

THE EDUCATIONAL SPACE AS A MATERIALIZATION OF CONCEPTIONS AND PRINCIPLES: CONTRIBUTIONS TO A NECESSARY DEBATE

*O ESPAÇO EDUCACIONAL COMO MATERIALIZAÇÃO DE CONCEPÇÕES E PRINCÍPIOS: APORTES PARA UM DEBATE NECESSÁRIO*

*EL ESPACIO EDUCATIVO COMO MATERIALIZACIÓN DE CONCEPCIONES Y PRINCIPIOS: APORTES A UN DEBATE NECESARIO*



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**ABSTRACT:** How do educational spaces contribute to learning experiences that favor the entry into literate culture and to the development of instruments of access to elaborated and systematized knowledge? From the perspective of democratic educational theories, we argue in favor of a conception of innovation that requires rupture with aspects of the established school culture and constant reinterpretation of educational theories and practices. We defend structural changes in conceptions, postulates, and in space in the Brazilian school, so that these conceptions, both of education and of human development, already advocated but made possible by the entangling of symbolic structures and school building, may be fully experienced.

**KEYWORDS:** Educational theories. Innovative educational spaces. Integral education.

**RESUMO:** *Como espaços educacionais contribuem para experiências de aprendizagem que favoreçam o ingresso na cultura letrada e para o desenvolvimento de instrumentos de acesso ao saber elaborado e sistematizado? Na perspectiva de teorias educacionais democráticas, argumentamos a favor de uma concepção de inovação que requer ruptura com aspectos da cultura escolar estabelecida e reinterpretação constante das teorias e práticas educacionais. Defendemos que a escola brasileira necessita de mudanças estruturais de concepções, postulados e espaços, para que se vivenciem concepções de educação e desenvolvimento já preconizadas, mas impossibilitadas pelo engessamento das estruturas simbólicas e dos edifícios escolares.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Teorias educacionais. Espaços educacionais inovadores. Educação integral.*

**RESUMEN:** *¿Cómo contribuyen los espacios educativos a experiencias de aprendizaje que favorezcan la entrada en la cultura alfabetizada y al desarrollo de instrumentos de acceso al conocimiento elaborado y sistematizado? Desde la perspectiva de las teorías educativas democráticas, argumentamos que la innovación pedagógica requiere romper con aspectos de la cultura escolar establecida. Argumentamos que la escuela brasileña necesita de cambios estructurales de concepciones, postulados, espacios y su arqueología para que las concepciones de educación y desarrollo ya defendidas sean experimentadas, pero imposibles por el enredo de estructuras simbólicas y edificios escolares.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Teorías educativas. Espacios educativos innovadores. Educación integral.*

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## Introduction

The importance of the school space as a *locus* for human development processes, for teaching and learning processes of knowledge elaborated and systematized by humanity and for the development of the instruments necessary for understanding the world and acquiring new knowledge was highlighted throughout the quarantine caused by the high contagion of the COVID-19 virus in the last two years. The distancing from the school space that we experienced reinforced how much it needs to be part of reflections on school culture, as well as the purposes and studies about the conceptions of education themselves.

Most states in the Federation were without face-to-face classes at school for longer than other countries (Escobar, 2021). This data can be interpreted as a disregard for education, which in fact it was, if we consider that we had great difficulties in returning to classes also due to the lack of infrastructure in schools to receive their students. But, beyond this aspect, the inability to think about school education beyond the space of the traditional classroom is what became evident, with there being no movements on the part of authorities and educational managers to organize the continuation of learning processes in other spaces.

A lived experience that, in the midst of this crisis, can be seen as worthy of note, was the effort of teachers in relation to the challenge of maintaining pedagogical processes and, hopefully, investing in student learning remotely, despite the weight of social inequalities in the results of such processes. The demands of this new context imposed the use of technologies that were already available, but that did not participate in the *modus operandi* of traditional classrooms. This experience could bring innovations to the pedagogical process when returning to school. However, this will only happen if the organization of schools, their classrooms and their resources and furniture are modified, otherwise the school culture, with its tables in rows, its furniture and its immobile resources, will prevail. Such change directly depends on the tension of the static representation of the places where education can take place.

