

THE SEARCHERS¹: GRAMSCI, FREIRE AND WILLIAMS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO POPULAR EDUCATION

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Abstract

Connections between education and Social Justice are very present in the long tradition of Popular Education. In this line, the three authors selected - coming from diverse backgrounds - have tried to find answers to questions such as: how can we transform this society into a more human and less exploitative one? How can we change charity for social justice? Gramsci was a politician and theorist who was imprisoned for a long period of his life. Raymond Williams was an adult educator and university teacher, very well known as a novelist and Professor of Modern Drama. Paulo Freire is considered to be the most important representative of Popular Education. The article's aim is not to present a comparative study between Gramsci, Freire and Williams, but rather to stress their contributions to an educational approach connected to social justice seeking for an education for all. In the conclusion I will try to establish connections between the searchers and Popular Education. Some final notes about this matter will be presented.

Keywords

Culture, Educator, Popular Education

¹ The Searchers is a film directed by John Ford in 1956. It is based on the novel - same title - by Alan Le May (1954).

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1. INTRODUCTION

The fight for Social Justice is closely linked to some educational approaches. It can be said that education and Social Justice are two faces of the same coin in the approaches, seeking – in Freire's (1970) words – liberating education, that other authors (e.g. Giroux, 1988, tr. sp. 1990) called critical education, or Popular Education.

The main idea is that people can think for themselves, and this enables them to analyse and transform their surrounding reality to achieve better community and a better world. This is a path for organising the emancipation of people – as a part and consequence – of certain educational processes.

Some thinkers – which I am going to call searchers – have made important contributions in this field. In this article I am going to focus on three of them. But it is important to consider other searchers: D. Lorenzo Milani, Gabriela Mistral, Celestin Freinet, etc.

Why searchers? In each specific historic moment – Williams and Freire lived in the same period but in different backgrounds – the three sought specific paths to rescue education from its consideration as a business and trying to achieve an education for all useful for reflecting in the causes of exploitation and alienation. Their search enlightens us today to seek another educational path, different from the dominant Lifelong Learning, only concerned with taking into account the person as a worker and consumer and not as a human being.

They imagined another society – from their own situation and work – very different in each case and they attempted to produce social changes to enable people to build another world.

Antonio Gramsci was a politician and Marxist theorist who spent a significant amount of his life in prison. He was not an educator in the strict sense, but an important part of his work is closely related to education as the fundamental tool for organising what he called hegemony.

Raymond Williams was an adult educator working in the WEA (Workers' Educational Association). However, he is also very well known as a Professor of Modern Drama at the University of Cambridge.

Paulo Freire is known as an adult education theorist and the major representative of Popular Education. His most important contribution

is an educational approach, considering it as a way to transform the surrounding reality of individuals and communities.

Popular Education focuses on two major ideas: the role of the educator and the focus on Social Justice. In this sense, it can be said that the three – Gramsci, Williams and Freire – tried to find answers to questions such as: how can we transform this society into a more human and less exploitative one? How can we change charity for social justice? «The idea of popular education, [refers to] an education that is rooted in the interest, aspirations, and struggles of ordinary people» (Martin, 1999: 4).

According to Turay:

Popular education refers to a non-formal adult education approach that develops the capacity of learners to critically analyse the root causes of their socioeconomic, political, cultural, spiritual and religious struggles, with the ultimate goal of organizing and taking collective action that will enhance social transformation (2005: 480-481).

From now on, I am going to briefly present the three thinkers. I will start with a short biographical note, and, after this, I will stress some major ideas – from my own perspective.

2. ANTONIO GRAMSCI. HEGEMONY IS AN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

Antonio Gramsci was born in Sardinia in 1891. This was a rural environment marked by a high level of illiteracy and superstition. Gramsci went to Torino to study at the University, where he joined cultural and worker movements. Torino was – at that time – the most important industrial city in Italy, and the birthplace of the working-class movement in the country, because of FIAT. He experienced the Russian Revolution and the defeat of the working class in Italy. Reflecting on this defeat, Gramsci built his political theory. He was incarcerated by the fascist regime in 1927. After initial incarceration in Ustica, he was transferred to Milano, Rome and finally to a prison in Turi because of his health problems. He organised at least two schools while in prison. The first was in Ustica and the other in Turi. This last was a failure. The prisoners' members of the PCdI (Communist Party of Italy) didn't attend it because Gramsci was critical of some political lines derived from the policies of the Soviet Union. In fact, Gramsci always thought that he was betrayed by members

of the Party for this reason (Vacca, 2014, tr. sp. 2020). Gramsci was released in 1937 and died in a hospital this same year.

