

Active Learning Logos, Methods or Methodologies? Reproduction and Social Transformation in Question

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Abstract

This is an update article, which aims to reflect on how the appropriation of active methodologies, by higher education teachers, can contribute to social transformation or reproduction. The massive expansion of Brazilian higher education (especially in the private sphere) and the growing number of professionals/teachers, are factors that demand pedagogical training initiatives for teachers. Common themes in these meetings, active teaching methodologies are superficially approached, contributing to the use of methods as an end in themselves, removing students from critical readings of reality. On the other hand, the conception of active methods as a means for the formation of subjects committed to the transformation of reality, requires teachers' awareness of the philosophical and political assumptions that underlie the various active teaching methods. Therefore, active teaching methods will contribute to social transformation, insofar as the political-philosophical pillars of the methods are appropriated by teachers and course coordinators.

Keywords: *Nursing Education; Teaching; College Education*

Introduction

Active teaching methodologies between reproduction and social transformation

The defense of student-centered teaching has been common in discussions in the area of university education. Under allegations based on the high potential of active teaching methods for the formation of critical-reflective subjects, pedagogical training initiatives under the theme "active teaching methodologies" are spread. Often, teachers and course coordinators are faced with purely operational courses and workshops, which provide them with manuals and portfolios that contain different methods to be used during classes. In this article, we intend to reflect on how the appropriation of active methodologies, by professors of higher education, can contribute to social transformation or reproduction.

According to Chirelli [1], working with active methodologies requires the teacher to assume his role as a student advisor in the process of reconstructing established knowledge, and demands from the student the student's understanding of his participative role in the learning process. In addition, it is necessary - for the work based on active teaching methodologies - the institutional disposition to review its organizational structure, aiming at greater flexibility in the pedagogical processes [1].

Flexibility - this is an expensive term for the educational context of higher education in recent decades. Expressions such as flexibility, institutional diversification and learning by skills are at the service of an educational concept that aims, fundamentally, at preparing the

labor force for the labor market. This educational conception follows the option for the neoliberal socio-political system, which has in Ronald Reagan and Margareth Thatcher prominent figures in the influence of Latin American nations to neoliberalism. In the midst of this socio-political option, the State has the role of a minimum intervener in the face of social problems that affect national populations, also assuming the role of regulator of social areas (such as health and education), committing itself, primarily, to economic development of the country.

For Minto ([2]: 217), “the more capitalist accumulation takes place, the more its productive forces develop, the greater the tendency for the relations determined by it to occupy wide social spaces, previously undetermined in their entire dimension”. Thus, with the submission of different social areas to the interests of capital, the idea is being infused - in the collective social imagination - that the State would be unnecessary to meet social needs. As a result, the State is practically restricted to the role of manager of public services and it is up to it to evaluate the provision of services to the population [2].

In the wake of the option for the neoliberal socio-political system, Brazil received influences from the World Bank [3], which spread the idea that poverty alleviation would be linked to higher rates of entry into higher education, which would improve the economy.

In the perspective of improving the economy by expanding access to higher education, the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education - LDB (Law No. 9,394 of December 20, 1996) was approved, which, adopting a “new educational language”, affirmed evaluation, institutional autonomy, financing and teaching model as beacons of educational reform. Expressions such as learning by skills and the pedagogy of learning to learn configured a teaching model aimed at delivering workers with great potential to adapt to instabilities to the market [3].

At the service of the market is also the forecast, in the 1996 LDB, of specialized universities by field of knowledge. This possibility is confirmed by Decree No. 2,306/1997, which establishes institutional diversification according to its administrative organization (universities, university centers, integrated colleges, colleges, institutes or higher schools). As a result, education entrepreneurs could launch products with different designs, that is, diversified courses, increasingly enhanced by institutions that (as is the case with university centers) now have the autonomy to create courses without the need for prior state assessment [2].

Another mechanism that favored the opening of the university educational field to the business community was the provision (in paragraph 2 of article 77 of the LDB of 1996) for support from the public authorities to university research and extension activities; what “in practice [...] reveals the lack of guarantee of public resources for public IES [Higher Education Institutions]” [2].

These legal provisions, while reflecting the expansionist aspirations of entrepreneurs interested in higher education as a profitable niche, also feed back into the social segment represented by the business community, maintaining the status quo.

To get an idea of the extent of public investments in financing the expansion of higher education in Brazil: “In 2014, the Federal Government released R \$ 13.154 billion to FIES [Student Financing Program] and PROUNI [University for All Program]. These expenses now represent 12.32% of the total budget under the supervision of MEC [Ministry of Education]. In financial terms, the resources destined to the expansion of private higher education, through FIES and PROUNI, grew 880.42%: from R \$ 1.342 billion, in 2003, to R \$ 13.154 billion, in 2014” ([4]: 25). The promotion of the financial capital of large educational corporations has repercussions on the design of pedagogical projects aimed at training workers for insertion in the market, as long as this insertion takes place in a position that does not threaten those in power, that is, innocuous to the status quo. Expectations around education, aimed at preparing for insertion in the labor market, make it a field profitable; because in the so-called knowledge society, “the individual is a consumer of knowledge that enables him to productive and efficient competition in the labor market. The possibility of obtaining an effective insertion in the market depends on the

individual's ability to 'consume' that knowledge that guarantees this insertion" ([5]: 55). This individualistic logic inspires the pedagogies of learning to learn, which are designed to prepare the individual for adaptation to changes, through a creative formation that "should not be confused with the search for radical transformations in social reality, but [...] in terms of the ability to find new ways of actions that allow better adaptation to the dictates of capitalist society" ([6]: 11-12).