It is therefore considered that reflection on the relationship between educational theories and educational spaces and their entire organization is fundamental. The question now being asked is how educational spaces contribute, or not, to learning experiences that favor entry into a literate culture and to the development of instruments for accessing elaborated and systematized knowledge.

It is argued that pedagogical innovation requires breaking with aspects of established school culture. Breaking with such a culture involves renewing its spaces, its artifacts, its constructions, modifying conceptions. Therefore, it is understood and defended that the

Brazilian school needs, above all, structural changes in conceptions, postulates, spaces and its archeology (Escolano Benito, 2017), so that already recommended conceptions of development and learning can be put into practice in more remote times, but unable to be implemented, due to the plastering of symbolic structures and school buildings.

Thus, this essay aims to revisit educational theories and build notes, highlighting the principles of experience, intentionality, meaning and integrality (Esteves, 2021) as necessary for educational policies, considering the relationship between school spaces and possibilities for integral education, historical and structural challenges for Brazilian education.

### **Educational theories, school spaces, and comprehensive education: weaving approaches and considerations**

Educational theories that break with the assumptions of traditional pedagogies are still latent in our school context and have not been effectively experienced. Since the beginning of the 20th century, and before it, different pedagogical schools have pointed out that the learning process takes place in social interaction, in the experiences lived by the subjects and in the relationship with their surroundings. However, the school space remains similar to that of the Middle Ages, which focused on the teaching and learning process, which was for the few, on the word of the master, on memory exercises, on standardized responses and on silencing the students. This school culture is rooted in references and in the imagination about what school does, in the experiences of students and teachers, in the collective imagination of what teaching is and, also, in the arrangement of objects and furniture in the classrooms.

Escolano Benito (2017) informs that the material objects used at school and in the classroom space weave practices into school life, practices that embody a model, a mode of education. He highlights that this way crystallized, decanted into experiences and was transmitted, giving shape to a certain school culture, which is still experienced today.

The author argues that researchers in the field of education must guide their inquiries in order to account for the empirical aspects of the ways of governing the school and ordering the teaching process. For him, “school practice is culture, and not a simple repertoire of random instrumental mediations that occur in reality” (Escolano Benito, 2017, p. 24). This implies understanding that school practices are not mere and mechanical developments of so-called didactic sequences, so popular with the market, but the materialization of theoretical, historical and epistemological assumptions, conscious or not, on the part of those who practice them. It is important to understand that the practices carried out in everyday classrooms, carried out by

teachers, adapt, and materialize different educational theories and propositions, in addition to the speeches that can be made about schools.

The democratic educational theories defended and established, especially in the 20th century, brought possibilities for innovation to the pedagogical field in relation to processes previously experienced. However, no matter how much they have been studied and proven in localized experiences, their effective adoption in large-scale educational policies and in schools has not materialized. António Nóvoa (2009, 2021) goes so far as to state that today, with digital and available technology, these theories, developed more than a century ago, are better able to be implemented, as long as an effective capacity for creation and innovation in teacher training is guaranteed. It is worth asking, however, whether creative and innovative teacher training would provide what is necessary to change the practices acculturated at school.

From these authors, it is understood that, in order to innovate and change practices at school, the training of teachers is structural and needs to consider the space that materializes the school's culture, affirming principles built from the premises of affirming the right to learning and development, as well as requiring the convergence of educational policies from the perspective of school autonomy. Furthermore, changing practices and culture must consider the context that surrounds each school institution in terms of the territory and networks in which it is connected. Obviously, it is important to highlight that teacher training must favor the development of theoretical solidity, critical, autonomous and creative spirit (Vieira; Galian, 2023) and awareness of their role in caring for others.

Changes can be addressed based on different theoretical conceptions about innovation in education. For example, the conception of the normative theory of innovation, whose perspective is instrumental, technical and bureaucratic. In this case, the innovation occurs after being decided at an administrative level and is implemented. This generates an unfounded search for an educational policy that is considered correct, leading to decontextualized reforms, systemic changes oriented by and for results (Pacheco, 2017). This time, the school's grammar does not change.

