

# The Human Being in the Context of Educational Construction

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## Abstract

*The article has theoretical reflections derived from the state of the art of the doctoral thesis Group management as a space of appearance. It questions how the human being finds himself in the context of educational constructions. The approaches, on the one hand, show the intention of leading man through an ideal that is predisposed for him; On the other hand, an education that offers him an incitement to emancipate himself from any regulatory framework, in addition to recognizing himself as a man in constant construction who explores new ways of being and appropriating the world, for this I bring to the text the educational contributions of the theory queer. The method addressed is comprehensive interpretation that allows the texts to be approached without judgments or prejudices.*

**Keywords:** Education, Pedagogy, Critical Theory, Queer Theory.

## Introduction

### *By Way of Introduction*

The role that education has played in all political utopias since ancient times shows how natural it seems to begin a new world with those who, by birth and by nature, are new. (Arendt, 1993, p. 40)

The educational question surrounding the education of human beings has been a topic of interest for various authors. Ideas such as those of Kant (2003) show that humans are the only creatures that must be educated, insofar as it is necessary to extinguish their savagery and enable their humanity. It is therefore relevant to mention some considerations on this subject by philosophers such as Locke, Rousseau, and Kant. For example, Locke (1986) wrote the treatise *Some Thoughts on Education* in the 17th century, which arose from the observation and analysis of the education that parents gave their children. In his arguments, he distinguishes that the preparation of the spirit and discipline are necessary to achieve reason. Such preparation is forged from good habits, virtue, rectitude, prudence, and instruction. For Locke (1986), education is achieved through practice. Knowledge, arts, behaviors, and actions must be taught repetitively.

For his part, Rousseau (2014) in his book *Emile* recognizes children as beings with their own characteristics who develop physically, intellectually, and morally. At the time he wrote the text (early 18th century), children were reduced to miniature adults. The author highlights the importance of education provided by the mother and father, as it was customary to separate children from their parents immediately after birth and entrust them to wet nurses who breastfed them and then handed them over to a governess. Rousseau shows that it is essential to bring children into contact with nature. He believes in a sensitive childhood that is close to the natural world, from which learning is derived. In his work, Rousseau shows how to achieve human purity by mitigating the evil accumulated by society and inequality. He proposes to achieve this by perfecting the good forces of the human being, “expressed in their pure feelings, with a view to the formation of a new social state” (Domingo, 2002, p. 50).

Rousseau's work was one of the most influential on Kant, as he understood that human dignity is forged in moral life. Kant himself states that Rousseau opened his eyes and taught him to honor men; hence *Critique of Practical Reason* and his concern for freedom and equality. He also shared the need to cultivate

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virtue in human beings, thus discovering Rousseau's intuition about the autonomy of the will. Both share a concern for the education of human beings and their genesis in the social sphere (Giralt, 1990).

Taking into account these pre-Kantian approaches, it becomes clear how human beings have been at the center of the construction of education. Kant (2003) states in his text *Pedagogy* that: “Man is the only creature that needs to be educated” (p. 29). The question of what it means to be human cannot be separated from the question of education, as Kant (2003) asserts, for humans are the only creatures who need to be told what they are and how to become so. Likewise, these discussions arise from the need for culturalization, for the introduction of the new individual into the community, or, as Kant himself would say, in the process of suppressing animality, or rather, converting animality into humanity.

In the following lines, I address the approaches outlined above. First, I gather reflections ranging from (1) human beings and their need for education in Kantian terms, offering the reader a brief summary of how human beings, from a pedagogical perspective, become universal beings, renouncing their uniqueness and desire for freedom—under the German pedagogical tradition. Next, I offer a quick look at (2) critical theory—from the Frankfurt School—as a possibility for the emancipation of human beings, presenting an educational approach that challenges them to become aware of their place in the world and opens up the possibility of transforming themselves and that world. Finally, I present the reader with an example of (3) a critical theory: queer theory, from the perspective of Britzman (2018), who examines the contributions of this theory to education, to rethink pedagogy and knowledge.