In this scenario, active teaching methodologies are justified by the need for the subject's autonomy in the face of situations that they must face in the job market. This autonomy seems, however, superficial, since it does not form the subject to think critically the bases of the social system in which he finds himself, but only enables him to develop reactions to apparent problems, common in professional practice.

Thus, I ask: How can active teaching methodologies be appropriated (by teachers and course coordinators), enabling university education to contribute to the formation of subjects who can think critically about reality, aiming at its transformation?

Active methodologies and quality in university education

Although I have touched on the issue of university expansion under a critical bias in the previous section, I admit that I am not against the said expansion; rather, its expansion without commitment to quality in training. And the "fact is that private-market institutions of higher education have adopted, in the vast majority of situations, teaching of questionable quality, including with the intensive use of distance education [Distance Education]" ([7]: 886).

As Torrez ([8]: 78) says - referring to the quality needed for public health services - "the impediment to access and the quality of the act of being cared for is the suppression of the right to health, but access without quality is also". In line with this conception, I understand that access is not synonymous with quality. In the context of university education, quality requires the education of subjects able to carry out critical readings of reality, capable of engaging in their transformation.

However, what are the chances that subjects trained in a context marked by values such as individualism and competitiveness, will be concerned with social problems, which often do not directly affect them? I understand that the use of active teaching methodologies can contribute to bring students closer to the perspective of social transformation. But it can also serve the reproduction of society, by reinforcing the values hegemonic aspects of individualism and competitiveness among the subjects. As Silva ([9]: 558) says, "within the scope of learning management strategies, the promotion and the triggering of interactive, innovative and creative pedagogical forms, in tune with the logics of the individualization of training paths, acquire momentum".

In this context, "it has become common to trigger design, customization and gourmetization processes, based on aesthetic inflation, which enhance a new stage of the economy" ([9]: 558-559). This new economic stage is designated by Silva (9: 559) as artist capitalism, whose characteristics "signal an aestheticization of life, in the search for differentiation, linking the economic with the forms of sensitivity [...] We are facing an economy of seduction".

In the economy thus forged, it is thought that the more attractive the class, the more diversified methods that meet different tastes and preferences, the greater the chance of learning. Now, what is this learning? Based on learning to learn, this learning trains the subject to be able to adapt to the demands of the labor market, not questioning the meaning of these demands, but simply, conforming to them - which, for us, does not indicate quality in university education. Therefore, in the horizon of social transformation, it is consistent to discuss active methodologies, that is, conceptions of the world, society, human and education that are implicit in different teaching methods.

Taking active teaching methods as an end in themselves, that is, focusing on diversifying strategies for momentary student satisfaction (for participating in a cool, light and dynamic class) seems to favor social reproduction much more than the transformation. Because

the ethical-political sense of using methods is lost sight of, centralizing efforts in the preparation of resources for the class and not in the formation of subjects for citizenship.

On the other hand, active methods can be used as a means for the formation of subjects committed to social transformation. From this assertion, I see two implications: The first is that, despite the purpose of the lesson, the transformation of reality will always be on the horizon. Another development concerns teaching autonomy to invent, alter and mix teaching methods, so that the teacher does not become a mere executor of the method, but his permanent critic. In this conception, it is not the methodical rigor that sets the tone of the class, but the logic behind the method.

One request: More logos and less methods in pedagogical education

It was June 2018 and the 16th National Seminar on Guidelines for Nursing Education (SENADEN) took place in the city of Florianópolis (Santa Catarina - Brazil). Final minutes of the course entitled Active Teaching Methodologies, I heard from some course participants: “- Yes, but so far she [the course teacher] has not talked about the topic”. I realized that there was a confusion of understanding between methodologies and active teaching methods. The course teacher spoke about epistemological and political conceptions underlying the teaching-learning process. In recalling the facial expression of several of the colleagues participating in the course, I think that the comment highlighted above was not isolated. It seemed to me that the public expected to receive a portfolio, containing something like “Active methodologies from A to Z: More than 50 methods for learning”.

Silva ([9]: 552) claims that “in the composition of classes in our country there is a productive connection between educational aesthetics, active learning and didactic solutions”. We are not here discrediting initiatives aimed at training teachers in the field of active methodologies, as, as Sordi ([10]: 48) says, “the number of university teachers who reveal a certain insecurity of their ‘competence’ to teach him, is almost absolute absence of pedagogical training”.

Although admits the need for pedagogical training - especially in an educational context marked by professionals who start teaching, without previous pedagogical training - I agree with Sordi ([10]: 56), that “filling this educational training gap cannot be done lightly”. Therefore, “it is important to discuss what type of training should be provided so that the university education process goes beyond the mere commitment to the professional dimension and that it instrumentalizes university professors, especially those professionals/teachers, to expand, through their decisions pedagogical, the academic and human dimension that must recover its centrality in the pedagogical projects of courses in different areas of knowledge” ([10]: 56-57).

Conclusion

Now, how will training on active methodologies help teachers to make decisions that expand the human dimension of training, if they are more satisfied with the surface, with the method itself and less with the philosophical and political conceptions that underlie the methods? It is based on this that I suggest to those who conceive, plan and implement training aimed at teachers and coordinators: In the name of social transformation, more logos... less methods.

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