The concept of school grammar, or school form [...] 'constitutes the generic culture of the school, a common structure shared by both internal and external agents, who recognize in it the true nature of the school and the foundation of its authority' (Lessard & Carpentier, 2016. p. 82), noting that change occurs at the margins of the system (Westbury, 2008) and that 'throughout the 20th century no innovation was able to transform the grammar of the school' (Lessard; Carpentier, 2016, p. 83 *apud* Pacheco, 2017, p. 94, our translation).

Yet another theory of innovation is the comprehensive theory of change. From this perspective, the focus of change is not on the implementation of strategies, but on the interpretation that actors make at school. Thus, teachers decide on their practices and the necessary changes from a space for discussing educational and learning policies. Changes in the curriculum and school culture occur in the long, medium and short term. Changes in the subjects offered occur in the long term, changes in programmatic content can occur in the medium term, and transformations in the organization of spaces and times of classes and the school occur in the short term (Pacheco, 2017).

Considering this reflection brought by Pacheco (2017), it can be understood that changes more related to space and time can be triggers, both in initial training and in continuing education, of discussions and reflective processes among teachers regarding pedagogical practice and educational concepts, building, even if slowly, effective changes in education.

#### **Four educational principles and school spaces**

The analysis by Esteves (2021), in his Master's dissertation, allows a synthesis of essential aspects to understand how changes in educational conceptions and practices linked to educational spaces can be promoted. The author defends four principles on which she establishes a relationship between the city and education. They are: intentionality, significance, experience, and completeness. These principles, in the educational perspective adopted in his research, were brought from the theoretical bases of Lev S. Vigotski (1987, 1991), David Ausubel (2000), John Dewey (1976), Paulo Freire (1996), Darcy Ribeiro (2018), Fernando Azevedo (2010), and Anísio Teixeira (1983).

Learning occurs through experiences, experiences, experiments, which mobilize the interests of each person, in contextualized and significant situations. This perspective has its bases in Johann H. Pestalozzi (1746 – 1827), in Friedrich Fröebel (1782 – 1852) and, mainly in the 20th century, in John Dewey (1859 – 1952). Esteves (2021) highlights that the emphasis on experience as an indispensable factor in the teaching and learning process dates back to Jan Amós Comenius (1592 – 1670), considered the precursor of pedagogy, as a field of studies and practices. The aforementioned author highlights that, years later, Dewey highlights the value of experience for learning. “In his work *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1976) seeks to find points of confluence between the practices of newer or progressive education, that is,

educational practices based on theories that oppose the assumptions of traditional education” (Esteves, 2021, p. 31, our translation).

This focus, according to Valdemarin (2017), has an important impact on education, over time removing the emphasis that was placed on the teacher's action and directing it to the student. According to the author, there would be, from this, an advance in the psychologization of education to the detriment of research and studies around the teaching method and the role of the teacher. Such criticism, which at first may give rise to a kind of reductionism in what we are considering as advancement or innovation, reveals an important epistemological turn that brings to the center of the educational scene the subject with his universe of meanings, relationships, references and with his potential for construction of answers that create new questions. Esteves highlights that:

The philosophy of such education is committed in a certain way to empiricism and experimentation, however, the meaning of experience is part of the problem to be explored by empiricism, after all, 'stating that genuine education is given through experience, does not mean that all experiences are genuine and equally educational, some experiences are (dis)educational' (DEWEY, 1976, p. 14). The quality of the experience is immediate (pleasant/unpleasant) and long-term (stimulating/limiting), and, considering these two times, it is configured as educational or de-educational (Esteves, 2021, p. 33, our translation).

Therefore, the quality of the experience requires content, instruments, means, and spaces articulated among themselves, through the actions of teachers who master educational theories and are available for new pedagogical experiences.

Another educator studied by the author is the Belarusian psychologist Lev S. Vigotski (1991), who researched the learning and development process, also shifting the emphasis from the teacher to the student, but at the same time valuing the teacher's intentionality in organizing activities, interactions and experiences that promote student development. Vygotski (1991) stated that interaction with the environment (thus, experience) was necessary for the development of higher psychological functions, as these are materialized in the relationship between the subject and his environment, through the mediation of different instruments and different people.

