ORIGINAL ARTICLE

GODOY, Juliano Bernardino de [1], ASSIS, Rogério de [2]


Contents

- SUMMARY
- 1. INTRODUCTION
- 2. BIOGRAPHY
- 3. WORKS
- 4. HISTORICAL-CRITICAL PEDAGOGY
- FINAL CONSIDERATIONS
- REFERENCES
- APPENDIX – FOOTNOTE REFERENCE

SUMMARY

It treats the present article of the life and work of the Brazilian educator Dermeval Saviani, still alive and born in the interior of São Paulo, Brazil. From a humble family, Dermeval stood out with his studies, both in Brazil and abroad, being known and revered by educators for his contribution and critical thinking. Would the Brazilian philosopher and educator Dermeval Saviani have something to say to today’s students and educators, or, upon meeting him, is there only an educational model that is part of the past? In order to achieve the proposed objective, his biography, works and his historical-critical pedagogy were studied, thus reaching the final considerations. We tried to show, in a succinct way, that much more than knowing the thought of this educator, is to recognize that such thought and criticism is in no way part of the educational cultural collection of the past, but, quite the contrary, such thought is very much alive, just like the thinker himself and, therefore, sheds light on the
Brazilian educational reality of the present day as an opinion-former.

Keywords: Dermeval Saviani, Brazilian philosophy, education.

1. INTRODUCTION

To know the life and work of Dermeval Saviani is to know the life and work of a simple man and the field who, unlike his only literate parents, stood out with his studies, even studying in the best Brazilian universities and abroad. Much more than that, it is to know the life and work of someone who stood out leaving to all his readers, especially educators, a legacy of a very current thought about the reality of Brazilian education. This article is divided into the following sections: biography, works, historical-critical pedagogy, final considerations and references. Of course, the whole article has its importance, but it is believed that the most relevant part is critical historical pedagogy.

Faced with the immense educational challenges that Brazil has been through, Saviani’s thinking is now becoming present and still dangerous, challenging. Dangerous and challenging for the simple fact of being critical. Criticism is that the reader knows, although part of the educational discourse, has not always been well seen, neither in the past nor in the present. It will tell us Saviani that when one lives times of curvature of the stick and here one can think of the numerous current and traditional educational movements or traditionalists, such as school without party, it is no use simply leaving the stick quiet so that it straightens, much more than that, it is necessary to cure it to the other side, that is, transform the reality in which it is immersed, think about education in a different way.

2. BIOGRAPHY

Dermeval is seventy-five years old. He was born on a farm in Santo Antônio da Posse, on December 25, 1943, in the district of Mogi Mirim, in the interior of São Paulo. However, it was registered on February 3, 1944. Son of Brazilian rural workers and grandson of Italian immigrants. In 1948, the family of eight children moved to the capital of São Paulo, becoming workers working in the city’s factories. Dermeval’s parents did not have the practice of schooling. They were still literate. But he was an exception. Saviani had the opportunity to
Dermeval Saviani: Sketch by a critical Brazilian educator

study in seminars, on a full-time basis. According to Batista and Lima (2012, p. 2), scholars of Saviani, “he had the opportunity to study in seminars, where he studied until the beginning of his university education, acquiring a solid formation and commitment to the subordinates.

In 1951 and 1954, Dermeval attended primary school in a school group, located in a wooden shed on the outskirts of São Paulo. In 1954, he began his old course of junior soon in São Paulo. But later that year, he moved with his family to Cuiabá, where he continued his studies, attending the old gymnasium at the Nossa Senhora da Conceição Seminary from 1956 to 1959. In 1960, he took a high school course, now high school, in Campo Grande, a prosperous city in southern Mato Grosso, now the capital of Mato Grosso do Sul. In 1962, he began his philosophical studies at the Major Seminary of Aparecida do Norte, in São Paulo. In 1963, he left the seminary, after much reflection, seeking a definition of life with the most experienced priests, convinced that his choice of life and work should go another way.

In 1964 he returns to São Paulo. Being there, he transferred his philosophy course to PUC São Paulo, where he completed it in 1966. To provide for his financial needs and help the family, Dermeval Saviani went to work at Banco Bandeirantes do Comércio until December 1975. At the same time, he tendered for the Bank of the State of São Paulo being approved, which allowed him to cover the costs of study, transportation, food and even help the family.