#### *Human Beings and Their Need for Education.*

When human beings arrive in this world, they are born in a state of total helplessness and therefore require a community of less helpless individuals to care for and protect them from nature, the world of things, other human beings, and themselves, until this same community, or the individual themselves, considers that they no longer need such care. For Kant (2003), human beings come into the world uneducated, without any instincts, and incapable of constructing a plan of conduct for themselves. Therefore, that plan of conduct must be constructed by others. In other words, upon arrival, the new individual embraces a world and an educational plan that precedes them, one in which they did not participate in its development due to their newness. This leads me to agree with Kant that “one generation educates the next” (2003, p. 30) and that this education constitutes the implantation in the new individual of natural dispositions that the preceding humanity considers relevant for human development.

Following Kantian reflections, education must be based on discipline, morality, and intellect. First, discipline enables the new individual to distance themselves from animal instinct and approach human destiny. This occurs through upbringing, which transforms the individual's savagery and leads them to eradicate errors of the spirit and vices. Discipline shows the laws that must be obeyed because without such coercion, savagery will continue throughout life (Kant, 2003).

Second, morality involves training the spirit to choose good ends and abhor vices such as evil, power, and envy. Moral education shapes character, which consists of actions based on maxims. At first, maxims are rules and then maxims of humanity. Kant (2003) refers to this as follows: “How can men be made happy if they are not made moral and prudent? The amount of evil will not diminish if this is not done” (p. 39). Thirdly, we must ensure that human beings become intellectual so that they can adapt to the community and be loved through the display of good manners.

Within each community, there are a number of individuals who are responsible for the education of newcomers—according to Kant, this includes discipline and instruction—someone who, through discipline, can control animal impulses, instill the laws of humanity, and restrain the desire for freedom, thereby preventing them from straying from their destiny: humanity. Kant (2003) states that discipline is merely negative, as it erases man's animal nature and therefore has to restrain him so that he does not wildly rush towards danger. “Discipline subjects man to the laws of humanity and begins to make him feel its coercion” (p. 30).

In other words, if after education the individual approaches the perfection of human nature, how do those men and women entrusted with this activity (that of bringing newcomers closer to perfection) define the ideal human being to be followed? How do they determine what knowledge they should have or what they should be taught? Where does the image of how they should be educated and where they should be guided come from? These reflections, along with many others, constitute what we know as an educational theory within each community, which is nothing more than a noble ideal that seeks to achieve the perfection of human nature; it is a dream.

This situation, perhaps due to cause and effect, places the teacher as an education professional. Therefore, it is necessary for the teacher, in concert with the community, to develop a plan that is “universal,” allowing education to become cosmopolitan, even if such a plan is detrimental to individual interests. Under these parameters of the ideal of humanity, education allows the individual to elevate the singular to the universal.

The renunciation of the particular begins with the teacher, who, in his role as an educated adult, is convinced of this ideal of humanity, on which he will set a horizon for his students in the quest to suppress their animal nature and achieve culturalization according to the laws of the community. It is important to mention that in some cases the educational intentions of the community go against its own members in order to favor specific entities or groups of individuals, perpetuating a kind of “domination of man by man,” where through discipline and instruction these practices of favoritism are prolonged, resulting in domination, and from which the teacher is not exempt, nor exonerated, whether through ignorance or submission, given that “[...] education is one of the few opportunities available to members of the dominated classes to imagine their social advancement and mobility, with the implicit commitment not to challenge the given order of things” (Hincapié, 2018, in: <https://alponiente.com/la-falsa-vocacion-de-los-maestros/>).

The entire picture described thus far leads us to question the relationship between education and community—a question that is not new—which becomes evident in the process of human development. Perhaps as a kind of answer, Piñeres (2017) indicates that there is an intimate link between being in a culture and being educated in it, since being educated in it, in a way, means incorporating the culture, a situation that arises due to the condition or formative nature of human beings.

Natorp (2001), in his text *Social Pedagogy*, offers us another answer to this question: “man becomes man through the human community” (p. 169), that human beings, in particular, are essentially an abstraction of their community and do not grow in isolation, but under the influence of others, which is why education cannot exist without the community. As a third answer to the question of the relationship between education and community, it should be considered that it is the community that determines the ideal of the human being and provides guidelines on how to educate them. To achieve this purpose, and to paraphrase Herbart (1946), it could be said that each community has its own educational plans and, moreover, in each era, the community has a temporary plan that encompasses not only the student but also the teacher, along with what they must do.

