on the importance of rejecting social relations and political structures which deny the individual as a person, including authoritarianism, disciplinary boundaries and the questioning of the interrelationship between ideas and social practices.

We start from the idea that what has been described above responds to a process of social conformity, as old as the human race. However, as we will see in this paper, conformity allows people to integrate into their social group. In that process, they reject their individuality and critical capacity. Individual freedom is an isolation for which one must be prepared; otherwise, social conformity becomes a mechanism of evasion which allows us to put the demands of the collective before those of our individual self, and to discharge in it the burden of responsibility of our thoughts and actions (Fromm, 2013).

### **Erich Fromm and *Learnt Conformity*. Processes involved in the Assumption of Students' Conformity.**

Erich Fromm, who was German and whose parents were Jewish, was forced into exile in the United States in 1934 after Hitler's rise to power. He was an outstanding member of the Frankfurt School and his ideas on authority, freedom as well as structuralism were an important turn in the sociology and pedagogy of the time.

Fromm understood democracy as a subtle version of previous authoritarian regimes. In the present era, citizens are given an opportunity to intervene in the system and this promotes a negative freedom which allows them to

think that their individuality is guaranteed by freedom of thought and expression. However, according to Fromm, freedom of expression of thought is of no use if citizens do not have their own thoughts. He relies on conformity to explain how the average citizen delegates to experts everything related to politics, economics and the general management of the country, out of fear of what the responsibility positive freedom implies. Fromm's main line of thought was initially influenced by Marxism, which was little by little turning into what he called "humanistic and democratic socialism". Thus, he criticized both the totalitarianism of the Soviet State and Western capitalism itself. This resulted in a game of labeling which had little to do with reality. Fromm has been described as a communist, social-democrat and anarchist, although his only objective was to study authoritarian tendencies in the societies of his time. Some of the tendencies he identified existed even in those democratic states where he detected a clearly hierarchical cultural pattern which was perpetuated and extended through their institutions. Ensuring students become aware and play an active part in their own learning would be a first step towards the intellectual independence discussed above.

There comes a time in people's lives when they become fully aware of their individuality with respect to the environment in where they are. This is isolation on their part and they must begin to face the problem which arises: incorporating their individual, unique and independent *self* in a society and in a group of individuals who have already established their behavioral and psychological characteristics.

Erich Fromm talks about "evasion mechanisms" (Fromm, 2013) which can be found in people who assume they have negative freedom but are not prepared to progress towards achieving positive freedom. That is, the mechanisms which help people who cannot assume the claim of their individual personality and the inclusion of that personality in their social group. Those that are not prepared to progress go back to their previous state, to a large extent rejecting their individuality to live a mechanical and compulsive life.

These evasion mechanisms are authoritarianism, destructiveness and automatic conformity. The most common mechanism of escape is that of automatic conformity. It is the third defense mechanism identified by Fromm, as well as being the most widespread. It presupposes absolute surrender in the battle between the individual *self* and the outside world, that we will adopt the customs and behavior of the majority of the people around us. Simply put, people end up imitating their environment, becoming yet another

of the many people with similar behavioral characteristics. Thus, feelings of loneliness and impotence are eliminated.

However, Fromm points out that this could conflict with the thought of individuality in the Modern Age, which is governed by freedom of thought, feeling and action.

The relation with freedom (or absence thereof) is that conformity involves accepting a system of external values and behaviors which we internalize and make ours. And there is no worse form of rejection of freedom than that; since when people obey a norm, thinking that the origin of the same is inside, the probability that they rebel against that authority is almost null, as they do not see it as such. This is what Erich Fromm (2013) called “anonymous authority”, and it takes the form of conventions, mental health, customs, fashions and so on. When an obligation is not perceived as a threat, the rejection rate is reduced to zero. Thus, the ethical responsibility of creating students is lost (Freire, 1998). Moreover, social problems, changes and critical actions are reduced to a state of total indifference – ethical, social and committed – with society and with other people.

Accordingly, conformity is the most widespread evasion mechanism, since it involves people becoming almost entirely assimilated into the customs and ideas of the social group. We will try to find the origins of this in vicarious learning, as people imitate it in their first learning experience.