His most important and impressive works are the 'Prison Notebooks', written while in prison. It is important to stress that they were written cryptically to prevent censorship.

2.2. *The intellectual*

According to Gramsci, there are two different types of intellectual. "Traditional intellectuals" – for instance, priests and also teachers – are intellectuals «employed in the service of the dominant forces» (Coben, 1995: 42). They represent the traditional world of landlords and rural society. A second category are "organic intellectuals", considered necessary for establishing the most favourable conditions for expanding the thinking of their social class. The 'organic intellectual' is a master in organising social life and legitimation. Organic intellectuals are builders of thought, either for the bourgeois or for the working class.

However, it is important to clarify that, even for Gramsci, every person is an intellectual, but only some hold this role in society. These people, with the role of intellectuals, are those who are renovating both the social and physical world and building a new concept of it.

There are two important points here. First, if every person is an intellectual, this means that everyone can reflect on and understand the surrounding world. Second is the fact that the 'organic intellectual', as mentioned above, shapes the world and, in some ways, creates the meanings through which people perceive their world. Giroux (1988, tr. sp. 1990) – among others – has developed the notion of educators as 'transformative intellectuals' linked to democratic schools. One of the aims of this 'transformative intellectual' is to empower students to critically interpret the world and change it.

Finally, is the structure of feelings. As Gramsci (in Broccoli, 1972, tr. sp. 1977) stated:

The popular element 'feels' but doesn't always understand or know. The intellectual element 'knows', but doesn't always understand, or exceptionally 'feels' [...] The mistake of the intellectual consists of believing that one can know without understanding and, especially, without feeling or being passionate (262, quotation marks in the original).

2.2. *Hegemony*

Individuals take part in a specific social group, one where people share the same approach of both thinking and social practices. Thus, the process of building a hegemonic thought means creating a concept of life, choosing a sphere of activity, and «participate actively in the creation of the history of the world» (Gramsci, 1963, tr. sp. 1974: 62). Gramsci considered hegemony to be a permeation in society of an entire system of values, attitudes, etc., which has the mission of supporting the dominant power relations in each historical moment (Burke, 1999, 2005) or facilitating the changes in a specific society at a particular historical moment.

According to Gramsci, hegemony is a form of cultural direction, «ruling by consent and not simply through force» (Mayo, 2010: 22). In fact, Gramsci derived the idea of hegemony from Lenin, but contrary to him, Gramsci considered to be possible – and necessary – to build hegemony before taking power. To Gramsci, the building of it is the requirement and not the consequence of taking power. Hegemony is an educational and communicational process (Broccoli, 1972, tr. sp. 1977). In fact, Gramsci affirmed:

A social group can and even should be leading before conquering governmental power (and this is one of the main conditions for the conquest of power); after, when it holds power, and even if it firmly grasps it, it becomes dominant, but it must continue to be equally “leading” (Broccoli, 1972, tr. sp. 1977: 147, quotation marks in the original).

In this sense, it can be affirmed that culture(s) and hegemony are closely connected to the building – or not – of a democratic society.

2.3. *Culture*

Gramsci differentiated between low and high culture and considered that low culture could be a form of domination. As Diaz Salazar (1991) states,

Folklore, understood as an idea of the world and of the life of common people in society, is made singular because of its opposition and counter-opposition to the “cult”, “official” and hegemonic idea of a specific society, and because of its non-systematic, contradictory and politically disorganised character (p. 153, quotation marks in the original).

Is it possible to consider folklore as a creative response elaborated for specific social groups? Is it possible to consider folklore as a way to give meaning to people's experience as Geertz (1973) defined culture? According to Gramsci's biographers (Vacca, 2014, tr. sp. 2020; Pearman, 2020) it seems that he used the concept of folklore taking in mind the Sardinian context when he grew up: a place plenty of superstition that alienated people – he referred his own 'story' about his illness. In Freirean terms, is a kind of magical consciousness, or common sense as I will refer later.

