

The epistemological dimensions of pedagogy

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Abstract

Pedagogic epistemology, as an autonomous philosophical subject, studies the development of knowledge in general. As subject applied in the domain of education science it has as specific aim the study of pedagogical knowledge, the manner in which the fundamental concepts in the domain of educational theory, training theory, curriculum theory, are built. The main aim of epistemology is to think critically about pedagogy, the research from the domain of education, training and curriculum. The part of pedagogic epistemology – as critic and problematic thinking – is to give to pedagogy that gnosiologic and heuristic aspect which confers to its ontological, methodological and normative step status of science.

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1. Introduction

Pedagogy systematical and profound reflects upon the educational act, upon the purpose and the means of learning. Postmodern pedagogy uses the enhanced and extensive research of contemporary epistemology which shape and follow two major reflection directions that behold the essence of science¹:

¹ Sola, G. (a cura di) (2002) *Epistemologia pedagogica. Il dibattito contemporaneo in Italia*, Bompiani: Milano, p. 21

1. To clarify what is being understood through science and
2. To state the methods of knowledge for a science to be thus defined.

The pedagogical epistemology reflects upon the scientific criteria of educational knowledge, but also upon the pedagogical research methods, upon the relation with other subjects and also upon the way of which this related subject developed. It deals with explaining the study aim for all pedagogical subjects. It highlights their research methods, their relation with other subjects and how they developed. As important are epistemological problems related with the normativity of the domain and of the specialized language construction.

Each science has as primary and existential the task to individualize the aim for it is called to make knowledge and culture. But the construction act of scientific discourse about a knowledge portion always implies an internal logic of the discourse and so of the science involved. In other words, general science of education needs pedagogic epistemology. Without it, pedagogy will never be a science, namely an organic organized knowledge².

Pedagogic epistemology represents both a manifestation of reflexive necessity over the discourse and an instrument of control and planning of pedagogy.

A solid pedagogic epistemology identifies pedagogy as a general science of education. It validates and supports a scientific subject free to develop, free to build its own investigation field, free to thoroughly address this investigation field but with the consciousness of being the main science to be assigned the knowledge of that aim that was defined pedagogy³.

Elaboration of a complex, dialectic and integrated apparatus of discourse peculiar to education presumes approaching pedagogy from an analytic perspective, mostly critic and metacritic. When talking about explication, argumentation, understanding, from a pedagogical perspective, they must coexist, giving to the scientific discourse, specific to the domain, additional methodological and praxiological resources.

2. The epistemological status of pedagogy

From past times, of an inquiring disposition, the men wanted to understand and know what happens in their surrounding reality. Knowledge understood as a reflection process upon objective reality implies a strong relation between the knowing party and the knowledge aim.

² Gennari, M., (1992) *Interpretare l'educazione: pedagogia, semiotica, ermeneutica*, La Scuola: Brescia, p. 22-23

³ Idem, p.21

The epistemological dimensions of pedagogy

“The epistemological status of pedagogy is uncertain for a long time”⁴, because of certain causes from in and out of its research domain (peculiar and general causes).

Peculiar causes (from out of the research domain) specific to all social and human science target high problems about the clarity of the study aim (society, human personality), which becomes both the aim and the topic of research⁵.

Pedagogy, in its historic development, was attracted by the traditions and models of scientific knowledge. The transition from empirical knowledge to scientific, for pedagogy, and its recognition as a science seem to be achieved later on than other sciences. As prove are the epistemological studies which do not place pedagogy in the category of social and human science-sociology, economy, psychology, linguistics, history of religions, literature and art- which “occur in the 19th century, after the other centuries prepared them through the development of the historical method”⁶

Franco Gambi defines pedagogy as the theory of those social, cultural and individual processes that cause learning and personal training, current in all cultures and societies. This processes are specialized in their “practices” - moving from an organized plan to one of theoretic reflection. In this movement, together with education-as practice- is organized pedagogy-as a theoretical knowledge, methodologic and normative supported. This specific knowledge self -adjusts, builds around its own principles and purposes, it is elaborated in touch with high levels of theory (be philosophical or scientific, cultural or political ideologic, economic or anthropologic). Further, pedagogic reflection holds a clearer leading role after the same educative practices, either criticizing them in their processes and aims, or refocusing them towards a greater plan of theoretic knowledge and rational rigor.⁷

Beyond of its applicability, pedagogy states a s theoretic science. The question is – “What kind of knowledge does the scientific, technic, pedagogy represent or less from all of these?”...Franco Gambi answers with explicitly terms – “Of course it is a knowledge to be applied, but it cannot be solved through it because it is (first of all) knowledge”⁸.