Returning to Natorp (2001), lacking the influence of the human community would return us to an animal state and a lack of cultivated sensitivity. In these terms, the individual overcomes the wild state to the extent that he or she articulates with others and with the community. The author shows that the primary effect of the community is the will:

One learns to love by experiencing the love of another. The energetic will of another, it is said, draws us in, perhaps like an impetuous current receiving a lazy tributary, imposing the same vigorous movement on its waters. But such an image leaves too much in the dark, namely that the energy of one's own will is increased, that one's own will is not forced or subjected to dependence, but truly placed in itself by experiencing how the will of another is dependent and energetic in this dependence. (Natorp, 2001, p. 176)

It is also valid to question and reflect on the tensions that arise between the new individual and the community, and within the individual themselves, when they renounce a particular interest, decline their desire for freedom, and reject their independence from the law, out of a desire to be part of a community, to be recognized and accepted. It is only logical that such tension exists between the new member and the community if, as Kant (2003) states, human beings by nature feel a great inclination toward freedom, toward recovering their animal nature. In the early stages, children show submission and passive obedience to their community, but later on, they reach another stage where they use reflection and oppose submission to the laws, as well as question the functioning of the community and what it has in store for them. Natorp (2001) tells us that there is no content produced in accordance with the law of the community that is the exclusive property of the individual; from this point of view, all cultural goods produced by human beings are common goods. In other words, each individual is visible through the actions that they contribute to their community, a situation that also puts tension on this relationship, but which does not ignore a certain individuality within the community. Therefore, we must strive to extend individuality and not nullify it, since the fundamental force of community unity is nourished by diversity and individuality.

Faced with the tensions that arise for the new individual with himself and with the community, it is important to mention that the purpose of education is not only to implant ideals from outside, as if it were mere passive receptivity. On the contrary, it is about teaching him to think, that is, between peripheral reception and the particular elaboration of thought, his identity is constituted according to the desire of the community. Natorp (2001) states that each person must use their own eyes to learn to exercise and direct their gaze, just as the other—the teacher—had to exercise and direct theirs, so that with their own gaze they can see what the teacher sees, but did not see before. Hence the importance of the community's influence on the relationship that is built with oneself, by allowing one to think and decide where to look, which makes this relationship an act of will.

It is also important to mention that in some communities, educational theories have been taken to the extreme of the instrumental reproduction of technical knowledge and a collection of meaningless data that must be imparted to men and women because it contributes to the development of job skills. Furthermore, they have been led toward an image of cultural automatons, with a sense of obedience and completed or finished training. This statement can be illustrated by what Aurin (1983) suggests in his research on *The Politicization of Pedagogy in the "Third Reich."* This author shows the power exercised by National Socialism and the unfortunate development of the German people, including in the field of education: "the goal of Nazism was the idea linked to nation and race, of a totalitarian state based on the authoritarian principle" (Aurin, 1983, p. 82). It can be suggested that the anthropological ideal of the human being lies within the national-ethnicity imposed by Hitler, a situation that forced people to renounce their individuality.

This education, based on instrumental reproduction, focused on training the will, defensive capabilities, and physical strength. Thus, young people were assigned combat, heroism, and national revolution. Neither Hitler nor his leader had a consolidated theory of education; the focus was on an anti-intellectual perspective, with no interest in recognizing humanity or the morally autonomous individual capable of taking responsibility for themselves (Aurin, 1983).

The above exemplifies the ways in which education can take place and how, in this scenario, those who assume the role of educating impart maxims that must be followed in order to comply with state plans. In this scenario, it should be noted that teachers can assume a subordinate role under the guise of a "vocation" in the service of dominant and oppressive groups. In contrast, within communities there are also educational theories that propose knowledge as a social appropriation by human beings, who are encouraged to engage in practices of freedom and emancipation, constantly asking themselves whether another world or other ways of being in it are possible.

### *Critical Theory: A Possibility for Human Emancipation*

The fundamental purpose of critical theory is to understand structural problems that arise at the social level by recognizing the historical and cultural situation. This theory was inaugurated by Max Horkheimer in

1938 to debate the traditional theory that had been imposed. This postulate gave rise to the Frankfurt School, formed by a group of thinkers belonging to the Institute for Social Research (Horkheimer, Adorno, Habermas, Marcuse, Fromm). In the words of Gamboa (2011), critical theory aimed to update Marxist approaches to understand knowledge not only as a conceptual reproduction of reality, but also from historical and relational bases.

