

Resistance tactics of creative self-expression to contemporary art/education: the role of critical and cultural pedagogy

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Resumo: O presente artigo pretende, com base em textos de diferentes autores, mostrar que as táticas de resistência da arte/educação no advogar de suas causas e no fazer cotidiano dos professores é uma luta antiga, que se perpetua até nossos dias no combate às estratégias de poder da ordem, que seguem impedindo a plena existência da arte/educação em favor da maioria, gerando novas táticas e proposições no horizonte contemporâneo de nosso país.

Palavras Chave: Arte; educação; táticas; resistência; história.

Abstract: Based upon research conducted by different authors, this paper aims at demonstrating that the resistance tactics art/education show in advocating its causes and in the daily work of teachers is a long-time and ongoing struggle against the order's power strategies, which continue to curb the full existence of art/education in favor of the majority, by creating new tactics and propositions in our country's contemporary scope.

Keywords: Art; education; tactics; resistance; history.

Introduction

In the comprehensive rhetorical framework devoted to the art of speaking or operating, the Sophists have a privileged place, from the point of view of tactics. Their principle, according to the Greek rhetorician Corax, was to make the weaker position seem the stronger, and they claimed to have the power of turning the tables on the powerful by the way in which they made use of the opportunities offered by the particular situation. (CERTEAU, M., 1984, p. XX)

In early 20th century, art/education's³ proposition presented us art classes as a creative practice directed to developing creativity and inventiveness potential, aimed at defending children from actions that were purely mechanical and repetitive, thus preserving their spontaneous nature.

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³ In Brazil, Art Education has been the term used in curriculums designs since 2000, and before that, the previous terms, including the "Art" word were: Artistic Education (1970); Art Education (1980) and Art Teaching (1990).

Such ideas intended to make sure that children could develop and be creative without traditional education's authoritarian guidance. Consequently, child centered education, as it has been pointed out by modernist art/education, was able to recognize children's potentialities by doing their own art, essentially encouraging their creativity.

Creativity theories were not merely speculations back then but the result of research with landmark conclusions that guided us toward promoting creative students. Viktor Lowenfeld, modernist art/education author refers to researchers Guilford and Brittain, who enumerate "eight creativity criteria, which significantly differentiate creative people from less or non-creative people as follows: *sensitiveness to problems; fluency; flexibility; originatily; redefinition or the ability to rearrange; analysis or the ability to abstract; synthesis an, coherence of organization* (LOWENFELD, 1981, pp. 45-49).

The focus given to creative self-expression, as it is well known, was a reverberation from modern art from late 19th Century and early 20th Century. During this period, the pioneers of art/education practices and ideas oriented to children and teenagers emerged. Among them, coincidentally, we find those who wrote about didactical proceedings (as we call them today), the artists of modern art: Lowenfeld (1961), Cizek (1910) and Stern (1961).

Artists and art/educators

In addition to art/educators, the critical thinking of many artists in the period mentioned recognized and valued childhood art. This understanding played an important role in spreading a new right for student's artistic production: the exercise of creative capability in autonomous and authorial acts.

There are still art inceptions, unexplored beginnings, such as those encountered in ethnographical, or even at home, inside children's bedrooms. Reader, do not laugh! Children have this skill, and there is a lot of wisdom in the fact of having this skill (KLEE apud IAVELBERG, 2018b, p. 78 – our translation).

Referring to Kandinsky's thinking toward childhood art, Argan observes:

Kandinsky did not intend to demonstrate that children perceive the world in some way and represent it in that same way, which would be unwise; his intention was to analyze, in the children's behavior, the inception, the primary structure of aesthetical operation (ARGAN apud IAVELBERG 2018b, p. 81 – our translation).

