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Doing Democracy

Striving for Political Literacy
and Social Justice

Edited by Darren E. Lund and Paul R. Carr

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CHAPTER

5

CAN REBELLIOUSNESS BEAR DEMOCRACY?

Reinaldo Matias Fleuri

Introduction

The struggle against authoritarianism to build democratic processes in the school environment has been one of the main goals of my pedagogic practice (Fleuri, 2001). However, on many occasions, I have realized that the attempts to promote the active participation of students in the planning, execution, and evaluation of the educational work within the school context has resulted in reconfigured schemas of subjugation and exclusion strategies among students. From 1990 on, I researched how and why such subjection mechanisms are constituted. It was necessary to deconstruct these mechanisms so as to support democratization initiatives at the pedagogical level. I found in Michel Foucault the necessary theoretical underpinning to understand how the disciplinary power at school works, and this allowed me to envision the possibilities for resistance that are sometimes articulated in acts of individual or collective rebelliousness. In particular, I tried to understand how some of the transgression practices perpetrated by students at school are traditionally transformed into delinquency, and this becomes the focus of the authorities to be banned or eliminated. On the other hand, I also intended to understand how these initiatives, paradoxically identified as "indiscipline," can be rearticulated as factors for emancipation in terms of democracy at and within school.

I understood that, for an educator who is able to problematize and engage in dialogue, the rebelliousness of the instigators may be one of the fundamental challenges for the ongoing pedagogical struggle to articulate the personal and collective interests, usually denied by the educational system, in a creative, pleasurable, and meaningful way. In the school ambit, these transgression practices may also reveal their revolutionary potential,

constituting the bases for the educational processes that can overcome the disciplinary knowledge-power relationships, as they are collectively (consolidating reciprocity and solidarity relations) and actively assumed (cultivating initiative and interactions diversity). To empower the dynamic solidarity networks, including the creativity, freedom, and democratic organization cultivated at the school level, it is necessary to disentangle it from the transgression and delinquency that is forced upon it by surveillance and punishment, developing problematized dialogue, and cooperation mechanisms among the participants of the educational process.

This chapter, therefore, concisely adapts Michel Foucault's (1977, 1988) theory of the disciplinary actions of power to indicate how the processes of violence are configured, ambivalently, as delinquency or rebelliousness, and as subjugated consolidation or contestation. This demonstrates the disciplinary devices employed in a unidirectional, monofocal, unidimensional, and monocultural perspective that characterizes interpersonal interactions. It also enunciates the need to understand the complexity and the interculturality of educational relations in order to construct and develop democracy at school. This eventually reveals elements of the pedagogical framework espoused by Paulo Freire (1974) and C el stin Freinet (1973), which point to the overcoming of these disciplinary devices. These writers promote the recognition and potential for a relationship among the different subjects and their respective contexts, favoring the development of infinite and fluid singularities; these ultimately produce the multiple and ambivalent meanings that intertwine with the existence of democratic processes at school.

Disciplinary Relations of Power

Michel Foucault (1977) characterizes "discipline" as methods that permit the accurate control of the body's operations and the constant subjugation of its activities. However, they are not repressive methods because rather than reducing the strength and impairing individual capacity, discipline facilitates one's energy and enhances one's abilities, turning them into useful and productive skills. The discipline trains the individuals, articulating two characteristics in one's capacities: docility and productivity.

The set of these social control strategies that frame people's bodies configures "disciplinary power." This reconstitutes itself insofar as it distributes the individuals in space, establishes mechanisms of activity control, programs the evolutionary processes, and articulates collectively individual activities. To achieve this, it uses coercive resources such as surveillance, punishment, and examinations.