Critical theory, therefore, took on the task of thinking about the liberation of human beings and society. The three crucial objectives of this theory focused on: a) analyzing the contributions of Marxism and disciplines such as linguistics, psychoanalysis, and sociology; b) understanding the phenomena that affect society; and c) developing social research techniques that articulate theory and reality itself (Castaño et al., 2009).

Muñoz (2018) states that the responsibility of critical theory becomes an ethical and political event that is key to human existence and emancipation. In addition, the author points out that one of the epistemic bases of this theory is Karl Marx and his critique of capitalism. In this regard, Muñoz (2018) suggests that:

These ideas are of vital importance for the different configurations of critical theory, since it is only such if it assumes the historical-biographical challenge of making oneself and one's existential conditions a source of struggle and transformation. (p. 50)

Emphasizing socio-historical issues makes discursive revolution and human emancipation possible. In this vein, it should be noted that each community establishes an anthropological ideal through an educational theory that defines it in a given era and at the same time sets a precedent for future theories and generations. However, as Kant expresses it, human beings, as beings who act freely, are also what they can make of themselves. Therefore, there is a rebellious, emancipatory desire for that community ideal that establishes them, even before their arrival. What must be is what implants in them an image of human beings as a horizon.

This is how, within communities themselves, educational theories called critical theories are formed, which precisely seek in education a transformation of the community and in training a mechanism of emancipation, of liberation; For Muñoz (2013), “critical theories, in their emancipatory interest, make it possible to highlight and support the rebellious subjectivities that challenge hegemonies, showing that another world is always possible” (p. 41). Therefore, the hope that makes each critical theory an alternative, a proposal for change, an event of something new, is consolidated.

Critical theories, in the sense expressed above, seek to recover the historical, social, cultural, and political positioning of human beings, as well as to recognize their power to undertake something new in the world. Thus, there is a concern to reclaim the awareness and praxis of each individual with which they are committed in their process of subjectivation. For Muñoz (2013), each subject must transcend the mechanistic reduction that the world has made of them, to assume themselves as a subject in a permanent process of construction. “For this critical stance on education, subjects will always be in the process of education; there are no educated subjects, just as there are no finished human beings” (Muñoz, 2013, p. 42).

This educational idea, or rather, this idea of education generates in the community, but especially in the teacher—as an educational agent—a political commitment to recover those human potentials that have been lost under an anthropocentric educational theory, and it is precisely this demand that brings critical theory into conflict with traditional positions—based on disciplining, homogenizing, and transmitting—which have been notable for their instrumental and technical nature that seeks a calculated result from the individual, in contrast to the intention of critical theory, which is aimed at opening up human beings in search of their own experience of humanity.

Critical theories are a challenge for human beings in that they are seen as practices of freedom, they do not ignore their potential, and they are not reduced to turning the act of education into an automatic act of cultural transmission. In response to this, Muñoz argues that “political emancipation is possible thanks to

human emancipation, but if the latter does not assume its commitment to the social collective, it could become a mere selfish and aristocratic impulse” (Muñoz, 2013, p. 40). For his part, Natorp (2001) argues that educational theory that promotes the social cannot avoid thinking about the answer to the question of the fundamental laws of community life, that is, human beings commit themselves to openness to the world, to the experience of humanity, and therefore, in community, they must break down the homogenizing barriers and limits imposed by hegemonic ideals of domination or subjugation, so that individuals can discover new ways of being and existing in the world.

Recovering the social and political subject also demands that these critical theories take on the challenge of constructing knowledge. In the words of Muñoz, knowledge “is the heritage and construction of any human being; it is not a privilege or the result of exceptional abilities, but rather the product of meaningful human experiences” (2013, p. 43). Likewise, information ceases to be mere data and is assumed by the subject as a commitment to the existential, ethical, and political search, both their own and that of others. In other words, knowledge is not individualized; it is part of those community constructions since, in the search itself, there is also a connection that influences the world of others, just as theirs influences their own. As Muñoz (2013) himself states, knowledge enhances thought and therefore “thought becomes one's own insofar as it places the subject in relation to himself, to others, and to the other, hence emerging knowledge is incarnation, lived experience, self-awareness in the world” (p. 43).

By daring to think, the subject confirms their desire to assert their will to construct new realities, which invites them to transform themselves and, therefore, to transform the world. This is concrete evidence of a process of awareness achieved through thought, which in turn has been stimulated by critical theories that emerge as resistance to domesticating, anti-dialogical, and alienating educational policies that seek, through existential sensations, to universalize the ideal of the human being and deprive them of the experience of their humanity. Speaking and acting together promote and recognize constitutive spaces where subjects enhance their existence. Queer theory is a clear example of this.