Subscribing to this point of view of the Italian educator. Pedagogy is a science; a science for applicability, for realization and solving the practical problems of education.

⁴ Cristea, S., (2010) *Fundamentele pedagogiei, Polirom: Iași, p.17*

⁵ Idem

⁶ Barreau, H., (1992) *L'Epistémologie*, Presses Universitaires de France: Paris, p.18

⁷ Cambi F., Colicchi E., Muzi M., Spadafora G., (2001) *Pedagogia generale. Identità, problemi e modelli*, La Nuova Italia: Firenze, p.5

⁸ Cambi, F., (1993) *Discorso, metateoria e differenza. Il mio itinerario nella ricerca pedagogica*, în Serpe, B., Trebisacce, G., *La mia pedagogia*, Jonia: Cosenza p.181

Even from his university years, pedagogical knowledge means to F. Gambi a knowledge “first of all theoretic and on this it is played the identity and the autonomy of it”.⁹

Over the years, pedagogy was presented either as art or religion, philosophy or science or as integrated part of them. In the second half of the 20th century, pedagogy claims the structure of an individual science within the humanities, next to philosophy and sociology. To do this, it has to incorporate and overcome the level of intuitive knowledge, have a specific vocabulary and use scientific methods of research.

This topics reach, says Mauro Laeng, what is called “pedagogic epistemology”, the judgment on science. All subjects, at a certain point, start to wonder over their aim and research methods trying to separate their area from the one of their neighbor sciences. Pedagogy cannot be the exception.

From its beginning, pedagogy has known a long empiric phase (empiric pedagogy), based on a repetitive and cumulative experience. However, “it was not filed from the beginning with rules but rather transmitted through collective skills or customs”¹⁰

The empiric pedagogy and learning art had to deal with the critic philosophic reflection which was in relation with the religious approach. This reflection, based on the rational approach over men, life and world, is situated at the base of rational research as a science which “investigates the facts exhibited, it confronts them, it puts them in hypotheses and submits them to tests”.¹¹

General pedagogy captures the most problematic aspect of education and training which managed to keep alive a certain interest for the fundamental and special problems, considered to belong to theoretic reflection. As general science of education, pedagogy is specially structured to be able to answer either to the accomplishment of the educational fact or to the demands of clearing and elaboration of the pedagogic reflection over the educational act.

Defining pedagogy is a difficult process because it is necessary that the particularities of the education domain be individualized, emphasizing the epistemological status of pedagogy as a human science. The published literature gives lots of definitions for pedagogy. We instance some of them from the Italian pedagogic literature. According to them pedagogy is:

- “socio-human science specialized in the study of education, based on a methodology a specific normative”¹²
- “art and science of education”¹³

⁹ Idem

¹⁰ Laeng, M., (1987) *Nuovi lineamenti di pedagogia*, La Scuola: Brescia, p. 232

¹¹ Idem, p.233

¹² Cristea, S., (2010) *Fundamentele pedagogiei, Polirom: Iași*, p.24

¹³ Bonomi, E., (1968), *Dizionario psico-pedagogico*, Ceschina: Milano, p. 402

The epistemological dimensions of pedagogy

- “coherent scientific discourse, ideatic and thematic organized, about the educational phenomena”¹⁴
- “art or profession which targets the educational/training activity systematically organized”¹⁵
- “general science of training and educating human”¹⁶
- “education theory which has a double meaning, sometimes ambiguous, of theory and practice at the same time”¹⁷
- “systematization of principles and norms that lead to the educational action”¹⁸
- “science which has as study aim education, explained and interpreted through a specific methodology, structured and governed through a specific normative”¹⁹
- “systematic study of education”²⁰
- “is a science, an organic system of knowledge resulted from the conceptional-critic developments over the training and education of human”²¹
- “reflection-critic knowledge”²²
- “reflection form over the tangible educative experience”²³.

However, the most common in Italian pedagogic literature and in published literature states that “pedagogy is a science and an education art”. This short definition is almost unanimously accepted. The conflict is in defining the meaning of the terms: science, art and education.

The emancipation moment of pedagogy from philosophy and the positioning it in the positivism era mark the phase of pedagogy beginning as a science. It is a moment when pedagogy was already compared with other socio-human sciences, as psychology, sociology, anthropology but also with a science that studies the human resource, biology.