Diaz Salazar, following Gramsci, also considers that «Popular culture is the starting point for the development of a new political awareness [...]. This process demands an appropriate pedagogy and wants to consider the progressive elements of the culture, and the creative popular soul» (1991: 160).

Gramsci also differentiated between common sense and good sense. "Common sense" holds contradictory elements but, in Gramsci's conception, also contains elements of "good sense" in a distorted and fragmentary view of the world. It is a conception of the world which is developed and absorbed uncritically (Borg, Buttigieg, Mayo, 2002).

Finally, it is important to stress that, for Gramsci,

Creating a new culture does not mean one's individual 'original' discoveries. It also, and most particularly, means the diffusion in a critical form of truths already discovered, their 'socialisation' as it were, and even making them the basis of vital action, an element of co-ordination and intellectual and moral order (In Mayo, 2010: 31, quotation marks in the original).

2.4. Social movements and the factory councils

It is possible to explore the role of Civil Society Organisations in Gramsci's proposal to organise workers. To do that it is important to remember the debate between Antonio Gramsci and Amadeo Bordiga kept in several media of the working press in Turin at the beginning of the 1920s. This debate focused on the primacy of trade unions and other kinds of movements – that Gramsci called "factory councils" – as representative of workers. In one of the papers on that debate Gramsci states:

Trade-unionism has revealed to be a form of the capitalist society, not a potential way of overcoming the capitalist society. Trade-unionism organ-

ises workers not as producers, but as wage-earners, which means as creatures of the capitalist regime of private property, as sellers of work considered as a commodity (Gramsci, Bordiga, 1977: 94-95).

Gramsci's factory councils, as well as the new social movements, are converted into an alternative element regarding society and state. Therefore, it seems that the building of social movements aiming to build a stronger civil society, with objectives of emancipation and social justice, implicates the building of social movements rooted in participation, able to trigger democratic participation and strengthen citizenship.

The system of workers democracy... would shape and discipline the masses, would be a fantastic school of political and administrative experience, would be the framework of the masses to the last man [and woman], building in them the habit of tenacity and perseverance, building in the masses the habit of considering themselves an army in the battlefield, in need of a strong cohesion if it doesn't want to be destroyed and reduced to slavery (Gramsci, Bordiga, 1977: 70).

2. RAYMOND WILLIAMS. THE ENDLESS ROAD TO DEMOCRACY

Raymond Williams was born in Pandy, Wales, in 1921. He attended schools in Wales and later studied at the University of Cambridge. He always remembered and emphasized the fact that education in Wales was conducted in English, and those who used Welsh for communication in school were punished, which he attributed to a form of cultural imperialism. This experience may have influenced his conception of education as a cultural practice, perhaps his most significant contribution.

He participated in World War II but declared himself a conscientious objector to avoid participating in the Korean War, which he perceived as imperialistic (Smith, 2008). He worked as a tutor for the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), where he developed his practice as an adult educator. Later, he joined the University of Cambridge as Professor of Modern Drama. He was one of the founders of the 'New Left Review' and, along with E.P. Thompson and R. Hoggart, was one of the 'creators' of cultural studies.

In addition to his contributions to education, Williams wrote novels, with the most famous being *Border Country* ([1960a] 2013), considered

a kind of autobiography. His notable works include essays such as *Culture and Society* (1960b) and *The Long Revolution* (1965) and books to systemise and popularise knowledge such as *Keywords* (1985).

Although not generally recognized as closely tied to adult education, Williams always viewed his practice at the WEA as an educational activity aimed at adults, emphasizing the constant reinvention of the educational task (Beltrán, 2004). One of his fundamental ideas was that education should be seen as a cultural practice rooted in people's life experiences. For him, education «is based on the recognition of the equality of individuals» (1959: 124). Raymond Williams passed away in 1988.

3.3. Culture

A central element in Raymond Williams' work is culture, understood as a tool for constructing and maintaining a democratic society. The key text in this regard is possibly *The Long Revolution* (Williams, 1965). As mentioned earlier, Williams saw adult education as the practice and process of cultural transformation. He believed that culture should be understood in the plural, as cultures. Quoting Herder, he stated,

It is then necessary, he argued, in a decisive innovation, to speak of “cultures” in the plural: the specific and variable cultures of different nations and periods, but also the specific and variable cultures of social and economic groups within a nation (Williams, 1985: 89, quotation marks in the original).

