Freirean Fundaments for a Discussion About Competences in Teachers Formation

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Introduction

The competence question has conquered a wide space for discussion. Education, however not alone, has raised many inquiries in the way of understanding what it means. Common sense, which offer us immediate explanations in a pragmatic level, has a popular saying that declares: "The one who does not have competence, doesn't establish himself". This affirmation suggests that the one who doesn't know how to do a determinate task should not do it. This first sense of competence emerges from practical daily observations, in establishing the importance of knowing how to do, stating a premise that will appear in many authors thinking, as, for instance, the Swiss Philippe Perrenoud, whose works in this area has been very acknowledged.

This article will reflect on competence, bringing a central question which is to discuss what are the philosophical fundaments proposed by the new national curricular directives to teachers formation in elementary education and also by what means this fundaments articulate with Paulo Freire’s thinking. We will take as reference to this study the book Pedagogia da Autonomia (Autonomy Pedagogy), understanding it as a synthesis that concentrates nuclear-ideas of his educational propose. In order to do it, we will start this study with a reflection about the influences of the competences discourses in the current policy of teachers formation in Brazil. Afterwards we will distinguish the importance of inserting Freire’s thinking in the knowledge needed to the teacher action and establish a correlation with the competence notion.

I — Mapping competence conceptions and its reflections in the current policy of teachers formation in Brazil

The fact that the men and the world different visions establish narrow relations with the historical moment in which they emerge lead us to inquiries about the reasons why the competence question occupies a wide space in the current debate.

The recognition of the necessity that various levels of schooling should turn to the competence developments is linked to the comprehension that we live in a transition state from old to new models, in which it can be observed meaningful changes in economy, policy and culture, coming from the questioning around established certainties. This picture lead us to reexamine practices, ideas, beliefs, values and reference parameters in a way that the very comprehending act turns into a challenge. At the same time, however, it is necessary to recognize that even holding a significant place nowadays, the
discussion about competences has already appeared in other moments and others approaches. Hence, if the discussion is itinerant, endures and crosses moments, it means that it continues to raise challenges and preoccupations to educators, bringing the necessity of a redefinition.

The discussion turns to the formation that goes further the linear and instrumental requirements of the educational policy suggesting more daring proposes in the search of forming the teacher to a new world (epistemic, social and political), meeting the requirements of the so-called knowledge society — technical-scientific. In this effort, we have met a great number of ideas in Brazil, some resembling recipes, which has influenced very much the pedagogical thinking and the national policy for the education.

Nowadays, the authors mostly published in Brazil, with French and Iberian predominance, put the educators formation in the end of the Brazilian educational debate. However, it seems to us that, without disregarding the merits of these authors’ prolific thinking, in their works spread and largely published in Brazil, we tend to forget the national production of yesterday and nowadays, in which we find, already in its origins, by means of Paulo Freire’s work, this thinking reference. This has been forgotten. In this article, we intend to reference the theses about the Teachers Formation in a counterpoint with the Freirean thinking fundaments. In fact, we can notice them in the teacher formation policy documents in Brazil, which we will analyze subsequently.

Here, our analysis will consider the MEC Document: Curricular Directives to the Formation of superior level Teachers to the Basic Education [2001]. The document is shaped by the competences course, in a Perrenoudian language, in the competences to teach.

Among the Document many qualities, it must be distinguished the effort of narrowing the distances between the institutions for teachers formation and the national policies for national, state and municipal systems of teaching. Whether on one hand the document proposes rejoining the national policies to the institutionalized formation locus (Universities and Superior Formation Institutes), what is very laudable, on the other it places a hard responsibility on these Formation Schools: reverting the terrible picture of the Brazilian basic schooling. As the Document says: "It is necessary that the courses for preparing future teachers take into account the responsibility of supplying the eventual deficiencies in the basic schooling that the future teachers received both in the fundamental teaching and in the middle one" (p. 20).