In 1967, already as a bachelor’s degree and graduated in Philosophy, he served as professor of the Pedagogy Course at PUC-SP and taught Philosophy and History of Art at a State College, and History and Philosophy of Education at the Normal School of the College of Sion. In 1968 he left banking to devote himself entirely to teaching. He completed his Doctorate in Human Sciences: Philosophy of Education, at the Faculty of Philosophy, Science and Letters of São Bento, PUC-SP. In that same institution he helped to create the Master’s Program in Philosophy of Education. In Batista and Lima (2012, p. 5) it reads:

Saviani, as a student at PUC-SP, participated in the student struggle, openly standing in defense of socialism, studying and defending Marxist ideas. His parents and siblings were workers, actively participating in the working-class struggle, while Saviani participated in student struggles. This militancy contributed to the strengthening of convictions about the need for transformation of society.
At PUC-SP, Saviani participated in student militancy until the extinction of student representation bodies in November 1964, already in the context of the Military Civil Coup. It is important to point out that Saviani’s militancy has not harmed his dedication to studies and work in undergraduate disciplines. Even in the preparation of the doctorate, without scholarship or removal, his attention to studies and research did not allow him to relax his preparation to classes, correction of students’ work, tests, and at the same time, the readings and writings of the thesis, completed in 1977. In his doctoral thesis entitled: “Brazilian Education: structure and system”, Saviani expresses the concern for a quality education, accessible to all individuals and guaranteed from a National Education System.

Retroactive a little in the trajectory of Saviani, in July 1966, when he was still a fourth year student of Philosophy, Professor Joel Martins took over the chair of Philosophy of Education for the Pedagogy course at PUC-SP and indicated Saviani as a monitor, thus starting his career as a teacher. After defending his doctoral thesis, he also began working at PUC-SP as a PhD professor in Education. He also worked at the Federal University of São Carlos, in the Graduate Program. He also improved his studies abroad: France, Italy and Germany. In 1980 he joined UNICAMP where he remains to this day as a collaborating professor. It is included in his curriculum that he participated in the foundation of ANDES, the National Association of Education and was a founding partner of ANPED, the National Association of Education and Research in Education and CEDES – Center for the Study of Education and Society.

In 1986, he completed free teaching in the area of History of Education, at the Faculty of Education of UNICAMP. In full exercise of his profession Saviani did not rest. Also in 1986 he created the Study and Research Group on History and Society and Education in Brazil. Between 1989 and 1992 he coordinated the Graduate Program of UNICAMP. Considered a philosopher of Education and/or Pedagogue of “dialectical pedagogy” which he called “Historical-Critical Pedagogy (MARSIGLIA; CURY, 2017). Dermeval married in 1984 and in 1988 had Benjamin, to which he devoted a paternal affection as intense as his dedication to teaching and scientific-pedagogical production. In the 25th anniversary of the launch of the book “School and Democracy”, Saviani wrote the following dedication: “To Benjamin, hoping that the children of his generation will be able to study in a truly democratic school.”

Dermeval was convinced about the need to develop a pedagogical proposal that would face conservative pedagogies. A kind of “left-wing” pedagogy, confronting the reactionary
thinking of current education. The first attempt to systematize his pedagogical conception was expressed in an article entitled “Democratic School beyond the Curvature of the Stick”, published in 1982 in the ANDE Magazine No. 3. In 1983 the Book School and Democracy was launched and this text was added to it. From then on, a new non-reproductive critical pedagogy began to take shape, the “Historical Critical” pedagogy, as Saviani himself called it (2008, p. 140-141).

[...] the expression Historical-Critical translated in a pertinent way what was being thought. So the expression “historical-critical, in a way, was opposed to critical-reproductive. It is critical like this, but unlike it is not reproductive, but rooted in history. That’s how the expression came about. From 1964 I have been easing this nomenclature for the pedagogical current that I have been trying to develop.

Aware of the importance of a broad understanding of the History of Education, Saviani began to elaborate a study that brought together both the contribution of scholars and his own. It offers students, teachers and researchers a resource that would allow them to approach education as a whole, from the origins to our day. Producing from there the book “History of Pedagogical Ideas in Brazil[3]”. The emergence of this historical-critical pedagogy was born in a context of strong military repression, marked by threats, persecutions, prisons, torture and military pressure, murders of social, political, religious and intellectual leaders. It was in the social struggle against military repression and its educational aspects, with labor strikes, in trade unions and churches that Saviani forged his contribution to Brazilian education, developing a theory of education focused on popular working society and the intellectual class.