Discipline distributes individuals in this space. The delimitation and organization of the spaces within the institution allow for the control of the location and movement of individuals. The disciplinary space is "analytical" because it is subdivided into compartments, with predefined functions. This allows the "analysis" and "automatic" control of the activities individuals carry out. The determination of location responds to the need to not only survey but also break dangerous communications and create a space where the individuals' work can be better used and controlled. The subdivision of the space allows two types of control simultaneously. On the one hand, it makes possible the control of each individual's activities. On the other hand, the space ordination permits the control of a group of individuals, establishing a general correlation, which is key among the people who act in the same place simultaneously.

The space organization in *cells*, places, and ranks assumes a real and, at the same time, ideal dimension. On the one hand, the position of buildings, rooms, and furniture is determined. On the other hand, this architecture determines a hierarchy between people and objects. This was named "tableaux vivants" (see Foucault, 1977, pp. 135–169), in which the table is a knowledge process where it permits the classification and verification of relationships; it is a power mechanism because it allows controlling a group of individuals.

The control of the activities of individuals in a disciplinary institution is also done through time conditioning. With the collective and obligatory rhythm imposed from outside by cultural time conventions, discipline carries out a temporal elaboration of the individual act that aims to make human activity increasingly more efficient. Discipline requires effort from the individual as to embody precise procedures. This does not mean, however, that the disciplinary learning process is repressive or violent. It is not violent

because it respects the objective and natural conditions of the body. Equally, it is not repressive because, on the contrary, it optimizes the individual potential for development. The elaboration of these acts is based on the accurate study of the body, as well as on various tools that are manipulated, so as to establish an optimal correlation between body and object. Its goal is, therefore, to obtain the best result with the least amount amount of waste, thus highlighting the efficiency of discipline.

Such mechanisms, which guarantee the continual shaping of differentiated individuals, constitute the exercise. This is understood as the technique by which one imposes on the body tasks that are both repetitive and different but always graduated (Foucault, 1979, pp. 160–161). The exercise—characteristic of military and religious practices—is assimilated into educational practice through the educational program, which frames the formal schooling experience for the child/student from year to year with activities of increasing complexity (Foucault, 1979, p. 161).

Both in the army and in the factory, collective action results from the cooperation between the elementary forces of the individuals involved. It is a machine in which the individual becomes an element that can move and project onto others. In the same way, this chronological series characterizing education should be adjusted to other people's time so that individual forces can be fully useful and combined to achieve an optimal result.

Thus, discipline is constituted in a set of power mechanisms. Through the precise construction of the physical environment, a table identifying and classifying the individuals is presented. It establishes movements, imposing a mandatory, collective rhythm, codifying a series of individual acts. It also institutes exercises that induce students to a progressive apprenticeship and an everlasting characterization of the individual. Further, it develops tactics that meticulously combine the individual forces so as to improve collective results. Such procedures construct the individual, articulating his/her identity and reality on the collective experience. The control of individuals in an institution is undertaken through disciplinary measures while being constantly observed. This spatial organization should provide the constant vigilance monitoring of the subaltern by their superiors.

Vigilance, however, is not carried out only through the force of the architecture setting. It is concretized through a hierarchical network of relations. The organizational chart at school, for example, resembles a pyramid: principal, supervisor, teachers, and students, with a range of administrative, pedagogical, and maintenance assistants added to the mix. The surveillance system establishes relations of reciprocal control among all individuals who belong to a disciplinary institution. This system of multilateral censorship obliges all to adapt to the norms through the hierarchical application of punishment.

Thus, disciplinary systems function based on a subliminal mechanism that qualifies and represses behaviors that escape the larger systems concerned with major punishment. The punishment purpose in this disciplinary relation is mainly to decrease deviation and perceived unacceptable behavior. Punishment, therefore, is privileged in an exercise-like format. However, the disciplinary sanction works as a double system of reward and punishment. The rewards stimulate the persistent quest to follow established norms, with the fear of punishment reinforcing the behavior of those who have been recalcitrant.