In view of this, it is noteworthy that the educational space, the school building and/or other spaces in the city are symbols and can play an important role, educational or non-educational, in mediating learning. Silva (2007) highlights this perspective in research on the

impact of carelessness with school space. He records a definition by Montoya, dated 1997, about school architecture, which corroborates what we are pointing out.

As stated by Laurentino Heras Montoya (1997, p 15), in his search for understanding the school space, 'Architecture is the support of symbolic, functional, technical, and political desires that characterize the culture of an era. For Montoya, therefore, in the architecture of the school building, lighting conditions, noise effects, ventilation, insulation against cold and heat, aesthetics, distribution of furniture and the existence (SIC) of equipment can influence positively or negatively in the teaching-learning process (Silva, 2007, p. 194, our translation).

This symbolic mediation can occur spontaneously in interactions; however, in education, there must be intentionality in its promotion, so that symbols, words and ideas are used as promoters of learning and development.

Vygotski (1987) differentiated the development that takes place in everyday life from that which takes place at school, from the passage from spontaneous concepts to scientific concepts. To achieve this, the necessary mediation needs to be intentional, the pedagogical process needs to be intentionally planned, and if, as Montoya points out, spaces, artifacts and architecture are symbolic, for education they also need to be intentional.

Mediation through symbols and language experienced by the subject in experiences that combine what they already know with new possibilities brings meaning and meaning to the learning process. From these theoretical assumptions, one more principle is extracted, that of meaning.

[...] any experience that provides the “experiential *continuum*”, a chain of experienced events that function as facilitators of new and different events that are largely pleasant and stimulating, that are links with each other, whether of naturally or stimulated through mediation. Thus, the subject who experiences such events can create and recreate meanings and signifiers among what is learned in each experience.

From this perspective, the experiences proposed and contained in traditional education are mostly understood as de-educational, since the learning dynamics in this conception consist of the repetition of past experiences and the reproduction of different contents, without any concern about creating meaningful links between what is experienced in each area of knowledge. When thinking about an educational proposal that has educational experience as a base, one must, therefore, revisit and change the practices of traditional pedagogy (Esteves, 2021, p. 36, our translation).

The educational experience, with meaning and meaning, implies a profound review of traditional teaching practices and, as a consequence, the organization of educational spaces that imprint other characteristics on school culture.

Meaning was a principle much worked on by David Ausubel (2000), an author who continued studies based on Jean Piaget (1976) and Lev S. Vigotski (1991), proposing meaningful learning. Brazilian researchers, who brought Ausubel's postulates to Brazil, state that:

When there is interaction, both knowledge changes: the new one starts to have meanings for the individual and the previous one acquires new meanings, becoming more differentiated, more elaborate.

This interaction is not arbitrary, nor literal, that is, the new knowledge does not interact with any previous knowledge, but rather with some knowledge that is specifically relevant to give it meaning (Moreira; Masini, 1982, p. 16, our translation).

Prior knowledge is, therefore, key for the student to establish new meanings in their learning. Part of this prior knowledge refers to the subjects' perceptions about space, people, and experiences already lived. Considering previous learning and experiences requires looking at the subject/student in a whole, integral and localized way.

### **Integral education and educational spaces**

Experiencing experiences in intentionally planned pedagogical processes demands the awareness that education deals with an integral subject. A subject who feels, who has memory, who creates, who establishes bonds, who can aspire to ethics, so that his development and the elaboration of new futures consider the diversity of people and cultures, the vulnerability of the environment, sustainability and the need for human beings to create and produce for themselves and for the world. In this sense, thinking about integral education is also investigating the pedagogical processes that occur in the school space, partly determined by characteristics of that space, as well as by issues that make up the hidden curriculum.

The meaning of the curriculum as a set of planned experiences is insufficient, as the effects produced on students by a pedagogical treatment or planned curriculum and its consequences are as real and effective as the effects arising from experiences lived in the reality of school without having them planned, sometimes not even being aware of its existence. This is what is known as a hidden curriculum (Sacristán, 1998, p. 43, our translation).