When we read Kandinsky's ideas about childhood art, we identify the proposition of modern artists:

Furthermore, the well-gifted child possesses not only the capability to remove the form the object shows externally, but also the power to endue its soul with a shape where he or she expresses him or herself with more strength - through which he or she acts (or speaks, as it is also said) with more intensity (KANDINSKY apud IAVELBERG 2018b, p. 81 – our translation).

The artistic production of children was also guided by philosophical, sociological and political foundations. It was believed that education through art could refine the perception of children and teenagers, making them sensitive to their world and that of others, to the action of caring for others, themselves and the environment. Moreover, it was advocated the despise for the consumer society, which exposed children to propositions that have stolen their creative autonomy, such as coloring books and excessive number of toys (LOWENFELD, 1961).

For modernist art/education, the strength of childhood art was internal and needed to be expressed in its art, and by taking this in regard, a better future was expected. (EFLAND et alii 2003).

In the narratives about workshops by authors, modernist art/educators themselves and their students, it may be verified that those daily practices included invention and the handmade, body to body building aspect with children and teenagers. Thereby, those art/educators could have the internal freedom of non-conformists, as Giard has told us (apud CERTEAU, 2014, p.18 – our translation), by exercising a tactical resistance to the traditional propositions of art teaching, still in place, by the art classes they taught, while pioneers opening new pathways.

Franz Cizek, among other modernist art/educators, was an example of resistance and transgression. In the same time, according to Viola (1935), the artist and professor lectured in the public system of Vienna and resisted, continuously struggling to keep the art education proposition he created. Despite controversies between authors of contemporary art/education, Cizek workshop was acknowledged as the first art classes of free self-expression in the world, with documented productions by children and teenagers.

The resistance act of Cizek lasted from 1887, when he opened his private Youth Class, until 1904, just as the management the University of Applied Arts of Vienna took over them, thus resisting for 17 years. Later, the Nazis forced Cizek to shut down his art classes. (IAVELBERG, 2017).

The themes of modernist and contemporary art/education are paramount for the current research that is conducted in this field. As our reflections progress, we have found important meanings to the analyses of modernist experiences in Certeau's writings (2014). By following his terminology and conceptions, we understood that education connected government strategies in Vienna back then denied credibility to modernists approaches, since they did not believe in creative freedom for children nor regarded it as convenient. In turn, Cizek's tactic intended and was able to maintain a proposal that went against the status quo, despite being later restrained by the Reich power strategies.

Contemporary art/education

As of the second half of the 20th Century, modernist tactics of resistance against traditional education led to the belief of incompatibility between teaching, authority and subject autonomy (Carvalho, 2017). As post-modernist art/educators demonstrated, according to Wilson (2010), this supposed contradiction only exists at a superficial level and the factors of cultural mediation promoted by schooling, contrary to the modernist understanding, may potentialize the student's creative process and development of a creative autonomy.

Scientific publications about education and art/education from the 80s and 90s, such as those by Ana Mae Barbosa and Heloisa Margarido (1990), Dermeval Saviani (1997), Saviani & Duarte (2012), Libâneo (1999), Heloísa Ferraz e Mariazinha Fusari (2009), guide this field, among others things, toward inserting

cultural diversity and interculturality equality and, mainly, rupturing with and criticizing the discrimination that violates Human Rights.

Barbosa (2012) discusses the development of art teaching in Brazil, predominantly by teaching drawing, and revealed the conflicts among different conceptions. The author clarifies the philosophical and political scope of the debate on which Brazilian art teaching was founded. She also points out the basis against which the resistance tactics of creative self-expression were established in the country.