This mechanism qualifies performances between two opposed poles, good and evil. At school, all behaviors are, ultimately, reduced to good or bad grades. These sanctions institute a subtle and graduated game of promotion or failure. The graduation system also rewards students with the possibility to move on to higher degrees and can also punish students by failing them. This produces a performance classification for students, activating processes that are enmeshed in a game of power among individuals, forcing comparisons as well as the exclusion of those who do not adhere to the established norms. In sum, this normalizing process of sanctioning combined with a hierarchical surveillance materializes in one of the key mechanisms of disciplinary and bureaucratic institutions: the exam.

The exam involves a combination of techniques, including hierarchical surveillance and a process of sanctioning in a perceptibly "normal" way. It is a ritual that encourages the qualification, classification, and punishment of individuals. It also configures a relationship of knowledge and power at the same time, *knowledge* because it makes it possible for the evaluators of

exams to know and to classify students and *power* because it demands that subalterns follow prescribed norms. The superiors, thus, control (observe and determine) the subaltern behavior and, at the same time, induce it to adapt to norms through a system of classificatory sanction.

The exam or examination articulates and mobilizes the different constitutive mechanisms of the relations inherent in disciplinary power and knowledge. Through the systematic application of these control mechanisms, it is possible to define the characterization of each student as well as the composition of a classificatory table that establishes a hierarchy of individual performances in each group, in each series, and in each grade of the school unit which, ultimately, subjects everyone automatically to a complete and impersonal control (constitutive of knowledge and power).

Power and Resistance

When we see structural characteristics from centuries ago in contemporary schools, we need to ask ourselves why the school continues to reproduce the same mechanisms from year to year in spite of all the reform efforts. It seems that the results of the vast restructuring processes eventually reinforce the same problems that motivated them, echoing the notion of a vicious circle. Would the supposed failure of the school along with its reforms—as Foucault questions (1977, p. 239) about prisons—not be related to the way that the school functions?

Several studies on education view the problem as one of reproduction in the larger system, constituted by politicoeconomic contexts, particularly the state, even when resistance processes are identified (Althusser, 1970; Giroux, 1983, among others). Foucault (1988) however, considers power as a strategy connected to power correlations, constituted of the unstable and ambivalent interaction of multiple agents that constantly sustain and threaten the general formula of domination (p. 90). The same correlations of power in schools result in processes that shape attitudes of docility and utility as well as creativity and rebelliousness.

How is it, then, that this conflict between discipline and rebelliousness manifests itself in the educational life? School routine seems, paradoxically, to reproduce the power and resistance mechanisms whose logic is

reconstituted insofar as their strategies and manifestations are reconfigured in different contexts. School architecture and routine, under different forms, then embody norms and procedures strewn together in successive attempts to restructure the educational system, even within the context of deep social revolutions. However ambivalently, in the cracks of the walls and in the opportunities that convulse within school routines, real and differentiated relationships emerge and can also take revenge at any time.

The classroom space can be seen as a "class cell" (Fleuri, 1990, p. 2) and is differentially occupied by students according to informal criteria and relationships. The desks placed at the front, in general, are considered more dedicated; at the back, they are viewed as the transgressors. It is an almost spontaneous habit that, although sometimes it becomes a rule, reflects an invisible relationship network, conflicting with the strategies of educational discipline. Brandão (1986, pp. 107–122) indicates that, despite the spatial division and imposition of daily routines, real life in classroom processes are perceived as a conflict between the establishment of norms and the development of individual or collective transgression strategies. The relationships created and recreated through the classroom routine reveals resistance principles and strategies related to the disciplinary mechanisms existing in the educational system.

This relationship network appears clandestinely and continuously, and spreads transgression throughout the institutional rules and disciplinary mechanisms. It trespasses onto the physical-spatial limits and barriers. It establishes collective rhythms and actions invisible to observers. It develops conflicting processes that interfere with the formation of youths' personalities. It articulates agreements and complicity, which are subversive or parallel to the bureaucratic hierarchy. It attempts to escape vigilance or invert it, and challenges punishment mechanisms. Last, it cheats the formal examination protocol.