3. WORKS

Dermeval Saviani does not keep only for the academy or for his knowledge what he produced or acquired and perfected from others. He is prodigal in socializing knowledge and making it public, which he raised for his studies, readings, reflections, congresses, group work, etc. The mechanism of dissemination of knowledge employed by him took shape from the publication in books, magazines, lectures, articles, seminars, debates and others. Among the most robust published books dedicated to education and pedagogy stand out:
• “School and Democracy.” In it he exposes the attempt to systematize his pedagogical conception and systematized knowledge as an instrument of understanding reality;

• In the same pedagogical line he published: “History of Pedagogical Ideas in Brazil”. Next “Historical-Critical Pedagogy, First Approach” and, also in 2009, “Education: From Common Sense to Philosophical Consciousness”. Finally, in 1984, he published “Ensino Público e Um Falas Sobre Universidade”.

4. HISTORICAL-CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

The Critical Historical Pedagogy, formulated by Dermeval Saviani, emerges in Brazil as a response to the need for a theory of education that would allow a critical analysis of education from the concrete society in which we live. It is an important instrument to provoke the process of human emancipation, especially of the popular layers. It even more opportunistizes a critical view of capitalist society. Critical Historical Pedagogy aligns itself with a transformative pedagogical conception that puts it on the opposite side to postmodernist tendencies that lead to the devaluation of systematized human knowledge. In School and Democracy (2009), Saviani defends systematized knowledge as an instrument for understanding reality. With this knowledge, the subaltern classes find conditions for defending their interests.

The devaluation of the contents, believing in the students’ ability to choose the research methods, emptied the school of the systematized knowledge method. This proposal was launched as a criticism of the traditional method, arguing that it was a scientific method, dogmatic, medieval, as Saviani notes (2009, p. 42): “traditional teaching proposed to transmit the knowledge obtained by science, therefore, already understood, systematized and incorporated into the cultural collection of humanity”. The historical-critical pedagogy does not defend traditional pedagogy as the best option for the transformation of the social being, however, it warns that the school-noivist methods were filled with arguments attacking a proposal that, in terms of democratic order, kept to its essences in a greater condition to bring the subject to existing knowledge and produced by humanity over time, as auluded Batista and Lima (2012).

Saviani dared, in dark times of history, to present a pedagogical and educational proposal that escaped the school-noivist fad and questioned, at the same time, the conservative
pedagogical theses without capitulating to reprodutivism. In this context, Saviani presents to society a critical theory of education, based on historical-dialectical materialism. Batista and Lima (2012), analyzing Saviani’s work, highlighted some steps to develop critical historical pedagogy, understanding it as a revolutionary education. These steps are found in Saviani (2009, p. 64):

Social practice: the starting point of educational practice, is common to teachers and students. Take into account that there is a difference in understanding of social practice. The teacher’s understanding is synthetic and implies a certain articulation of knowledge and experiences.

Problematization: it is the guideline of the contents that will be worked, identification of the main problems of social practice. As a result, what knowledge is necessary to master.

Instrumentalization: it is about appropriating the theoretical and practical instruments necessary to overcome the problems detected in social practice.

Catharsis: it is a Gramiscian conception of superior elaboration of the structure without superstructure in human coexistence. Acquiring the basic instruments: the time has come for a more elaborate expression of understanding social practice.

Social Practice: point of arrival of the educational practice, far from the social practice from which it was departed, the path taken allowed the teacher to lead the student to the point of problematization and instrumentalization in which he himself is in the approach of the contents. The method becomes practical.

It is understood that the method becomes, then, a practice that must sustain the transformation of the teacher himself while the content, in turn, must be incorporated into the social practice of the student, far from common sense, fed by philosophical consciousness. In the saying of Saviani (2009, p. 65):

At this point, at the same time that the students ascend to the synthetic level in which, by assuming, it is already known that the teacher was at the starting point, reduces the precariousness of the synthesis of the teacher, whose understanding
is more and more organic. This elaboration at the level of the teacher is essential to understand the specificity of the pedagogical relationship. Hence, the cathartic moment can be considered the culmination of the educational process, since there is carried out, through the mediation of the analysis carried out in the teaching process, the transition from syncresis to synthesis.

Around there, Saviani reveals himself as a philosophical researcher linked to Education working a set that is completed in social thought, with social struggles and always in defense of a just and egalitarian society. Since 1984, Dermeval Saviani has been developing a new modality of Pedagogy: the “Historical-Critical Pedagogy”. Not satisfied with non-critical pedagogies, as tradition comes with proposals for a new pedagogy, represented by “escolanovismo”, technical pedagogy and critical-reproductive theories, Saviani creates a more complete, more current, more comprehensive pedagogy, totaling what he calls “Historical-Critical Pedagogy”. In his work “School and Democracy” is an introduction to this pedagogy. In this book, Saviani already outlines some guiding lines of his new pedagogical proposal.