This phenomenon, known as the theory of social learning, has been addressed in the work of Albert Bandura, Dorothea Ross and Sheila A. Ross (1963). Their work goes beyond previous work (by Julian B. Rotter, for example) which took into account vicarious elements, but despised the motivation.

The work of Bandura and his team gave name and form to a fact as common as humanity itself. In addition, they went further with their experiments and showed that even negative behaviors (in this case, physical aggression) can be learned. In their investigations, children imitated violent behavior previously performed by an adult where no one had condemned or punished the adult, leading them to believe that such behaviors were desirable.

Given the above, we can talk about *contaminated vicarious learning* (or better still *contaminated vicarious teaching*, because after all, it is the adults who modify their behavior, contaminating the process), when cultural as-

pects inherent to the behavioral model decisively influence all the actions they perform.

Here, we are talking about a primitive and early representation of conformity, the origins of which are found in Fromm. Solomon Asch defines it as “a psychological tendency to ‘uncritical acceptance’ of group ideas and evaluations” (1956, p. 2). Such conformity not only allows us to integrate into the group, but also to participate in it and to benefit as members. Nevertheless, this frequently requires us to suspend our personal judgment in favor of the collective judgment. We need to fit into the group to ensure our survival in it.

At this point, it becomes necessary to consider what happens when both contaminated vicarious learning and conformity merge. Assuming that the school classroom is a place of social reproduction, do we learn or do they teach us to suspend our personal judgment and leave the majority to form judgments? Can they teach us to be obedient and submissive, without questioning ourselves for external orders? And if so, is it a conscious teaching and learning process?

If so, we would venture to call it *learnt conformity*, when, in adults’ behavioral manifestations, it is inherent, and often unconscious to any kind of authority. A particular behavior exhibited, although not consciously, in the presence of children still creating their vision of the world can become determinant. The way our role models behave towards an authority will determine our conception of that authority and our attitude to it. *Learnt conformity* removes all vestiges of a person’s minimum chances to escape conformity and guarantee personal freedom and intellectual individuality.

## **Promotion of the Critical Spirit and Intellectual Individuality in Primary School Students**

Stanley Milgram (1974) adhered to the line proposed by Fromm and pointed out that the origin of a person’s moral and intellectual freedom lay in what Fromm called *solitude*, and Milgram *isolation*. We accept the dominant value system of the socioeconomic group we are born in and grow up in. In this way, we learn to delegate the consequences of our actions to the group. Consequently, we develop an individual response, generated from our individual reasoning, which supposes isolation, a state of solitude, where individuals take responsibility for themselves in their own actions and thoughts.

As we have already pointed out, this individual freedom potentially presents a danger to the dominant culture, as it would begin to redefine itself and evolve in a progressive line. However, at present, it adapts to reproduce, extend and perpetuate itself (Escudero & Bolívar, 1994). For the system, it is much easier to use the school as a stage for social reproduction, as a multi-level screening process for dividing the students into different classes according to personal ability. However, in practice, this is carried out according to the student's socioeconomic background. That is why the school walks a delicate balance between forming student individuality and critical spirit while promoting obedience and the acceptance of vertical classes as an endemic part of the society they will belong to.

This is in line with what we have seen so far. Obedience presupposes the acceptance of external norms. In addition, these norms can come from a specific defined source, or from an "anonymous authority," as argued in Fromm (2013). For Milgram, accepting individual solitude is the beginning of freedom, or, the rejection of any of the evasion mechanisms to assume our positive freedom.

We can define obedience as a change in our thoughts and actions when some kind of pressure is exerted by an external agent (Milgram, 1974). In this definition the word *change* is important because it is key to understanding how the processes behind the origin of people's obedience are articulated. Change occurs as, under the pressure of that external agent, we change our natural behavior. At times, it may seem that the agents cause these changes to emanate from within us. However, even in these cases, the primary source of this agent is outside us, despite us having internalized it and not seeing it as an external influence.

There are innumerable dangers in acting in obedience, especially if there is a figure of authority who acts despotically and whose objective is the common good. The path between despotism and personal gain on the part of those who exercise it is very narrow. To avoid this, we must educate citizens in reason. On this, Fromm (2013) said that disobedience, as an act of freedom, is the principle of reason.