In the Brazilian scenario, we mainly emphasize the dispute between the Liberal and positivist trends that occurred from late 19th century to the beginning (first decades) of the next one. The first one dialogues with some of the principles of modernist art/education. For instance, Rui Barbosa, concerning drawing classes, postulated that “the teacher could never make corrections in the student's own drawing” (BARBOSA, 2012, p. 59 – our translation). As seen earlier, when we talked about Cizek, this is a central idea for the modernist authors. In turn, the liberal trend also focused on drawing teaching as the preparation for labor work. It is explicit when they defend that “all drawing teaching should have as its basis the geometrical forms through the freehand strokes.” (BARBOSA, 2012, p. 59 – our translation). Other principles that followed this trend during that time were: the need for creative development, somehow related with Lowenfeld, despite oriented toward industry interest; and the moral education, in a romantical sense of refinement of perception, feeling and spirit, an “axiom often repeated in the pedagogical work by Rui.” (BARBOSA, 2012, p. 60-61 – our translation).

As for the Positivists, the author explains that, in Brazil, they proposed the return to teaching art based on imitation and encouraging values such as strict discipline and respect for the social order established. For Barbosa the positivists represented the effort toward immobilism in art making and teaching. According to this kind of thinking, they were naturalizing social structures and, consequently, art itself. They still mean a heavy inscription from the past that lingers on in Brazilian schools. The main intellectual who followed this trend in Brazil was Benjamin Constant. (Barbosa op. cit.). Brazilian art teaching, therefore, carries those marks, inscriptions. Liberal and Positivist influences are still present somehow, both in the utilitarian view (liberal) and Eurocentric one (imitative, authoritarian, positivist). Thus, the resistance tactics of creative self-expression should take into account these notions that were strongly present in the process of establishing art/education in Brazil and overcome its retrogressive features. Nonetheless, as we pointed out in the beginning of this section, to resist against it, for us, does not mean to extinguish the teacher's role in the process of encouraging the student's creative art production.

Saviani & Duarte (2012) developed a materialist perspective regarding the role teachers play in the educational process. The discussion they presented talks at length in favor of the teacher's right to intervene in the student's learning process. According to them, “*education, while communication among people at different levels of maturity, is the promotion of the human being, from one part to another – that is, both of learner and teacher.*” (SAVIANI & DUARTE, 2012, p. 14 – our translation). Thus, the influence an adult has does not essentially mean an obstacle to favoring the student's development. What is necessary is to understand this process within this contradiction.

Martins (2011) endorses these ideas and, from the perspective of cultural-historical psychology, argues about the pre-eminence of a cultural factor for the human intellectual and artistic-creative development. Considering the transposition from a hominized human to a humanized human and the introduction of individuals in the history of human gender, the author says:

[...] so that this introduction takes place, it is not enough to be born into and to live in society nor is the immediate contact with human objectifications. So that individuals insert themselves in history and humanize themselves, they need education, the transmission of material and symbolical culture from other individuals. In the educative act, conditioned by social labor, resides the protoform of the social being, that is, of a being whose development is subjected to the amount of appropriations he or she performs. (MARTINS, 2011, p. 15 – our translation)

Martins (2011) also analyzes each one of the Higher Mental Functions, according to Vygotsky's (2008) terminology. When explaining the “imagination” function and the differences it presents when compared to the other psychological functions, the author adds to the comprehension of human development, and his or her creative progress from the art/education point of view:

[...] the reflection of reality doesn't merely embrace the perception that is recorded from what acts as an object in a certain moment, but dynamic pictures, “live” ones, that are subject to acquiring new shapes by an ideal act. The imagination supersedes the previous sensorial experience and, thus, their own reflected reality, at the same time that it finds in the reality its foothold and condition of existence. [...] Once all function processes are imaginative processes, in a sense, the singularity of imagination resides in the fact that the images of previous experiences change themselves and produce different and new images. It's about a mental activity that modifies the pre-established connections between image and object and produces another figurative image. Thus, the image produced may operate as a mental model to be conquered as the product of an activity guided by it, that is, by means of this process, the anticipated image of the activity's product may be constructed. (MARTINS, 2011, p. 180 – emphasis added – our translation).