Already in the first chapter presents a synthesis of the main theories of education, covering non-critical theories (traditional pedagogy, new pedagogy and technical pedagogy) and reproductive critical theories (school theory as symbolic violence, school theory as an ideological apparatus of the State and dualistic school theory. These theories have already been represented as something on the way to overcoming and the need for a proposal for a critical theory of education that will be the pedagogy that will be the pedagogy that will be voted here. In a second chapter of the work School and Democracy, Saviani takes back from Lenin the so-called “Theory of Curvature of the Stick”. When criticized for taking radical extremist positions, he adopts Lenin’s own explanation of this theory: “when the stick is crooked, it gets curved on one side and if you want to straighten it out, don’t just put it in the right position. It must be washed to the opposite side” (SAVIANI, 2009, pp. 64-65).

This thesis was put by Lenin when criticized for taking extremist and radical positions. Dermeval applies to himself this conflicting experience when presenting his version on the need for a historical and critical pedagogy. It is opposed to the dilemma between old education and new education, new pedagogy and old pedagogy, and thus positions itself on the revolutionary character of the pedagogy of the essence: and the reactionary character of...
the pedagogy of existence. On the other hand, the pedagogy of the essence also has a revolutionary role, because, in defending the essential equality between men, the elimination of privileges that prevent the realization of a considerable portion of men is privileged. Saviani goes beyond the theory of stick curvature, therefore.

He tries to overthrow the school-looking ideary that has turned into common sense for educators and has become a way of conceiving education. The goal of Dermeval is to try to reverse the dominant trend. Contrary to what was current in the educator’s head, traditionalism, which considers new pedagogy as the bearer of all virtues and no vice, attributing, conversely to traditional pedagogy, all vices and no virtue, Saviani endeavored to demonstrate the reverse. It then makes a synthesized study on three theses. The first (philosophical-historical) thesis covers the revolutionary character of the pedagogy of the essence (pedagogy/traditional) and the reactionary character of the pedagogy of existence (new pedagogy). The second thesis (pedagogical-methodological) provides for the traditional method of scientific character.

The third (specifically political) thesis aims to reflect on the theme of democracy within the school, especially the construction of a democratic order, it is assumed that democracy must be given life, as it tends to be silenced (SAVIANI, 2004). Thus the expression theory of curvature of the stick is explained: to straighten a stick that is crooked, it is not enough to place it in the correct position, but it is necessary to bend it on the opposite side. This also occurs in the ideological debate: it is not enough to teach the correct conception so that deviations are corrected, it is necessary to shake certainties, deauthorize common sense. Revolutionary and critical pedagogy, far from understanding education as the main determinant of social transformations, recognizes that it is a secondary element in the pedagogy of essence and existentialism. Education, therefore, does not transform directly and immediately, but indirectly, that is, acting on the subjects of practice. As Vásquez says (1968, pp. 206-207):

> The theory itself does not transform the world. It can contribute to its transformation, but for this it has to come out of itself, first of all it has to be assimilated by those who will cause, with its actual effective acts, such transformation. Between theory and transformative practical activity, there is always a work of education of consciousness.
Hence it is easy to identify the understanding of education as a mediator within social practice. And if education is mediation, this means that it is not justified by itself, but has its reason for being in the effects that extend beyond it and that persist even after the cessation of pedagogical action, as Saviani concludes. He is an eternal dissatisfied with the reflections and findings on the ways of evolution of the educational concept and practice. After exploring the extent of the actions of the bases of non-critical pedagogies (traditional pedagogy, new pedagogy and technicist pedagogy); critical-reproductive theories (school theory as symbolic violence); from school theory as an ideological apparatus of state and dialectical theory, Saviani tried to overcome such theories and enunciated about the critical theory of education or “pedagogy-historical-criticism”.

Understanding the educational issue from historical development was its goal. From 1978 on, the educational issue was understood from social conditioning. It can be seen that education is influenced by society, which, in turn, is influenced by education. There is a reciprocal relationship between education and society. In a light: education interferes in society and can contribute to its own transformation. This passage from the critical to historical vision to a critical-dialectical view, therefore historical-critical, is what Saviani translates as historical-critical pedagogy.

It defends, then, from this new perspective related to education, that the human being is a peculiar natural being, distinct from other natural beings. While these survive, adapting to the nature that provides their conditions of existence, man needs to adapt nature to himself, taking away from it what is necessary for his existence. Hence comes the specificity of this animal, called man. To survive, he must be in communion with nature, transforming it. The human being is made acting on nature through work. And transforming nature, he transforms himself.