The interpersonal relationships in the school environment are small-scale reproductions of what happens in society as a whole. Thus, it is possible to discern different groups among students (defined by their racial, economic, social or even intellectual background), as well as differences in the relationships between them, and in turn, with the staff.

Regarding the concept of authority, there is a gap between the school and society. Students are taught to obey teachers, class delegates, textbooks, schedules and classroom bells, but this degree of irrational obedience would never be required of citizens in a democratic society (Ruiz, Bernal, Gil & Escámez, 2012). The reason is that a society cannot be considered a democracy if its members do not demonstrate a critical capacity before rulers.

The origins of the current education systems, as well as the dominant paradigm, must be sought in modernity, where the school is conceived as a traditional institution and as an agent of power, of the control exerted by the ruling classes (Althusser, 1977; Moral, 2009). Jürgen Habermas (1971) talks about the dominant ideology of knowledge and science, the preponderance of hierarchical knowledge which controls education and science. What is more, this ideology masks real problems and justifies the interests of the ruling class by preventing the emancipation of the dominated class. There is no neutral or innocent pedagogy, but in relation to power (Giroux, 2017).

The Western school has the modern pretension to offer a neutral, objective place where equal opportunities to all the subjects are an immutable reality. A school based on a dominant pedagogical model, which is acritical and equal. Furthermore, it is based on a scale of values claiming universality, in which a fictitious ideal of a homogeneous society is presented.

From this paradigm, learning transmits an objective and formalized content with neutrality. They are acquired with authority, imparted irremissibly by a teacher and assimilated by a student who, in most cases, remains passive, obedient and uncritical. The curriculum is privileged on the affective and the critical, and the teacher's authority is not perceived as legitimate, generating potentially destructive and problematic tensions between obedience and freedom (Hargreaves et al., 2017). We refer here to the banking concept of education where knowledge is imparted downwards hierarchically from the wise to the ignorant. Such knowledge is based on the instrumentalization of the dominant ideology and on the absolutization and alienation of ignorance where the other always takes a stand (Freire, 2014).

Many countries have found their way to democracy under the auspices of capitalism. Nevertheless, the absolute leadership which continues to show the teaching staff in the classroom has been in place since the 19th century. This disrupts student autonomy. In addition, when this oppression conflicts with social expectations and demands, internal and external personal

conflicts are often created, and these may even generate violent behavior towards other students and teachers (Barba, 2009).

There is no critical spirit in those who are obedient. Moreover, the school positively reinforces obedience, while promoting the students' intellectual independence. Here lies the great contradiction of Western education; it is a paradox which leaves unresolved the dichotomy between what education aspires to be and what it in fact is: a reproductive scenario rather than a space of personal growth and formation. From this perspective, therefore, there is no place, except verbally, for the promotion of the critical spirit in the school where citizens are formed. In addition, these citizens will be integrated into an uncritical society and surrendered to conformity. We could state that the processes which we have described above occur inevitably, due to the context in which formal education is framed. And it is possible to think that teachers' attitudes are always concerned with producing obedient students, without fomenting their critical spirit nor their intellectual independence.

But, as we have said, the education structure itself drives all the teaching and learning processes towards obedience.

Fromm discusses the concepts of negative freedom and positive freedom in relation to people's freedom and their integral formation. Negative freedom refers to the possibility of doing something in the absence of obstacles. Positive freedom, in turn, is seen as superior to the former, and refers to the ability to perform an action for the simple reason it can be done (physically and intellectually). Thus, positive freedom supposes a complement to negative freedom, as necessary as sufficient, to achieve full freedom (Fromm, 2013).

Consequently, while Western societies in the twenty-first century have achieved a negative state of freedom, where there are fewer and fewer obstacles hampering people's development, citizens are not prepared to assume their role in it through positive freedom. That is to say, a scenario is presented where citizens are offered the *freedom to* intervene in the processes guaranteeing their individual freedom in society, but they have not been sufficiently psychologically prepared to grasp the *freedom to* intervene in such processes.

Likewise, the school prepares students to know about and assume the existence of negative freedom. But they never work to promote the intellectual

independence which grants them the possibility of developing that negative freedom. In fact, the opposite is true. Students are not allowed to assume any responsibilities in school, beyond performing their tasks and sitting exams. What is more, this may be counterproductive in the sense that evaluation is part of an external entity and not one's entity.