Clandestinity and Rebelliousness

To Foucault (1988, pp. 91–92), the strategic codification of resistance trespasses social stratification, making individual unity a necessary precursor for revolution. The main challenge for those who dare to promote

autonomous initiatives and movements in the school is facing the control of the normalizing system. How, then, can we liberate the transgression potential in education and articulate it in transformative processes?

The construction of a world of delinquents in the school ambit becomes pertinent to the discussion around the maintenance of disciplinary order. Not only because it segregates and systematically excludes every person that presents divergent behavior, submitting it to a constant vigilance and exemplary punishment, but, above all, because it prevents the appearance of ample and open rebellious forms, deviating initiatives and movements of contestation in controllable forms of transgression. Thus, the maintenance of a disciplinary milieu within the school structure becomes an antidote to the development of democratic processes. The construction of democratic processes implies, therefore, the deconstruction of the disciplinary mechanisms of power.

Deconstructing Subjection

To deconstruct the disciplinary forms of pedagogical relation that facilitate the construction of democratic and cooperative, emancipatory processes, it is necessary to know beforehand why relationships tend to configure subjugation in the disciplinary organizations.

From Foucault's point of view, the *regard* sustains the strength of the power that is exercised on individuals. It is the regard that is carried out as vigilance, a regard that, through the analysis and observation of the object, segments it into individual and comparable parts in a manner that reduces them to a classification table. This analytical classification serves as a perception filter to the "other," one that conditions the attitudes and behaviors of the observer in the sense that he/she exercises domination in relation to the observed subject. At the same time, the classificatory analysis becomes a censorship mechanism in relation to the knowledge. It tends to determine the ambit and type of answers allowed to the other, excluding all forms of reaction that do not coincide with the established parameters. Similarly, concerning the exercise of power, it shapes coercive instruments, which reinforce certain behaviors (by rewarding) and discourage others (by punishing).

These mechanisms converge in the examination regard, a relationship strategy that materializes in multiple institutional situations. Vigilance, sanction, and examinations are resources for good training; that is, to induce the individuals to align themselves to disciplinary relations (individual, classificatory, and hierarchical ones) in which the productive but docile individuals form their identities. The disciplinary regard becomes a relation of unidirectional control permitting it consider the other only as an object. But it does not permit to be observed by the other. The type of regard that establishes the disciplinary relationship excludes not just the reciprocity of the regard. An objectivistic kind of visual perception is privileged so that other possible meanings of it are reduced or excluded, such as in relation to curiosity, reception, seduction, or valorization of the other. In addition, hierarchical vigilance is a control system based mainly on the visual sense. In this way it constitutes a power and knowledge structure unable to embody the diverse dimensions of human interactions, constituted by the language of hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching, favoring a kind of *unisensorial* relation.

The analogy of the disciplinary power-knowledge (hierarchical, formal, and positive) dynamic as a kind of *unidirectional*, *unisensorial*, and *unifocal* regard constitutes itself on an interpretative basis, from which it is possible to foresee the problematic of educational disciplinary relations.

First, such reconfiguration of the educational process implies constituting relations of reciprocity between educated-educator subjects in the knowledge process. Overcoming the unidirectionality of the hierarchical relation, or of the "banking education" concept (Freire, 1974), means honoring the reciprocity of dialogical and cooperative relations among people. At the same time, a person teaches to, and also learns from, another. Similarly, when a subject observes, he/she is also observed by the other, influencing and being influenced in his affective, intellectual, active, interactive, and communicative processes. In the educational process, insofar as people constitute mutual relationships of knowledge and power, they develop the potential for critical and creative interactions, overcoming the subjugation produced by disciplinary mechanisms.