In other words, the ability to create a subjective image comes from the initial reflection, the concrete conditions established. Nevertheless, the main characteristic of this mental function is not its reflection but, rather, its creation, including images that do not necessarily exist in material life. Martins (2011) further emphasizes this perspective when quoting Rubinstein: “Substantially, every image, in any measure, is both a reproduction – even though distant, mediated and modified – as well a transformation of what is real. These two tendencies, which always exist in certain unity, diverge simultaneously.” (RUBSTEIN apud MARTINS, 2011, p. 181 – our translation). And Rubinstein goes further saying that the more developed the imagination mental function the farther from simply reproducing the reality it is. (op. cit. – our translation). Furthermore, we believe that the image is also able to create new realities (two-dimensional, three-dimensional, virtual and expanded ones) by means of imagination as well as of perception, sensibility, and cognition. The image creation also feeds itself of different images that are available to it, that may or may not hide power relationships that are present in different cultures.

From these contributions, we perceive the possibility of interlocution between authors of cultural-historical psychology and those of art, education and art/education. We understand that Iavelberg (2016), when explaining Thierry Duve's (2012) ideas,

dialogues with Martins (2011) by emphasizing the importance of students being in contact with the accumulation of historical and cultural knowledge produced by art:

In the wellspring orientation from the ideas of Duve one may verify the need for resuming the transmission acts in didactical situations jointly with the artists, so that the knowledge can be assimilated from what has been constructed in the History of Art of different cultures, educating judgment, knowledge about art and art making. (IAVELBERG, 2016, p. 154 – our translation).

In the cultural-historical psychology concept, the ideas Iavelberg highlighted concerning Duve (2012) are essential for the artistic and creative development of students. According to Iavelberg, when speaking about Duve's positioning toward the modernists, he highlights two points in particular in his review:

[1] the emphasis on creativity and [2] the discovery of the rules of art by the artist. For Duve (2012), such points of modernist education are based on the modernist dictum "everyone is an artist", which reiterates the myth of personal expression, in which each student works individually. Our author advocated the contrary, stating that isolation prevents a student's mistake from teaching the others. He proposes, therefore, what is currently understood among educators and art/educators as shared and collaborative learning. (IAVELBERG, 2016, p. 153-154 –emphasis added)

In short, to deny children the possibility to interact with artistic productions by their peers and other artists was part of the modernist proposal, which led to isolating children and teenagers in their creative act. They believed that this dome preserved the flourishing of creative beings. Today occurs the opposite, since interaction is seen as positive for learning. The contact the student has with the art of classmates and artists, as we know, does not regress genuine creation and, instead, it promotes the student's artistic and aesthetic development in an informed manner.

Wilson (2010) also reinforces this perspective when explaining the new art/education ideas of contemporary artists: "Rather than turning their backs to art history, contemporary artists are looking for images in it, so as to adequate and fulfill them with new meanings" (WILSON, 2010, p. 90 – our translation) and, goes further when he points out that: "My view is that new art teaching methods should be focused on the study of important artwork" (WILSON, 2010, p. 94 – our translation).

Wilson's (2010) concept of a new art teaching method reminds us of how cautious we must be when using the expression: "important artwork." That is so because the body of work that was written by American art/education theorists, among whom we highlight Brent Wilson, integrating member of the Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) project, sponsored by J. Paul Getty Trust, institution in which The Getty Center for Education in the Arts operated during the 80s and the 90s (20th century), as well as the theorists who took part in the proposal known as Critical Studies in Art Education (CSAE) Project, in the United Kingdom between 1981 and 1984. Taylor (1986) gives us a new view: to oppose creative self-expression by recommending the interaction with artwork, both reproductions and original work at the museums.