The school structure and organization encourage all this. We cannot expect an education for freedom in a context which does not allow it. The characteristics of society today differ from those of society during modernity. However, the school system retains the structures it had two centuries ago. Although the school system's outward appearance has changed, it is still modernity that shapes the classrooms, even though education and society are constantly changing, in a liquid state (Bauman, 2005). What is more, teachers can do nothing to avoid a state of conformity and alienation developing in the students, as this is endemic to the Western education system. Its eighteenth and nineteenth-century characteristics are incompatible with current demands.

Moreover, we have to make visible the dependence and influence of the education system on minors, who spend much of their lives in those places. The reason is that they face the relations of authority, relationships between equals and individual transformations. As a result, schools become the favored place in which to construct identities that have lasting effects on people's values and actions, on who they are and what they think they can be (Apple, 2011).

## **Productive Process, Market and School**

In one of his critiques of education and education systems, Noam Chomsky (2004) raised the question of prevailing education models and his disturbing obsession with disabling teachers and students in an attempt to simplify people's education to a set of rules and rules so strict – and obsolete – that it does not allow students to develop critically, making them perish in a labyrinth of procedures and techniques which seeks people's homogenization and their gray immersion into an uncritical and obedient social mass.

Instead of promoting a critical spirit in students, which would allow the cycle of learned compliance to be broken, education is at the service of the market. In that market, neoliberalism is presented as a political, social, economic and pedagogical project which constitutes a form of public pedagogy.

It is a pedagogy based on the rationality of the market, which legitimates a cruel culture of fierce competition in which democracy has been transformed into a unique form of authoritarianism (Giroux, 2015).

Capital and the market, with the subordination of the school, generate the commodification of knowledge, intellectuality and affection, which is called cognitive capitalism (Morgan, 2016). In cognitive capitalism the social and productive transformations are arranged to serve the control of knowledge and its modes of production. As a result, we find that a financial logic has been introduced into schools, which implies governance, bureaucratization and the degradation of objectives to adapt to the freedoms of capital. Consequently equity, democracy and people are all endangered, as is the social construction of the school (Heilbronn, 2016). These problems arise not only because of the very nature of capitalism and globalization, which have proven to be the greatest equalizers in the history of mankind (Norberg, 2005), but also from the way in which they are executed. Thus, in the Western world, we have achieved levels of well-being unimaginable two centuries ago, but always by relying on citizen conformity and obedience (Carratalá, 2016). According to Erich Fromm, this is where the real problem occurs in Western democracies. Erich Fromm, who was preoccupied with the authoritarianism and submission in our society, identified an oppression of individuality, prompted by the demands of Western capitalism. These demands were at least as intense and effective as those present in the national socialist states and Soviet Union (Fromm, 2013).

There is a close relationship between education and work (Spring, 2015), and this has not escaped psychologists and education theorists. The changes in education promoted by neoliberalism, such as the privatization of the public school, the training of teachers and administrators to be producers of standardized results and academic capitalism, necessitate the critical development of educators to curb neoliberal education policies (Baltodano, 2012). People must develop in the scenario which has been given. Society is shown to be a fabric of interconnected citizens linked through work. This allows us to contribute our labor (when we do not own the resources or the means of production), and in return we receive the fruit of other people's workforces (Fromm, 2013). It is the task of the contemporary school, as conceived, to train citizens such that they can be appropriately introduced into social life through work.

Against this backdrop, resistance theorists have revealed the inability of the new labor force to intervene in the labor system they will be incorporated

in. The psychological space where this idea could emerge begins to destroy itself from the school, which imitates the dominant cultural model, leaving no space for the remaining groups with different socioeconomic backgrounds. Thus, school objectives and methodology are based on a specific social pattern to which not all minorities have access, which means the academically successful pass through this obstacle course without much difficulty (meritocracy), while those students who fail to advance, assume the failure is theirs, and are gradually expelled in a screening process which does not take account of the students' realities.