Second, this dialogical reciprocity only constitutes itself insofar as the multiple dimensions of human communication permit their existence. This human interaction is not reduced to visual communication. The interaction is constituted in the communicative dimension when it develops simultaneously the reciprocity of the multiple forms and languages of verbal and bodily communication. In the emotional and mental dimensions, when welcoming and being welcomed, and when understanding and being understood, the reciprocity becomes evident. Since different languages are used in a simultaneous way, the reciprocity in communication between different people becomes a reality. Speaking and listening may seem to be a unidirectional relation between an active and a passive subject, if you consider only the aural-oral communicative dimension. However, taking into consideration the multiples languages and communicational dimensions, we realize that, as they are developed, the different interlocutors participate actively and reciprocally in relation to the sustenance of the communicative context. Concerning the multidimensional and complex, communication is essentially dialogical.

Third, the overcoming of the disciplinary mechanism in the unidirectional regard implies the overthrow of the unifocal character. The teacher, when examining the student's performance, focuses on and values only aspects related to certain preestablished goals, ignoring all other components that form his/her context. The dialogical relation, on the contrary, implores us to consider the constitutive contexts of the multiple meanings developed by people's actions and interactions. Thus, it becomes necessary to develop the capacity for perception and comprehension of the context (Severi & Zanelli, 1990) and their transformative processes. It is from the social, subjective, historical, cultural, and environmental contexts that actions are constituted and acquire meaning; "without a context, words or actions have no meaning" (Bateson, 1986, p. 23). The apprehension of the context requires a logical jump, so as to identify not only the objects but also, simultaneously, their interrelations.

The recognition of the multiplicity of (subjective interpersonal, social, cultural, economic, political, and ecologic) contexts, developed through the interaction of different subjects in the relations and educational processes

implies perceiving and guiding them according to a logic (or epistemological paradigm) capable of understanding the relationship of the unity of the group with the diversity of elements that constitute it. Thus, the transformation of the disciplinary mechanisms of knowledge-power and the institution of educational processes of dialogical character—such as the ones proposed by Paulo Freire and Céléstin Freinet (Fleuri, 1996)—constitutes a second learning field, insofar as it implies the development of educational contexts that permit the articulation between different subjective, social, and cultural contexts. This translates into understanding and building educational processes in which the distinct subjects constitute their identity, elaborating autonomy and critical consciousness. It also means establishing reciprocal (cooperative and conflicting) relationships with other subjects, creating, supporting, and modifying significant contexts that interact dynamically with other contexts which, consequently, create, support, and modify communicative metacontexts.

The educator, in this sense, is properly situated as a subject that is inserted in an educational process, one that interacts with other subjects, dedicating particular attention to the relationships and contexts that are being created. This contributes to the explanation and elaboration of the senses (perception, meaning, and direction) that allows subjects to construct and reconstruct relationships. In these contexts, the curriculum and the didactic programs, more than a logic character, have an ecological function. The educational processes are constituted, thus, simultaneously, within the perspective of singular subjects, as relationships among people mediated by the world, according to Paulo Freire. At the same time, the people who interact dialogically can mediate cultural, social, and environmental relationships.

Perspectives on the Construction of Democracy in the Educational Process

The construction of democratic processes in school implies the development of dialogical educational mechanisms that overcome disciplinary mechanisms. There are two educators who, although contemporary, have evolved in very diverse social contexts, namely France and Brazil. Freinet was mainly concerned with the education of children up to 14 years of age.

Paulo Freire was initially concerned with adults who were not full participants in formal, traditional education. But their proposals present points in common. Both understand that education is not politically impartial; both refuse the manipulation of human beings; both believe that pedagogical action, despite all its conditioning, is fundamental for human liberation and social transformation.