What is called historical development is the process through which the human being produces his existence in time. Acting on nature, that is, working, man builds the historical world. You’re building the human world! And education has its origin in this process (SAVIANI, 2011, p. 81).

The historical-critical pedagogy had its roots in the movement of May 1968, the so-called cultural revolution of young people, hatched mainly in France, but which spread throughout
several countries, including Brazil. This movement intended to carry out the social revolution by the cultural revolution. Changing the foundations of society by the educational revolution, covering not only the school, but the entire cultural environment, was one of the objectives. This critical view, although still reproductive, played an important role, because it somehow drove criticism of the authoritarian regime and the authoritarian pedagogy prevailing in that regime. In a way, as Saviani notes, these theories fueled the reflections and analyses of those who, in our country, stood against official and dominant pedagogy.

However, this critical pedagogy that is still embryonic is capable of criticising the existing one, of explaining the mechanisms of the existing one, but has no presupposition of practical intervention. It merely shows that it is so and cannot be otherwise, but the problem is that the central issue was precisely how to act critically in the pedagogical field, such as in the act of acting and in the development of a practice of a critical character. In this context, the formulation of a proposal that surpassed this critical-reproductive view was proposed, which culminated in the emergence of pedagogy addressed here. The historical-critical pedagogy implies the social determinants of education, the understanding of the degree to which the contradictions of society mark education and positioning in the face of such contradictions.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In summary, we try to trace the history of Dermeval Saviani, an educator who provoked in his time great reflection on the current educational model and that still provokes a new thought for Brazilian education, after all, there are days of great curvature of the stick and it manifests itself through the educational models that, little by little, are being imposed, such as School Without Party, among others. As an educator and critic by vocation, expressed as a teacher, animator and educational writer totally devoted to education, consistent with the needs of his time and future times, the author addressed in an updated and liberating way lucidity with regard to critical education.

This is Dermeval Saviani, someone who, from his legacy, leaves all educators and educators a strong provocation and, at the same time, a strong sense of restlessness in the face of the traditional educational models prevailing in our country, which motivates the confrontation and not passive acceptance of these methods. Yes, it is necessary to reflect and, when
reflecting, to become aware of the system in which the educator (a) is. And, when becoming aware, one must seek change, which takes place from the historical-critical pedagogical model. Finally, we hope that this article has achieved its goal, being light in the midst of darkness, and provoking reflection in the midst of accommodation and confusion.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX – FOOTNOTE REFERENCE

3. ‘History of Pedagogical Ideas is a compendium on the history of education. Dermeval Saviani divides the work into four parts – 1. Pedagogical ideas in Brazil between 1549 and 1759 – monopoly of the religious aspect of traditional pedagogy; 2. 1759 to 1932 – coexistence between the religious and lay aspects of traditional pedagogy; 3. 1932 to 1969 – predominance of new pedagogy; and 4. 1969 to 2001 – configuration of the concept of
productivist pedagogy.

[1] PhD student in Education at the University Of Piracicaba (UNIMEP). Master in Education from the Metodist University of Piracicaba (UNIMEP) 2019; Lines of Research, History and Philosophy of Education. Graduated in History from UNIESP 2012. Bachelor’s degree in Philosophy from the Claretian University Center 2014/2019 (CLARETIANO). Bachelor of Theology from the Claretian University Center (CLARETIANO) 2015. Graduated in Pedagogy from the University Center of Araras (UNAR) 2016. Graduated in Sociology from the University Center of Araras (UNAR) 2018. Graduated in Geography from the University Center of Araras (UNAR) 2020.

[2] Master’s degree in Education from Universidade Nove de Julho (UNINOVE), 2019; Research line: Education, Philosophy and Human Formation (LIPEFH), member of the Research and Study Group in Philosophy of Education – (GRUPEFE) and Research and Study Of Complexity Group (GRUPEC), under the coordination of Profs. Dr. Antônio Joaquim Severino and Dra. Cleide Rita Silvério de Almeida (UNINOVE). Lato Sensu Post-Graduation in Teacher Training for Higher Education by the University Center Asunción (UNIFAI) 2015; Postgraduate in Reformed Theology by the Evangelical Literary Mission (CFL) 2019; Bachelor’s degree in Theology from the Pontifical Faculty of Theology Of Our Lady of the Assumption – Assumption University Center (UNIFAI) 2007; Bachelor’s degree in Theology from the Anglican Institute of Theological Studies (IAET) 2005.