In this way, education continually falls short in providing students with integral training. It would seem that all learning (or memorization) of academic content is targeted at the acquisition of skills and personal resources that enable the students to know and assimilate this content throughout their lives and for their lives. Just as workers on an assembly line perform a very specific task, decontextualized from other processes and in exchange for a salary at the end of the month, students concentrate on memorizing isolated content and passing the test to receive a final grade for each unit. Education results are justified in terms of competitive goals, labeled by governments and corporations using mercantilist language and thinking (McMurtry, 1991). It is based on globalizing neoliberal logics which subjugate the true objectives of education. In addition, they are clearly contradictory to policies and existing practices.

All in all, once students complete their studies, we obtain a qualified and obedient working mass. If we accept that education is strongly affected by neoliberal culture, it is imperative that educators know, understand and criticize it in the process of defense (Connel, 2013). Some scholars consider teachers to have a vague idea of what neoliberalism is and its pretensions to dismantle public services (Sleeter, 2008), and this makes neoliberal ideology work better, since it is not perceived as such (Blacker, 2013).

## **Relationships between Modern Production Systems and the Functioning of the Contemporary Western School**

If we study contemporary society as a postmodern society which has left behind the materialism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is easy to understand the abyss which is opening up between the characteristics of contemporary generations and the neoliberal socioeconomic paradigm. Traditionally institutions (such as the state, democracy, education or the labor market)

functioned according to the logic for which they were designed more than a century ago. However, nowadays, citizens' interests and demands are entering a higher stage. This is because of the benefits of Western democracies which is the basis upon which citizens' basic needs and aspirations are satisfied. Nowadays, the institutions of modernity clash head-on with postmodern society, which aspires to further values that these institutions will not be able to satisfy. Here lies the origins of the contradictions between the social and labor discourse, generated in the school, and through social, democratic and labor demands. The school must support students' integral education which includes training them to exercise freedom and a critical spirit, as well as training workers in the labor reality in which they are immersed. However, as we have already pointed out, Western education has limited itself to maintaining a specific cultural model through the imposition and reproduction of the dominant ideology, implicit in its highly hierarchical and undemocratic economic and labor models. With the reproduction of these characteristics through the school, the hierarchical model is perpetuated through the way future relationships are established between the social actors and it goes beyond the simple hierarchy in the labor market. The term "reproduction" is defined as in sociology. It recognizes the possibility of change or evolution (as indicated above with respect to the transition from modern to postmodern citizenship) and so indicates models of change to ensure the reproductive processes are maintained.

In this regard, the objectives which appear in the education laws and which appeal to the sense of students' self-realization are just a declaration of intentions. In the context of globalization driven by neoliberalism, characterized by education discourses on the commodification of knowledge, education of human capital, and its influence on national policies (Spring, 2008), the fact that education serves to promote autonomy and a critical spirit among students is a chimera, as demonstrated by the growth of power of neoliberal and neoconservative agendas at the international level. In this way, the democratizing objectives of Western education come into conflict with training for capitalist work, strongly hierarchical, competitive and generating inequalities. In this way, the market, and in a more general way, neoliberalism, exercise their particular influence on education. Moreover, they transform education to the point of generating this contradictory discourse (Apple, 1999). All this is sponsored by state care, which tries to foster a critical spirit and promote social mobility while submerging the students in the great uniform and uncritical mass that is the working class and reproducing the dominant ideology (Giroux, 1983). Therefore, critical pedagogy rejects education policies and practices, so it is necessary to rethink

social transformation in a more subtle and complex way, establishing active links with the classroom reality (Apple, 2011).

We understand that, from an economic dimension, education systems are influenced by the market, and are at the service of capital. Spring (2013) indicates that most education systems adopt objectives for economic growth. Thus, relationships between students and teachers are mediated through the integration of students into a competent economic system, in which education becomes an instrument for professional and economic development, reduced to preparation for employment (Kemmis, 1998). This leads to monotonous learning as students are taught to become competent and useful subjects from the labor point of view.

School reproduces the model of capitalist production on a small scale. It therefore reflects the inequality in the capitalist social structure (McLaren, 2016). In this context, it is impossible to introduce elements which guarantee an integral education so that students can acquire the intellectual skills necessary for them to assume positive freedom. However, from an economic dimension, it was initially believed that improvements in capital and labor would lead to better student training. In addition, governments invested in human capital, so neoliberalism ends with the value of social goods and presents education as just another product (Casey et al., 2013) which can be bought and sold like any other (Davies & Bansel, 2007). In this context, people's freedom within this economic-education system is very limited, if not non-existent.