### *A Critical Theory: Queer Theory*

Queer theory, it could be said, is not part of any particular school of thought or academic discipline, since such an affiliation would reduce it to a normative framework and impose limits on it, which would be contrary to its purpose, which is to provide a critical perspective. According to Hincapié (2012): “(...) queer theory functions as a political-cultural praxis that critically intervenes, in different ways, in the ‘spaces’ where sociocultural oppression has been naturalized” (p. 96). In other words, the proposal of so-called queer theory can be understood as a form of ‘break’ with that which, in society through everyday practices, has become naturalized and has turned into normative molds or frameworks.

Britzman (2016) states that he conceives queer theory as a commitment to recover and exceed the stereotypes that contain and distort the subjectivities of certain groups of people, such as gays and lesbians. In his words: “Queer theory occupies a difficult space between signifier and signified, where something strange happens to the signified—to history and bodies—and something strange happens to the signifier—to language and representation” (Britzman, 2016, p. 17). In other words, queer can be seen by certain sectors as inappropriate subjects and theories. In response to this, Hincapié (2012) states that queer is understood as a reappropriation of a humiliating term into a term of pride and resistance against naturalized normativity.

Talking about education from the perspective of queer theory allows us to consider two types of approaches, as proposed by Britzman (2016). The first refers to “(...) thinking ethically about what discourses of difference, choice, and visibility mean in classrooms, in pedagogy, and in how education can be conceived” (p. 16), which would involve reflecting on the language and representations we construct from it. The second has to do with studying “(...) the structures of dissent within education, or the refusals—curricular, social, or pedagogical—to incorporate that traumatic perception that produces the subject of difference as a disruption, as outside of normality” (Britzman, 2016, p. 16). Paying attention to the difference between human beings and recognizing their plurality could be the beginning of breaking molds under an anthropocentric notion of education. In any case, queer theory pedagogically raises a serious

reflection on the need to develop cultural spaces for the recognition of other ways of being and existing in the world, which are also valid and desirable, such as those that have been naturalized by tradition.

For Britzman (2016), queer theory aims to be an ethical project that begins to involve difference as a political and community foundation, a kind of participation. Therefore, the theory is framed at the level of actions and not subjects. This is how this practice offers criticism of methods that normalize, subjugate, and structure bodies, “defining normality as an approximation of limits and domination, or as a renunciation, a rejection of difference itself” (p. 18). It insists on a critical stance in which the production of normalization is a problem of culture and thought.

If this theory rejects normalization, then how can we understand difference from a queer theory perspective?

According to Britzman (2016), “the theory offers methods for imagining difference on its own terms: as eros, as desire, as the basis for politicization” (p. 18). It offers methods for creating meaning and highlighting what normalization discards or rejects due to the nature of its practices. In other words, queer theory is constituted from a particular amalgam that restores us to practices of bodies and bodies of practices, as Britzman (2016) expresses it, in this case quoting Butler: “cultural practices that make bodies matter, not as mere positivity, but as socio-historical relations, forms of citation that mean more than what individuals and communities need or want” (p. 20).

## In Closing

Human beings have lived in the context of the construction of education, a dispute over the formation of their identity. We have seen, broadly speaking, how education is used as a tool to introduce and secure the world for new generations, a world conceived and designed by others who no longer enjoy that status of being new; in other words, the new must be subjugated, educated, or trained according to an ideal pre-established by the adult who precedes it. It seems that this situation arises due to two things: first, because individuals are beings who need education to become human, to subscribe to ideals of universality that require them to renounce their unique selves; and second, because the techniques offered by education as a tool of the community allow individuals to be easily molded according to the images required by the anthropological ideal of the time.

However, for human beings, there exists within the educational debate a possibility to resist, to oppose these homogenizing ideals, and therefore to carry out actions that allow them to experience other ways of being and existing in the world, one that rejects imposed molds and allows us to understand that difference also has a place for human beings, in that natural essence of their animality, which also allows them to live and enjoy the world and the things that inhabit it. This possibility of resistance and opposition is framed by critical theories, such as queer theory, which encourages everyone to recognize the plurality of human beings, to dare to think and construct new realities, in order to transform themselves and thus contribute to the transformation of the world.

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