Both also gave voice to people to speak about their lives as a crucial step in the hope of achieving autonomy, and to be able to engage in world transformation. "Free expression" was Freinet's great discovery that provided a voice for the child. Through this experience and the possibility to recount their own lives, children develop their autonomy, their critical judgment, and their responsibility. Yet, for Paulo Freire, to understand the word is to transform the world, as in people consciously construct their own ways through words (Ribeiro, 1977, pp. 74-75). Both Freinet and Freire defend the dialogue and the cooperation among subjects to problematize, understand, and transform reality. Freire focuses primarily on the educational work linked to sociopolitical action and the organization of the adult world. Freinet underscores the transformation of the educational environment by developing active methods, cooperative organization, and communicative channels within the natural and social milieus.

Freinet's and Freire's pedagogical proposals complement each other. Freire, in his initial elaboration of "consciousness," developed the thematic investigation, codification, and decodification method (Freire, 1975, pp. 89-141). However, he has warned against the dangers of the tendency to mystify methods and techniques. Thus, he emphasized the necessity to develop dialogue and the interaction between educators and the educated to problematize and transform the world. Complementarily, Freinet realized that many politically active teachers adopted, in the classroom, domination methods and techniques diametrically opposed to their ideological relation to freedom and solidarity, underscoring the importance of the technical and pedagogical organization. In this sense, the preoccupation with the political clarity of the educational process ends, so emphasized by Freire, joining the techniques proposed by Freinet in relation to the possibilities for mediation within the practice of school education.

The disciplinary organization within the educational space of the school identifies itself to the auditorium-scriptorium of the traditional school. Against this functional school model, Freinet proposes that the school become a workshop that is both communitarian and specialized, thus demanding a new architectural structure. Here, within the natural milieu, the buildings are considered a priority. In the primary school a basic architectural module comprised of a common room is proposed, where children can gather for collective work with internal and external specialized workshops (i.e., vegetable gardens, orchards, play areas, and livestock). In this school space, activities tend to be taken over by student groups, according to their interests and plans, subverting the hierarchical mechanism.

Thus, the theme discussed in the pedagogical context is called a *generator theme* by Freire (1975), since the approach to such a theme generates a discussion of other correlated themes. However, "the generator theme' ... can be only understood in man-world relations" (p. 115). It is important, therefore, that the explanation of the generator theme focuses the dialogue, thought, and action of the people on their specific reality. Thus, the thematic investigation needs to be accomplished by subjects in dialogue through which they can manifest their action-reflection on the situation in which they live.

In Freire's and Freinet's pedagogical proposals we can identify the confrontation with the disciplinary mechanisms in an attempt to promote creative and productive school education processes. However, such proposals are not reduced to a mere set of techniques or *innovative* pedagogical methods to be applied at school. It would be important to *adopt* Freinet's pedagogical proposals to construct or adapt school buildings and spaces, including classrooms and specialized workshops (interior and exterior), or adapting schedules, methods, and programs to become more creative and participatory. In the same way, the problematizing dialogue around the key themes, proposed by Freire, is executed neither in a spontaneous nor in a mechanical way. Since these methodologies can be easily assimilated to a disciplinary structure that places individuals in a hierarchy, then the personal options and the correlation of forces in a certain context favor the hierarchization and subjugation in the institutional relations. In a disciplinary

institution, paradoxically, resistance relations and options develop that point of the other form of organization, instigating structural changes.

The most important component in the work of constructing democracy at school is to creatively engage in human relations, bravely facing the game of power in which students, teachers, and others participate, creating and recreating critically, step by step, the means that support relations aimed at autonomy and reciprocity and, at the same time, neutralizing the ones that produce loneliness and submission.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why might the disciplinary mechanisms of space, time, and collective processes promote a political passivity in people?
2. How does the exam process with its supervision and sanctioning model induce people to be subjugated?
3. What epistemological changes are necessary to overcome the disciplinary mechanisms inherent in knowledge and power in educational practice?
4. How should education and the role of the educator be conceived in a complex perspective?
5. What methodological indicators can we find in and through Paulo Freire and Célésstin Freinet to develop democracy in the pedagogical practice?

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