According to Fromm, democracy fails in its ways and intentions to expand the borders of institutional freedom. As a result, a false sense of self-realization is generated in citizens because democracy does not prepare citizens or allow them to assume responsibility for democracy. With the natural development of industrially advanced Western democracies, citizens began to assume a normative (in reality an inequality) or community (motivated more out of emotional than rational reasons) commitment, but both were some distance from the original idea of democracy, where citizens do not have to form their identity in relation to the government but must assume the government as their own (Jaime, 2009).

Fromm proposes some integral citizens' formation, without denying the fact that human beings must be trained for the socio-labor reality in which they are born, but where they have enough psychological capacity to assume their own individuality and the responsibility that democracy requires. Yet it

is now clear that consumerism and globalization, an extreme form of capitalism, are causing an unprecedented increase in the differences between rich and poor, a form of economic discrimination based on social class, beliefs, race or sex (Sandlin & Maudlin, 2012).

Liberty and capitalism are incompatible. Alienated and obedient workers are a guarantee of economic benefit, but one that entails the loss of individual freedom.

In a dystopian way, all people who go through regulated education systems want to be transformed into alienated workers. Democratic models or more horizontal and cooperative production systems are not imitated in schools; on the contrary, the desire (from an economic point of view) is to promote a means of production in which workers are forced to sell their labor power at a price established by the market, which is changing, devalued and relative to the place and moment.

Hence, the only reason education cannot be improved in qualitative terms is because it would damage the prevailing economic system, perpetuated by the power elite that dominates education discourse, practices and policies, and which prioritizes the market and profit over other considerations and understands learning in terms of economic growth (Hursh & Henderson, 2011). In an education model like the one we proposed previously, a modernist or capitalist personality would not fit, we refer back to Fromm. Therefore, it is counterproductive for the community to be home to it, if it is immersed within the neoliberal system of production in Western culture. The mercantilization and subjugation of education to neoliberal capitalism contribute to the displacement of oppressed and minority communities and so it is necessary to construct a critical anti-capitalist public pedagogy (Lipman, 2011). If there is no struggle, or recovery of educational criticism, or encouragement of an education which inspires the challenge of authoritarian practices, the essence of the community's moral and transforming pedagogy will be lost (Giroux, 2016). Dependency on the system and the abandonment of a critical identity, if it ever existed, are the result. Consequently, a hierarchical power relationship will be built, in which people will have little to contribute beyond their economic production. It seems that neoliberalism is here to stay in the current education system (Maisuria, 2014).

## Some conclusions: Practices of Resistance in Schools

These conclusions, which are not the complete, but a compilation, try to establish a line of reflection. We have seen how conformity is postulated as an element of evasion which allows people to avoid the isolation of claiming their individual *self* in the world around them (Fromm, 2013). Thus, the assumption of our individual *self*, different from each person around us, is the preceding step to the assumption of the positive freedom which allows people to become established as free people and independent of any other. This, on the other hand, involves accepting a kind of intellectual and emotional solitude, an *isolation* which is not acceptable to humans without prior preparation. In the endemic structure of Western education systems such preparation is not allowed. The reason is that in a uniform environment, the logical consequence is the risk that all subjects will choose to renounce that isolation. Therefore, they will also be renouncing positive freedom so they do not become separated from the group.

As we have mentioned before, the school is responsible due to its complicity in the very form of its structure and by the inaction of the education community. As it is structured around a classroom environment with the same schedules, similar materials for all students, similar content, similar evaluations, and so on, it is logical to think that the groups of students tend to behave with uniformity with regard to the rest of their peers (Gil et al., 2013). The same happens with all children. Likewise, the inaction of the education community when faced with such events is often somewhat unconscious. In many cases, no-one knows what is impregnated in students' consciences. In these cases, teacher training is aimed in one direction, while the road map marked out by the administration goes in another. Recent studies have shown that even in the very early stages of schooling, obedience to authority is a value within schools (Kawashima & Martins, 2015).