¹⁴ Cucuș, C., (2014) *Pedagogie*. Ed. a III-a. Editura Polirom: Iași

¹⁵ ***(1959) *Foundation in education, Dictionary of Education*, McGraw-Hill Book Company: New York, Toronto, Londra, p.387

¹⁶ Gennari, M., (2006) *Trattato di pedagogia generale*, Bompiani: Milano, p. 23

¹⁷ Volpicelli, L., Calandra, V., (1978) *Lessico delle scienze dell'educazione*, Dr. Francesco Vallardi: Milano, p.807

¹⁸ Peretti, M. (1965) *Breve corso di pedagogia*, La Scuola: Brescia, p.41-42

¹⁹ Noveanu, E. (coord) (2008) *Științele educației. Dicționar enciclopedic*, Editura Sigma: București, volumul II, p.253

²⁰ Laeng, M., (1990) *Lessico pedagogico*, La Scuola: Brescia, terza edizione, p.249

²¹ Gennari, M., Kaiser, A., (2000) *Prolegomeni alla Pedagogia Generale*, Bompiani: Milano, p.27

²² Xodo Cegolon, C., (2001) *Corso di pedagogia generale*, CLEUP: Padova, p.167

²³ Bertolini P., (1996) *Dizionario di pedagogia e scienze dell'educazione*, Zanichelli: Bologna, p. 414

3. Education - pedagogy's aim of study

Any subjects need its aim of study and reflection, through which states its identity and function. At the same time, it is required the need to deepen the nature, particularities, components, epistemological status, language, verification criteria of the subject. "Each scientific discourse preliminary states a fundamental issue: rigorously setting, under the epistemological profile, a discourse aim"²⁴. This is also valid for the pedagogic knowledge, being in its identity search, its own autonomy.

"A content, an issue domain, a «something», still is not a subject. The same reality can be the «aim» for more sciences, more subject, that see it from different points of view."²⁵ The same idea can be found at A. Agazzi whom states that an aim can be seen from different points of view. The sciences match with "«points of view» to which reality relates or a part of it."²⁶

Often, education was defined as a direct activity through which the social values and the functional behaviors, that assure the surviving of the topic and belonging group, are accomplished. It has as synonym compliance, respectively with the acceptance of the social, cultural, linguistic, anthropologic, psychologic structures. An acceptance of the postmodern man education in this terms it is far from being confirmed as a resource, as a value generator factor, as a challenge for postmodern period.

The challenge is found in the theories and the formative experiences, that have the supporting role of man and the path of world citizenship and which look with great sensitivity towards all those daily needs. Pedagogy needs to find other training model in a globalized world.

The topic of pedagogy is "to find basics for an education theory, highlighting the mechanisms of the educational event seen as a systematic and non-mechanic report which it manifests historically becoming impregnated with precise politic and economic content"²⁷.

The interest problem of pedagogy is as old as human: education problem. As an education science, pedagogy systematically researches and examines the possibilities which could permit, in a determined socio-cultural environment, the formation of all human being dimensions. In this regard, in

²⁴ Colonna, S., (2002) *Introduzione alla pedagogia*, Adriatica Editrice: Lecce, p.13

²⁵ Serafini, G., (1989) *Pedagogia in prospettiva*, Bulzoni: Roma, p.19

²⁶ Agazzi, A., (1985) *Pedagogia, didattica, preparazione dell'insegnante*, Brescia: La Scuola, p.27

²⁷ Genovesi, G., (1995) *Pedagogia e scienze dell'educazione. Alcune riflessioni*, in Borrelli, M., *La pedagogia italiana contemporanea*, vol. II, Pellegrini: Cosenza, p.123

The epistemological dimensions of pedagogy

terms of dynamic, shows the process through which the human being can actively achieve and integrate into its socio-cultural environment²⁸.

The study aim of pedagogy is education. It is a process and a product that relates to the culture and its achieve in a life span.²⁹

The attempt to explain education is quite difficult because of so many formative pedagogic models that history recorded: education as a technic teaching, as uptake of “cultural models”, a simple development, as a cultural, hereditary, values rendering from a generation to another. For Mario Gennari “education first of all evokes human as a historic, moral, natural and spiritual, politic and social persona”³⁰.