Hence, the question concerning the initial teacher formation is not limited to this task, hard in itself, it becomes wider when we notice that in the Basic Teaching (fundamental and middle) mass policy the concern has not been the teaching quality, but the massive sums which serve as statistics fo
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Critically speaking, we could say that the competences are, according to Perrenoud (1997; 2000), capacities of mobilizing various cognitive resources that help the professional to dominate the situation as much as possible, to comprehend the others persons ways of thinking and acting, to control his own impulses and ambivalences, to become conscious of the cultural heritages and of the bets underlying the very agents strategies, from this cognitive point of view, the inscription of failure in the practice implies that the professional prepares himself with the know-how-to-do competences, specific to analyze the uncertainties and contradictions; promotes blockages, disappointments, conflicts; foresees the other person strategies and its consequences; to deal in commitments, reflect upon the advantages and inconveniences. In this case, the teacher formation almost completely circumscribes itself in an individual aspect. This matrix restrains the formation for competences only to that ones regarding space (classroom/school unity) of the teaching service. It requires cognitive, psychological and technical skills that practically let the professional alone and as the single responsible for the task of searching and administrating his competences. He is responsible for his pupils failure and for all the schooling process. This analyzing category, although taking into consideration the team work and the participation in the administration of the school unity (5, 6 competences), removes from the professionalism a critically wider concern with the teaching systems and, in a more general way, with the interdependence between the pedagogical practice and the State Education policies.

Perrenoud’s competences are competences to be taught, and this teaching is restrict to the school unity, to the practice circumscribed to the learning process, what for our reality are complexity minimizers of the relations between education and policy, between the national education system and the school unity, between the teacher social conditions and his hard task in unstructured working environments, among others aspects. It is not the place to criticize here the Genevan model, because the social-political-economical context is completely different from the one lived in Brazil. Concerning our country, the Directives for teachers formation, however inspired
in Perrenoudian conceptions of competences to mobilize cognitive resources that become viable facing the problem-situations in the teaching and learning relation, goes precisely to the above mentioned point as absent in Perrenoud’s categories. The six Brazilian competences families for teaching propose that the teacher formation be guided by the wider political and social conceptions required in our context.

The first competence group shows a concern with the formation turned to the principles of democratic ethics revealed in the political-social dimensions and even in the methodological and didactic choices: human dignity, justice, mutual respect, participation and social responsibility, cultural diversity of the Brazilian ethnic, dialogue and solidarity to act as teacher and citizen.

The second group directs to a formation that turns available to the teacher comprehending the school social role, its critical relation with established political powers, from where it comes the directives to the teaching levels in Brazil, as well as with the enlarged School, or else, the School-Community relation.

The third, fourth and fifth groups concern the competences to comprehend the complex curricular picture, the dominances of the pedagogical knowledge and its skills expressed in the theoretical investigation and in the teaching practice — which in a country like Brazil has specific and peculiar meanings —, without however dismiss the revelation of the contents dominance and of the new resources for an educative practice in the different contexts of our reality.

Finally, the last group indicates the responsibility of the formation schools in the requirements attendance for preparing an autonomous teacher, capable of running conditions for his continuous formation, in a responsible way, without however releasing the State from its task of turning the mechanisms available, by means of educational policies that assure the spaces for collective formation.

This analyze shows that in reality what guides and fundaments the Brazilian document, elaborated with the Brazilian educators advisement, are our social-anthropological and political concerns about Education. Education as a political act. These requirements have already been expressed in the democratic origins of the Brazilian educational thinking, in which Professor Paulo Freire is one of the great icons. What we have nowadays is an educational document that, duly regarding its social and historical proportions, could have been put into practice since the 60’s. Freire’s thinking influence seems very clear to us. We intend to deepen this influence comprehension showing, in the following item, Paulo Freire’s reflections concerning the teacher formation process.

II — Recovering the Freirean fundamentals required to the teaching action

The current segments that study directly or indirectly the teacher formation have their source in Paulo Freire’s thinking. Some examples are very near to his ideas. Researchers from the first world claim that the teacher must be turned into an intellectual who searches, from his own practice, the meaning of his educative action and of the interests to which it serves, and to what measure it contributes to the maintenance or transformation of the system picture in which it actuates.
The central point of this discussion is to make the teacher reflects upon his own practice, considering his experience as the most important source for knowledge construction, starting from analyzing his practices in order to understand the ways to face the day-to-day complex problems of the school, how he uses his knowledge and how he creates new procedures and strategies to teach and learn. This kind of reflection, in a Freirean language, implies that the educator sinks in his culture and history waters, conscious of being and come-to-being-in-the-world. He must sink in his experience and feelings world, a world full of connotations, values, symbolic interchanges, affective correspondences, social interests and, at the same time notice, starting from a theoretical comprehension, what is going on in the objectivity world.