The connection between culture and social class is crucial, as well as the abandonment of cultures considered minority or subjugated, such as his own experience with the abandonment and marginalization of Gaelic as a school language and as a means of knowledge transmission. For the first – connections between culture and social class – Williams used the term “working class culture” that defined as:

It is not proletarian art, or council houses, or a particular use of the language; it is, rather, habits of thought and intentions which proceed from this (Williams, 1960b: 346).

And stressed the importance “of the nature of social relationship” (Williams, 1960b: 344). In some ways, it is possible to affirm that it derives from people's experience.

Working class people have had years of experience of waiting at labour exchanges, at the panel doctor's, and at hospital. They get something of their own back by always blaming the experts, with or without justification (Hoggart, 1966: 74).

According to Hoggart (1966), it seems to be a very conservative culture, «for the group seems to conserve, and may impede an inclination in any of his members to make a change, to leave the group, to be different» (p. 84). Deriving for that,

Change is very slow, and people are not troubled by inconsistencies; they believe and do not believe. They go on repeating the old tags and practising their sanctions and permissions: the oral tradition is still strong (Hoggart, 1966: 31).

Moreover, cultures are linked to historical moments and connected with specific social contexts that are unique to certain historical situations, laying the foundation for “cultural studies” as a contextualized approach to cultural movements in each historical moment. Cultures encompass material, intellectual, and spiritual elements and serve as a mode of interpretation of common experience.

Using a Marxist approach, Williams differentiated between cultures as material productions and cultures as symbolic structures. These symbolic structures give meaning to the idea of education that allows participation in these common cultures while refining individual experiences. He later delved into the concept of criticism, which will be discussed ahead. For now, it suffices to consider that culture must overcome what Gramsci named folklore: a non-emancipatory, oppressive form (Díaz Salazar, 1991).

In any case, for Williams, «Popular culture... presents knowledge in generally accessible ways» (1985: 23). It is also a way of life, something common to people.

In summary, Williams considered three categories for using the concept of culture: a description of a process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development; a particular way of life; and a specialized work and artistic activities. The second category, culture as a way of life, a symbolic structure common to people living in a community, is particularly relevant for the creation of an educated participatory democracy (Morgan, 1997). As Cole (2008, s/p) points out: «Raymond Williams' most important lesson for educators is the deep and continuous emphasis he places on culture as a constitutive element of society and as a potential means for social transformation».

3.2. *The building of critical thinking and awareness*

Culture is a central element in Williams' thought. It is a collective act constructed through social interactions and must never be approached uncritically. Similar to Freire, who highlighted how the oppressor colonizes the mind of the oppressed, Williams reflected on the form of colonization represented by the prohibition of using Gaelic in school.

From here, it seems that education should go beyond merely sanctifying certain expressions of popular culture to subjecting it to analysis and critique, constructing an aesthetic sense.

Raymond Williams (1985) introduced the term "criticism", derived from literary criticism and stripped of its negative connotation. Criticism, for Williams, is a natural response connected to the sense of moving from censorship or negative criticism to the construction of taste and what he calls a cultivated person. It is not about seeking something lacking; instead, the idea of criticism implies building conscious judgments linked to situations and contexts. He stated:

when what always needs to be understood is the specificity of the response, which is not an abstract "judgment" but even where including, as often necessarily, positive or negative responses, a definite practice, in active and complex relations with its whole situation and context (Williams, 1985: 86, quotations marks in the original).

3.3. *The educator*

One of the most interesting texts to help understand Williams' ideas on the role of educators is "An Open Letter to the Tutors of the WEA" (Williams, 1993). In it, he begins by affirming that his work as an adult educator «has been good job, but always, as for more tutors, it has been more than a job» (1993: 222). He believes it has been more than a job because the maintenance of education ensures «the organization of social justice and the institutions of democracy» (223). Democracy, Williams insists, can only develop in a framework where people are educated, and education defends a cultivated democracy.

For Williams, the essence of the educational relationship is exchange and discussion.