Education has certain particularities: includes in its area an own process, it refers to a report, it regards the desired outcome, it integrates in a micro or macro system.³¹

Giuseppe Zago³² takes the observation of Gaston Mialaret whom outlines four main meanings of the education concept:

- a) Education as an institution,
 - b) Education as an action,
 - c) Education as a content,
 - d) Education as a result.
- a) **Education as an institution** - it refers to a unit of structures that have as main purpose the development of pupils. The education system depends on the historic-social place and context in which it develops; the systems from different countries and different historic era can be compare.
 - b) **Education as an action** – is the most used meaning after 1950. It bears the imprint of E. Durkheim, whom in 1911 states that education is the action taken by the adult generations over those who are not yet prepared for social life.
 - c) **Education as a content** – it corresponds with what we name in general and lastly curriculum. The approach has some boundaries. When we talk about scientific and artistic knowledge, the two general contents do not stop only to curriculum, known as a complex of acquired knowledge but a bigger meaning, with effects on medium and long term, in a formal but also non-formal plan.
 - d) **Education as a result** - it underlines the effects of the other types of education. Through education it is facilitated the adaptation of the contemporary man to the new situations and problems with which he

²⁸ Giugni, G., (1998) *Introduzione allo studio delle scienze pedagogiche*, SEI: Torino, p.9-12

²⁹ Macchietti, S.S., (1998) *Apunti per una pedagogia della persona*, Bulzoni: Roma, p.51

³⁰ Gennari, M., (2006) *Trattato di pedagogia generale*, Bompiani: Milano, p.49

³¹ Idem, p.52-53

³² Caldin, R., Zago, G., (2000) *Pedagogia generale. Teorie, sistemi e prassi dell'azione educativa intenzionale*, Erickson: Trento, p.81

has to deal, which demands to concentrate over the essential content longer valid and in multiple contexts.

Ioan Cerghit³³ states the possible understanding perspective of education:

1. **Education as a process** – it refers to the transformation of human in good and on long term, in the prospect of explicit formulate finalities;
2. **Education as a leading action** - leading the individual towards the stage of a formed, autonomous and responsible person;
3. **Education as a social action**- planned activity conducted on the basis of a social project, which requires a personality model;
4. **Education as an inter-human relation**- assumes a joint and conscious effort between two actors: the educator and the educated;
5. **Education as a whole of influences**- willful actions or unintended, explicit or implicit, systematic or unorganized, which somehow contributes in the making of man as a man.

Mauro Laeng³⁴ considers that the generic naming of education is imposingly given to a complex of activities through which the ones that had already got to a certain maturity try to lead the ones that are still immature. In this large meaning, it can be found the training, learning, instruction, teaching, counselling, school professional guidance, mainly all the activities of which aim match, more or less, the vast domain of educational process.

Education is marked, a social level, by a whole of institutions that manage the educational processes. They belong to the educative practices which over time were targeted towards learning, training, depending on the society's demands.

It is important to underline the fact that education always occurs here and now. It depends on the place and time context, the subjective factors that enter the game, the resources that engages. Education means evolution, change, improvement, development. This implies motives, assessments, options and decisions, which come in conflict with own believes of “education actors” situated at a micro and macrosocial level.

The implication of pedagogic, as a necessary specific formative process in the education of man, needs to be orientated towards certain parts that allow the awareness of specific values. According to this, the pedagogical approach of reality assumes our understanding of the fact that in any context³⁵:

- a) The conformism, addiction, docility are hypocrisies harmful for education;

³³ Cerghit, I, Vlăsceanu, L. (coord.) (1988), *Curs de pedagogie*, Tipografia Universității din București: București, pp.13-14

³⁴ Laeng, M., (1987) *Nuovi lineamenti di pedagogia*, La Scuola: Brescia, p.7

³⁵ Gennari, M., *Trattato di pedagogia generale*, Milano, Bompiani, 2006, p.52

The epistemological dimensions of pedagogy

- b) Anti-conformism, eccentricity and rebellion are dangerous illusions for emancipation.
- c) The possibility of education remains one of the fundamental resources of human;
- d) There isn't an ideal or universal educational report;
- e) Each person has infinite and undefined possibility to learn;
- f) The hegemony of each educational model is rejected in the name of liberty;
- g) Any educational ideology is rejected in the name of humanity;
- h) Education that becomes routine and habit leads to the alienation of the subject and isolating it from the others.

Each historic period has its own coordinates, that can be seen in the way of thinking and making learning, in the instruments of pedagogy used to solve the complexity and the dynamic of educational issue and to suggest suitable intervention models.

Pedagogy knows how to manage the processes and events liked to a differential humanity. As an education science, pedagogy analyzes and interprets the phenomena and the events that relate to a variety of subjects, to many formative needs and a plurality of visions over the world.³⁶

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