For our educator, any teaching action must be based in two basic principles: the first concerns the reflection about man and his "vocation" in the search of firming himself as subject of the history; and the second associates itself to the position of man in this history — his action in the world as his interpreter and culture creator. Freire approached these questions almost in all his works.

The man showed by Freire is an homo politicus. The educative act cannot turn men into an object, because this goes against the natural vocation of Being. Hence, for Freire each and everyone educative action must be a political act to help men becoming conscious of his position in the world, to free himself of his oppressed consciousness, in order to participate, in a active and creative way, of the history and of the reality transformation in which he is inserted. The educator proposes an educational politicization, once there is not exist an educative process far from policy; what really happens is the covering of the political content which is underlined in any educative propose. Since his first steps in the pedagogical practice, Paulo Freire chose a political pedagogy centered in freedom and in the being autonomy.

Understanding that the knowledge process happens when the person, recognizing himself as human, is motivated to reflect upon the problems that surround him in the daily life, Paulo Freire´s political pedagogical work was meant to the man excluded from political actions, judged by the powered ones as being incapable of defining his existence. He searches, starting from his pedagogical advisement work intended to the ones considered illiterate, to motivate them to regain their rights and the use of their voice, through the word, reading and writing appropriation.

The act of reading the world through the word makes possible to man rediscovering his own values and the meeting with other men in the search of freeing himself from the powers that oppress him. Hence, in Freire´s thinking it is not possible separate Education and Policy as two independent things, for these two human life dimensions are intrinsically linked.
Since the second half of the last century, Paulo Freire was already putting forward the fundamentals of what nowadays both the education "vanguard" and the official documents of the Brazilian educational policy have been emphasizing as new competences to teach. His thinking is being rooted in the "being" category, putting the emphasis in the man as a being of relationships. This dialogic relation of the man-with-the-world involves a compromise dimension, transcending the attitude of merely physical inserting as being-in-world. In this perspective, it is required to have knowledge belonging to the being category and it is not required to have competences inscribed in the "having" category. Hence, we can say that the Freirean conception to the teachers formation is guided by an onto-anthropological dimension and the other by a pragmatic and instrumental dimension. The last one is based in the practice of competences acquisition while the first in the construction of knowledge oriented to an educative practice. Taking Freire’s ideas as the base for discussing the problems about the teachers formation and subsequently that one involving competences mean, in this manner, remove the discussion about the reductionist reading, by the way proposed by Perrenoud, in which the teacher’s know-how-to-do turns to merely technical competences, emphasizing a relation that was already corroborated as being terrible to the Brazilian education: the one of subject-object in the teacher-knowledge-student interaction. From Freire’s thinking on, it is possible to affirm that this perspective des-historicizes the human being from the aspect of the relations that he establishes with himself, with other men e with the world. Even appearing in the documents of teachers formation in Brazil and in the competence conceptions, the discourse of political insertion, democracy and citizenship, it is necessary the ontological dimension as the formation root. Nowadays the possibility of creating new worlds by means of multiple and different technological applications have raised many questions turned to education fields, especially on the discussion about the competences to teach. Thus we understand that even the "new" being formed in the enchanted world of technologies and individual competences, if it has not the dialogical experience, the critical conscience of its task and of the social place in which the education and the passion for the act of teaching is located, so the educator’s place is really threatened in these times of changing. This technological apparatus can lead us, as in the past, to what Freire severely criticized: a technicist education, named by him as "banking education". Without paying attention to these aspects, the education in the 21st century will not be different from that one so hardly criticized and tried to be changed by Freire.

By these means, the teacher formation goes toward new directions. It is not based only in the new technologies problematic, but also in the teacher intellectual formation. According to Freire, teaching brings risks and the "availability to the risk, to the new that cannot be denied or accepted only because is new, as well as the criterion of refusing the old is not only chronological. The old that maintains its validity or embodies a tradition or marks a presence in time remains new" (Freire, 1997: 39).
References