Space makes up this hidden curriculum. In this sense, pedagogical artifacts, architecture and the relationship between time, space and memory lead us to consider that it is not only possible, but also necessary for educational spaces, whether school or non-school, to be understood, considered and valued in the composition of the curriculum. The pedagogical work of teaching and learning, which brings teachers and students into relationship, finds limits and possibilities in school spaces with their characteristics.

The education of human beings, in its entirety, has been a right defended by many authors, concerned and eager to humanize education. Considering the cognitive, affective, ethical, aesthetic, relational, spiritual subject, among other aspects, requires thought out and planned educational processes, processes that consider how, throughout history, knowledge has been elaborated, what mistakes were made, what possibilities and dreams are possible. Humanizing education, from the perspective of integral development, involves understanding and modifying educational spaces, breaking the technical and positivist rationality of the school, dominant in school culture in the 19th and 20th centuries and still present in the 21st century, towards the construction of spaces humanized and humanizing, which promote relationships between people and the intense exercise of citizenship.

Jaqueline Moll (2011), coordinator of the Mais Educação Program from 2007 to 2013 (Brazil, 2007), remembers that dealing with education in its entirety, dealing with the person's integral education, brings significant interlocutors into contemporary times such as Anísio Teixeira (1983), Darcy Ribeiro (2018), Paulo Freire (1996), Milton Santos (2007), Maria Nilde Mascellani (1999), among others who thought of education as promoting life and citizenship. Understanding such construction from the perspective of “polyphonic dialogues”, the voices of the authors of this essay join these avatars, arguing that integral education implies innovation, construction and reconstruction of educational spaces, therefore, dialogue between educators, architects, engineers, environmentalists, among other professionals.

Educational spaces need not only to encourage interaction with the city (a space that carries many symbols, memories and everyday lives of many people), but to be permeated by the city and vice versa. The school and the city communicate, the school belongs to the city, therefore, it needs to be occupied and cared for as a space that belongs to everyone.

Valter Caldana (2014, online, our translation), on the occasion of the anniversary of the city of São Paulo, clarifies that

[...] in the structuring of the city, the location of educational equipment, schools, daycare centers and others, are factors of agglutination and

polarization. They are, therefore, agents of territorial organization that enable the implementation of housing and various other equipment and services, and are, finally, factors in the valorization of the urban fabric itself.

In the opinion of the professor and architect, talking about education and the city is dealing with a topic that is proposed in a systemic way. Reflecting on education in the context of the city leads not only to thinking about student training through the official curriculum, or through the activities and pedagogical practices promoted, but, rather, thinking about education “which is a service, which is a product, which is heritage, at the same time at the same time that it is also an intrinsic and inalienable value of the process of building citizenship” (Caldana, 2014, online).

In the same direction, Jaime Giolo (2011), writing about full-time education, addresses very precisely the issue of school space and the relationship between school and city:

One of the ways for the school to make up for the lack of its own space is to find it elsewhere, from churches, associations, NGOs, etc. It is very good for the school to have a relationship with the community, as there is a lot to learn in contact with collective entities external to it (commerce, transport, industry, sports institutions, cultural groups, etc.). On the other hand, it is certain that she must participate in the life of the community in an organized and educational way, carrying out an action foreseen in her pedagogical plan. Therefore, going to the community can never represent an escape from the school space or, which is equally serious, a way for the school to make up for the lack of its own space and working conditions. When a school has to leave it to obtain a classroom borrowed from the church or a community association, it means that neither the public authorities nor the local community consider the school space as an educational means and it is unlikely that good pedagogical results will be achieved. The concept of an educational city is not realized in this way, but only when the school rises in the external context as a full institution, fundamental for the improvement of the community itself. Industry and commerce will not be asked to perform their activities exquisitely without having adequate facilities; Public administrators will not be asked to do effective and efficient work without recognizing their right to use public money to equip themselves materially; Athletes will not be asked to bring Olympic medals without providing them with the appropriate spaces for the required training. Can the school be asked to provide quality education without the minimum material conditions?