I have discussed D. H. Lawrence with workings miners; discussed methods of arguments with building workers, discussed newspapers with young trade unionists; discussed television with apprentices in training. To me this

have been formative experiences, and I have learned as much as he taught (Williams, 1993: 224).

As McIlroy notes, for Williams, «the tutor [the educator] became far more passive, and the class more active» (1993: 288).

3.4. The road to democracy

As mentioned above, according to Raymond Williams, education is intrinsically linked to the construction of a democratic society.

If man [sic] is essentially a learning, creating and communicative being, the only social organization adequate to his [sic] nature is a participatory democracy in which all of us, as unique individuals, learn, communicate, and control. Any lesser, restrictive system is simply wasteful of our true resources; in wasting individuals, by shutting them out from effective participation, it is damaging our true common process (Williams, 1965: 118).

As mentioned earlier, the issue of culture seems fundamental, and an emancipatory education must consider this issue as paramount. However, working on culture must go beyond recognizing popular culture. It involves clearing the alienating elements within popular culture and denouncing the intrusion of forces that hinder personal development.

I believe in the necessary economic struggle of the organized working class. I believe it is the most creative activity in our society. But I know that there is deeply necessary work to be done regarding the processes of cultural hegemony itself. I believe that the system of meanings and values generated by capitalist society has to be defeated in general and in detail with the most constant types of intellectual and educational work. This is a cultural process that I called the “long revolution”, and by designating it as the “long revolution”, I emphasized that it was a genuine struggle as part of the necessary battles for democracy and the economic victory of the organized working class (Williams, in McIlroy, 1993: 308, quotation marks in the original).

4. PAULO FREIRE. DIALOGUE AND CONSCIENTIZATION

Paulo Freire was born in 1921, in the city of Recife, Brazil. His mother, who was a significant influence, was a deeply religious person. After the 1929 crisis and the subsequent death of his father, the family became impoverished and had to move to a more affordable place: Jaboatão,

near Recife. Freire studied law, began working at the “Serviço Social da Indústria” (Industry Social Service), and later at the University of Recife, where he was in charge of the “Serviço de Extensão Cultural” (Cultural Extension Service). In the early 1960s, he initiated various literacy experiences in Brazil. He was appointed coordinator of a “National Literacy Program” covering all of Brazil, which would be thwarted by the military coup in 1964. These experiences were fundamental for his early works, especially *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

After the coup, exile took him to Bolivia, Chile, the United States, and finally to Geneva, where he worked in the Department of Education of the “World Council of Churches”. This period is crucial to understanding his international recognition.

Freire returned to Brazil in 1980 to work at the Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC/SP) and the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP). He served as head of the “Department of Education” for the São Paulo Prefecture between 1989 and 1991. He was one of the founders of the “Workers’ Party” in Brazil and the “Paulo Freire Institute of Brazil”, established in 1992. During this time, Freire rewrote a significant part of his ideas and conceptual elements. He passed away in 1997.

4.1. Culture

Freire considered culture a part of the humanisation process. This process means, among other things, that people can leave the so-called *Culture of Silence*: some forms of domination that impede individuals and communities from expressing themselves. The concept of the Culture of Silence is very important to understand the idea of culture in Freire. He considered that a process of political democratisation needs a process of cultural democratisation, the recognition of popular culture as opposed to a culture of the elite. This can only be done through an educational process. To him, «the learning of both writing and reading is to introduce the illiterate in the communicative world of writing [...] starting from this, the illiterate can change their previous flairs. They can self-discover critically as creators of culture» (Freire, 1986: 105-106).

In this way, people discovered themselves as creators of culture. As Freire affirmed «literacy cannot be done from up to down, as a donation or an imposition, but from inside to outside, by the same illiterate, and with the support of the educator» (1986: 108).

According to Souza the process of cultural expression is connected to the process of collectively creating knowledge. Souza also considers

that the culture in Freire has to be approached from a multicultural perspective.

Inside the classroom, this multicultural Freirean postulate/concept can, even, contribute to identifying the kind of relations among different students that come from diverse cultures and to perceive relations among different written and oral views of the same culture (2007: 197).

The most important thing here is that the concept of culture, understood as people's view of their life, is present in the works of Paulo Freire from the very beginning. In *Education: The Practice of Freedom* he stated: «Recognise, after the first situation, the two worlds – one from the nature and the other the men's [sic] role and the culture in these two worlds – it follows another situation where the cultural domain is both clarified and amplified» (Freire, 1986: 107).