Obedience to an absolute rationalism defended by modernity generates the claim to admit the existence of a homogeneous society. Moreover, reason is imposed through universalization in that society, with the transmission of objectives and formalized content. What is more, the content is acquired with authority and transmitted vertically from teacher to student. As a result, students passively acquire it because the content does not allow for contradiction. The process of *learned compliance* enables contemporary students to assume the methodology of modernity which prevails in schools. To break this cycle of the transmission of conformity, it is necessary to involve the students in the processes which are part of their education. This

destroys the traditional roles imposed by the unidirectional transmission of content and the school opens up to the democratic demands of our society. Although the implicit messages of relations of authority and obedience are anchored in modernity, they are transmitted and learned with a certain coherence thanks to *contaminated vicarious learning* and *contaminated vicarious teaching*, which allows students to assume these contradictory discourses. Our proposal is that advocated by resistance theorists: that schools should adopt an active role in transmitting a new democratic culture, rather than transmitting the nineteenth-century elements servicing the market (Giroux, 2012). In other words, stop teaching conformity and promote transforming aspirations and critical spirit.

From a critical perspective, the ruling class ensures hegemony in schools. The objective is for the students to become dominated individuals who represent educational practices based on social authority and the unequal power and privilege relations of the education-government structure. Furthermore, this is part of an administrative bureaucracy which forces students to obey and adopt the prevailing ideology (McLaren, 2015). In this way, progress is limited to economic macro figures and indicators, which translate into an improvement in the quality of people's lives but perpetuate a relationship of inequality among citizens. This is the main symptom of the low democratic quality of Western countries and of what Fromm warned against: progress and welfare are not given by third parties but taken and protected by all those who benefit from them. Sometimes teachers become technicians in the service of the system. That is, they are uncritical, indolent, and unable to transmit anything other than the official curriculum, and of course, without a hint of enthusiasm for fostering critical thinking in their students. The education system imposes the curricula and controls the subjects taught, finding justification in pupil immaturity, while paradoxically, ensuring they remain immature by ensuring a lack of freedom and responsibility (Darling, 1992). This imposition demonstrates a relationship of inequality in which each protagonist is placed in an antagonistic place, that is dominant and dominated, and teaches them to assume this role throughout their lives. Previously we have referred to this as "learnt conformity", rather than one that is acquired by the infant in a natural way. Within this process of implicit imposition, vicarious learning becomes contaminated by the relations of authority and obedience established in the classroom, and which continue to exist in contemporary western society, as Fromm pointed out. Empowering and critical dialogues will enable teachers to create a pedagogical repertoire that allows for critical reflection, the autonomous construction of their teaching function and the opportunity to invite students to participate

in the lived experiences of growth and learning, rather than having to serve the establishment (Aloni, 2013). We may conclude that the school structure conditions obedience. In addition, teachers are comfortable having submissive and obedient pupils, as this facilitates and simplifies the mechanical work of the classroom. However, some studies have shown that authority in the classroom is not a guarantee of better learning. What is more, there is evidence that students seem happier and more committed when given a certain amount of freedom and democracy in the classroom than those who view the teachers' authority as vertical and absolute (Lakshman & Schubert, 2015). This perspective offers us the key to understanding that a hierarchical society model is transmitted through the hidden curriculum. Resistance Theory appeals to teachers and students to strive to break this reproductive cycle that sustains one of the most contradictory discourses between the aspirations of the school and Western democratic reality: integration in a class society. This opens the door to a more inclusive and democratic education. According to Giroux (1983), students' failures are the failures of society, never of the students themselves. Society molds the school turning it into the main stage of social and cultural reproduction. Therefore, it is logical that the school assumes the responsibility of leaving out of this scenario all those who, because of their race, sex or socioeconomic origin, cannot adapt to the requirements. The prevailing school model in the 21st century is obsolete, and the neoliberal agendas promote a commodified economic school, which is at the service of capital. Moreover, the market reigns with its law and imposes on education its rationing, hierarchies and mechanisms of competition in schools. As a result, it creates business-like schools with subjected teachers and obedient students (Connell, 2013). In addition, there is no room for criticism, reflection or an alternative to the proposed model. Critical teachers have to understand the true discourse of the school in order to break this cycle. Nevertheless, nowadays teachers no longer master the language capitalism uses to achieve reproduction through the school (Sleeter, 2008), and are limited to assuming the ways and customs of other older teachers, stagnating the school culture (Bolívar, 1996). Moreover, they turn teachers into part of the reproductive machinery. To reverse this situation, the precursor initiatives for change cannot come from outside the education community, but they must be the ones who initiate a response (Marcelo & Estebaranz, 1999). As we have already pointed out, in order to achieve this, university education must provide teachers with the necessary tools to understand the latent hidden mechanisms in the school and produce, in turn, a response which guarantees that democratic ideals and social demands will be included in the new school discourse. Despite the difficulty of proposing a critical pedagogy in the classroom, teachers