But who defines what the “most important works” are? Important for whom or for which art history among so many? We add to this reflection Lowenfeld’s (1961) contribution, modernist art/educator, who associated the matter of who we intend to provide art/education to with the children’s lack of freedom in traditional schools. The author believed that the art education he practiced and studied aimed at preparing the new generations for building a much better world for all, within an inclusive view. Among contemporary propositions from the 80s, in Brazil, it is in the work of assimilating and rebuilding American and English proposals that we were able to observe the sprouting of the seed of what we may conceive as “important artwork” today, under an inclusive and contextualized view. As the result of this historical process, we must mention Ana Mae Barbosa’s work (in her Triangular Approach) and the Mexican proposal: Escuelas al Aire Libre.

In statement given to the Art Paths in Education (2014), Barbosa informed us that the Escuelas al Aire Libre were created in Mexico after the political revolution of 1910 in the country. She assigned to Best Mougard (1891-1964) the implementation of the schools from the study of indigenous expression, little appreciated until then, from which he abstracted a grammatical view with six basic elements, which he proposed be used by students in their creative works, as well as observation drawings of the surroundings to give value to their original environment. All these propositions, according to the professor, aimed at the appreciation of the autochthonous’ culture.

Ana Mae, in her statement concerning this issue, asserted that the influence of the proposal fell on the Triangular Proposal as an opening to the contextualization, appreciation of the culture of origin and restated the fact that we Brazilians carry the African, indigenous and European genes and, as such, she thought of directing art teaching to this intercultural context that is our own. (IAVELBERG, 2017, p.148-149 – our translation)

Conclusions

The association between the educational view oriented to Human Rights and that of History, Critical Pedagogy is essential, the second one already aiming at the first one. Today, the teaching of competencies and skills that are present in the federal government document, the Base Nacional Comum Curricular [*National Common Curriculum Basis*] (BNCC - 2018), contradictorily intends to inclusively related to current issues and those of social equality in different scopes. It proposes to consider contextualized knowledge that is related to local, social and individual realities. Concerning educational ethics, it understands that learning rights must be respected and extended to all children and teenagers, as a duty of the educational institutions. Nevertheless, after analyzing the association of the educational views above, we believe that the relations among BNCC, curriculum designs and the diversity of artistic cultures to be contemplated in the schools should go beyond contextualized and local realities, to a wider field of cultural heritage, particularly because Brazil is rich in art production from different periods and diverse contexts. Even artwork coming from the European continent and from other countries that took part in our colonization process may have been produced by artists who opposed the political structures of domination of their contexts of origin and the censorship in art, mostly with no link with preserving the status quo.

That was the case, for instance, of modernist artists in Europe, who were under Nazi domination during World War II, such as Jewish art/educator Viktor Lowenfeld (1961), who left the region so that he would not succumb to Nazism. Settled in the United States of America, Lowenfeld criticized American consumerism and emphasized the care toward the environment that we all should have.

We are astonished to observe in different places of the world the exercise of unfair powers by the oppressor against the oppressed in the humiliating manners immigrants are received in Europe and in the USA; in the attack to families that, in their search for shelter from war, misery and religious persecution, face cynical and dissimulated racist politics. We also live the persecution of artists, the restriction to political freedom and freedom of expression, and the disrespectful interference in children lives, who have been isolated from their families under the justification of being “illegal immigrants” by politicians defending hegemonic interests. In Brazil and in other countries around the globe, women's effective social participation is repressed and the violence against them has been a field of struggle, particularly to the young ones. We have politicians and social pressures trying to restrict gender freedom, among other brutalities.

Regarding the gender theme in the official curriculum, despite the advances we verified with the insertion of environmental education laws, the inclusion and appreciation of studying Brazilian cultures, we also notice repression and prejudice against gender freedom being imposed on the text of the BNCC of Art, in its fourth version, in which competences and skills containing the gender word were replaced by other vague formulations intended to be more pleasant for some. We stress the absence of contents for the curricular Art component and the prevalence of the pedagogy of competences, which points to a scenario of debasement of this component.

In short, what is necessary is to develop resistance tactics in order to preserve that which our peers have already achieved in Brazil and worldwide, and to not just accept a bad lemon that will not turn into lemonade.

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