Thus, the notion of culture in Freire seems to be closely connected to the development of people either in individual or collective terms. This enables us to consider the relevance of Freire's thought to fight against the dominant tendency to alienate the cultural life and the loss of either individual or collective identity that is derived from the processes of globalisation and standardisation, which we are currently facing in almost all areas of life. This can be done through dialogue as the major educational skill in the Freirean approach.

4.2. Dialogue

This is the core of both Freire's philosophy and methodology. Dialogue guarantees communication and establishes education as a cooperative process characterised by social interactions between people. In this process, new knowledge is created by joining and sharing the knowledge people have. Dialogue includes multiple voices and multiple directions. In this multiple dialogue, knowledge is produced at the same time that dialogue takes place. Dialogue never means that people have to agree, on the contrary, it is a way to share and contrast ideas and thoughts (Sennett, 2012) to build respect listening the difference (Sennett, 2004). As Park (2001) states,

Dialogue, in particular, looms large as an important methodological link among the activities pursued because of its existential significance for human life. More than a technical means to an end, it is an expression of the human condition that impels people to come together (2001: 81).

According to Freire (1970), teaching and learning are the two steps in the process of creating knowledge: the teacher is a learner, and the learner becomes the teacher. Freire stresses that doing a collaborative work means including community members in grounding the work in people's daily lives. This process of dialogue that becomes conscientization is done through the double process of codification and decoding. While codifying and decoding, people embark on a collective work based on both cooperation and sharing experience. In this process people's knowledge emerges, creating a new one based on the surrounding reality.

In my opinion, two different aspects are important in this process of dialogue. The first is to stress that it means organising teaching in a totally different way. A second important matter is that knowledge is collectively created. As Park states when relating the Freirean approach to Participatory Research:

Dialogue occupies a central position as inquiry in pursuing the three objectives of participatory research, and the knowledge associated with them, by making it possible for participants to create a social space in which they can share experiences and information, create common meanings and forge concerted actions together (2001: 81).

This creation of knowledge is done by opposing people's knowledge to the "official one". On the other hand, in a school – and in a society – that seems to lose the importance of education as a social activity, dialogue enables individuals to create «open and trusting relationships between two or more people [...] One important aspect of dialogue is its ability to build social and emotionally caring relationships between people» (Dale, Hyslop-Margison, 2012: 4).

4.3. *The Educator*

The role of the educator from a Freirean perspective has been undertaken from different perspectives. At times it was affirmed that Freire overturned the role of the educator by considering that educator and student are the same. This is not true. There are differences between educators and students and even between educators themselves. As Freire stated: «There must be radical differences between left-wing and right-wing educators in their use of the same slide projector» (1984: 45).

One of the texts where Freirean concerns about the educator can be appreciated is "Professora sim, tía não" (Freire, 1997). For Freire, what

the educator does derives from the knowledge they have and how this knowledge is continuously reevaluated to build a better practice. All of this, without forgetting the material conditions of the school, the school context and the community where people live. Also, the classroom context itself, seeking answers to questions such as: what do the students like? where do they come from? how do they react to the school experience? how do they relate to their classmates? All of this entails assuming the diversity – not only cultural – that is found in a classroom and respecting that diversity and the cultural and linguistic forms of the people being educated.

Alongside this, there is the tension between practice and theory, which must be present in the fact that «the ongoing training of educators, which involves critical reflection on practice, is precisely based on this dialectic between practice and theory» (Freire, 1997: 74). Furthermore, he affirmed: «I cannot be sure of what I am doing if I do not know how to scientifically justify my action, if I do not have, at least, some ideas about what I do, why I do it, and what I do it for» (Freire, 1997: 40).

In summary, for Freire, in teaching there is an element of didactic and scientific knowledge and another ethical element that has to do with the construction of the affections that occur in every human relationship, integrating everyday knowledge into the school experience.

The experience of *understanding* will be the more profound the more capable we are of associating, never dichotomizing, the emerging concepts in the school experience with those that come from the world of everyday life (Freire, 1997: 20, italic type in the original).