must present knowledge in a problematic way, in such a way that students seek to collectively investigate social change (Collinson, 2012; Damianidou & Phtiaka, 2016; Rogers, 2007). A teacher trained in critical pedagogy will have the tools to break the circle which connects the school of modernity with postmodern society through learned conformity. This process involves rethinking the figure of the teacher in the classroom. In a more horizontal and democratic society, teachers have to abandon their authoritarian role. They have all the valid knowledge of the classroom and they will guide student learning, promoting a critical spirit with regard the acquisition of ways and customs which are socially contaminated.

At this point, a new debate on teacher training should begin, and in turn, focus on what elements of cultural reproduction should be present throughout this training. Without straying from the main topic, but being aware of its importance, we must point out that teacher training is one of the fundamental elements in critical discourse, since teaching in school is part of the general discourse of the Theory of Resistance. Knowledge and social responsibility must be introduced into future teacher training. It must be training which educates and enlightens teachers, turning them into critical individuals capable of transmitting that same critical capacity to their students. However, it is difficult to train teachers to transform society in only a few years of initial training (Pittard, 2015). In the new school of the future, a space must be reserved for people's integral education. Teachers, families and students must develop critical awareness and fight for change, freedom and autonomy, without waiting for the hegemonic elites who control the school to do so, because as Paulo Freire points out (2014), that would be naive. The school has to remodel its structure in order to generate a coherent discourse and teaching has to be aimed at promoting a critical spirit in students. Likewise, the transmission of a democratic culture does not fit into the rigidity of current school structures, meaning that we cannot educate for democracy in a vertical school which recognizes the class system and empowers it through meritocracy. A pessimistic view is that the school, conceived of as a political instrument of the ruling classes, finds itself caught between two competing agendas which it will not be able to get rid of without ending up following one or the other: "So much the better for the public; so much the worse for its schools" (Johnston, 2012, p. 121).

There is much more thinking to be done here. We share hope in trying to think about education and education relations between teachers and students in terms of collaborative, understood and criticized work. Therefore, we recognize the different points of view, the disagreements and the attempt

to solve them, and even the agreement to differ (Beckett, 2013). Education in and for freedom and the exercise of democracy are at the same time the forerunner of and hope for change in the constant pursuit of a just and diverse community (Fielding, 2012). The values of democratic education must be cultivated and protected in order to maintain societies where respect for human rights prevails over the various potential ideologies. Educating children does not mean seeing them as passive objects to be manipulated educationally, but as subjects with basic freedoms that must be cultivated so they can become fully autonomous (Giesinger, 2010). It is important to prepare them for life, with a strong education in the values and virtues important for life and human development (Curren & Kotzee, 2014; Sanderse et al., 2015). Education has to value the characteristics which define these societies, and to ensure the active and participative inclusions of each new subject in social life. Although research linking inequality with social class and education is unpromising (Lynch, 2015; Marsh, 2011; Rumberger, 2010), critical pedagogy and education professionals must advocate an open, reflexive pedagogy, and an education aimed at reducing egocentrism, self-knowledge, self-criticism and rectification, personal maturity that is evolutionary and helps us cultivate our own thinking (Herrán, 2014). It should be emancipating and liberating, a poetic education, in the aesthetic, moral and intellectual sense (Hassen, 2004). If students become aware of the processes of social reproduction occurring around them and act accordingly. In this way, future citizens will shape their own value system (which should not conflict with that of others), and let their environment influence them. It is important to be aware not only of the dangers involved in obedience, but also of the benefits which arise from freedom.

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