A large part of the so-called Brazilian schools must be summarily demolished and, in their place, beautiful and functional school buildings built, with space for classes, meetings, teachers' rooms, libraries, laboratories, group studies, meals, leisure, sports, etc. Schools where students, teachers and other education professionals can be there all day, organizing and carrying out the activities necessary for the integral education of students. Considering the context of current Brazil, with its dynamics of economic and social development, this type of investment is possible and urgent (Giolo, 2011, p. 101, our translation).

Therefore, integral education requires, as already pointed out, spaces and plans that have experience, intentionality, meaning and completeness as their principles. Moll (2011) states that, in order to achieve this integral education of the person, to humanize the school, it is necessary to increase the time children (and teachers) spend in schools. However, it highlights that:

The increase in students' length of stay has direct implications for the reorganization and/or expansion of physical space, the working hours of teachers and other education professionals, differentiated financial investments to guarantee the quality necessary for change processes, among other elements. The implementation of such changes requires medium-term processes that allow education systems and schools, in their daily lives, to (re)construct and reorder material and symbolic their *modus operandi* (Moll, 2011, p. 28, our translation).

Recent reforms in Brazilian education have placed emphasis on curriculum reforms, the prescription of skills, the development of content that allows knowledge to be mobilized to solve students' daily problems in a contextualized way. The teacher training policy – Guidelines and Common National Base – Teacher Training – BNC-FP (Brazil, 2019), has similarly placed great emphasis on the teacher's ability to contextualize and develop strategies to ensure the development of prescribed skills in the National Common Curricular Base – BNCC (Brazil, 2018).

There are several studies raising criticisms and establishing analyzes about the mistakes of BNCC and BNC-Formação (Galian; Silva, 2019; Rodrigues; Pereira; Mohr, 2019; Frangella; Dias, 2018). In general, such studies question the conception that is being supported when it is admitted, in the documents themselves, that the success of education lies in teachers' strategies so that students take ownership of what is being proposed, even stating that, with BNCC, teachers just need to know how to teach.

Many questions arise: will guaranteeing a National Base be enough if the foundations on which the Brazilian educational system is built are not revisited, including in relation to its exclusionary, dualistic and archaic characteristics? Furthermore, if the material bases of education are not revisited, also made up of buildings, with their architecture and their internal, educational or non-educational arrangements, will these reforms that point to the curriculum be efficient? Are school structures prepared to work considering the four principles listed in Esteves' research (2021)? Can a classroom, with 35, 40, 45 students to one teacher, with desks lined up and perhaps a computer or two, with or without connectivity, be able to handle these principles, especially after all the learning made in the context of the pandemic and which do

they imply more generous spaces, openings for communities, infrastructure so that health, culture, sport, and education work in an integrated way, based on the territories and their people?

A profound educational change in the country, and not just a reform, requires more than modifying the curriculum for students and teacher training. It demands an intersectoral dialogue between the areas of Education, Infrastructure, Health, Culture, Sports, at a minimum. A dialogue that favors the construction and elaboration of new educational spaces, expansive spaces that connect school and community, that not only incorporate new technologies, but that favor effective interaction with signs and languages of society, that allow students to interact with each other and with the social environment, that honor the autonomy guaranteed in LDBEN 9394/1996 (Brazil, 1996), so that schools and communities plan meaningful learning processes and experiences, with the perspective of building a world in which everyone fits.

### Final remarks

The complexity of the themes explained in this article prevents any intention of exhausting issues or bringing together all dimensions that can be addressed. It was proposed to create notes, highlighting the principles of *experience, intentionality, meaning and integrality* as necessary to deepen the understanding of educational policies that, from the training of teachers and permanent curricular restructuring, must consider understanding, re-reading and expansion of educational spaces with their configurations, characteristics, and representations, taking into account the commitment to an integral education or the full development of the person, provided for in the Brazilian Constitution of 1988.

Each person lives and is crossed by spaces that motivate them to interact, create, innovate, or, on the contrary, to become shy, saddened and isolated. Thinking about education based on this perspective can mean the construction of a promising path that has not yet been tried by Brazilian education.

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