4.3. *Conscientization*

This is the most controversial concept in all of Freire's thought. According to Kirkwood and Kirkwood (2011) it can be defined as

The process by which people are stimulated and encouraged to explore their reality and their awareness of it, so that their understanding of both reality and their own *consciousness* is deepened, and they begin to engage in *praxis* (2011: 172, italic type in the original).

It is related to concepts such as oppression. Freire stopped using it for a while because he considered it might be understood mainly in an epistemological sense: an oppressed man or woman could be conscious

about their own oppression in an intellectual way, and he or she can create some knowledge about this. As Torres (2007) affirmed,

Paulo Freire adopted the notion of conscientization in his work and he launched a huge challenge to authoritarian and banking education, but he abandoned its use when he saw that it had been used as a disguise to make up the implementation of an instrumental rationality under the guise of a radical education (2007: 216).

For this, it is important to stress that Freire always uses the concept of conscientization to make reference not only to the knowledge that a group of people have, but also beyond this, conscience is shaped in a process of social practices and changes concerning one's own reality. In this process, through dialogue, each person meets with other people and can move from a magical conscience to a critical one. We can say that conscientization is a process and not a stage. It is more than merely consciousness rising; it also implies the need to act on what is known. But the most important element that I want to stress is that conscientization is shaped in the forge of everyday liberating actions that allow people not only to be conscious about their alienation but being able to change the situations which cause it.

5. CONCLUSIONS

I am going to focus on the conclusions in two different ways. First, I will try to provide an answer to the questions that opened the article. Then, I will consider some common points for the three searchers, mainly the role of the educator, the culture and the aims of education.

At the very beginning of the piece, I put forth two questions that the searchers looked for answers to: how can we transform this society into a more human and less exploitative one? How can we change charity for social justice? To Gramsci, in transforming society the main issue is to build a new hegemony against the dominant one based on the values of the church, the landlords and the owners of the factories. As I mentioned above, to Gramsci this is an educational process. For Williams, the response to these questions is furthering participatory democracy, not only as a political form of governing society, but as a way to guarantee the development of people and communities. Finally, Freire considers that the process of conscientization – based on social practices – enables people to reflect and then transform the surrounding reality into a more human and fairer one.

In short, the social inequalities we face today have a significant economic basis, but not solely economic – as Marx, Gramsci and other Marxist thinkers affirmed. Education cannot be presented as the answer to all social problems, but the concept of consciousness and conscientization that Freire used, or the concept of criticism in Williams, allow us to remember that reflection on the causes of injustice – and becoming aware of it – is only possible through transformative social actions in the spaces where our daily lives unfold. We change nothing if we are not able to act on those everyday spaces that are close to us.

The second part of my conclusions is related to the common points among Gramsci, Williams and Freire. Regarding the first, the role of the educator, it seems that all three agree that the educator must start their work from real people's situations and then trying to find ways to raise the educational level to a more educated and critical one. It is the case in Williams with the concept of criticism, and Freire when talking about the different levels of consciousness - from a magical to a critical one. Concerning Gramsci, he has received some critics related to the idea that he proposed a conservative education (Entwistle, 1979), but if we analyse his practices in the press – *L'Ordine Nuovo*, *L'Unita* – or his project to organise schools either in Ustica or Turi, it is true that he always looked for a working class highly educated beyond the restrictions of a depersonalised school. In this effort to start from people's real situations the idea must be considered – present in all three – to empathise with the people as the only condition for understanding of the real world in which people actually live. This seems the way to also include the popular knowledge and culture far away from “folklore”.

In this direction, for Freire one of the most important things is that education enables people to leave the Culture of Silence, a form of oppression that impedes individuals and communities to express their own culture. To Gramsci, in a similar line, people have to travel from common sense to achieve good sense, which means overcoming those forms of “folklore” whose goal is alienating the people's culture. In this way, it is important to stress that culture – or cultures – is the way that people – as Williams affirmed – organise their daily lives.

Finally, what are the goals of education? It seems that, for the three thinkers, the main goal is that people can create critical and reflexive thinking which can enable them to analyse and transform their surrounding reality.

These searchers, and others not referred to in this piece, were a kind of modern Diogenes. There, not with a candle, but with education, looking for the knowledge that enables people to be free to think and organise judgement about their lives and the life of their community.

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