

Synergy between popular education and higher education

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Abstract: In the process of professional development of Guantánamo's University, topics related to popular education have been included in an isolated and inadequate way. The purpose of the following article is to compare the respective pillars and principles to prove the existence of synergy and the need to incorporate it into the professional development of university teachers, while keeping in mind that it is one of the modern teaching methods and contributes to the achievements in the new millennium.

Key words: popular education; higher education; professional development; pillars; principles

1 Introduction

The current university background requires education to be guided by responsibility and social transformation, which inevitably means a revolutionary review of the traditional way of knowledge undertaking and distribution. Therefore, it can understand the teaching process in the reciprocal and horizontal relationship between educators and educators.

Similarly, the changes taking place in the world today: economic crises, the increasingly accelerated development of new technological inventions, the impact of neoliberal globalization and mass media, the environmental crisis, the epidemics that hit the world, have a strong influence on formal and non-formal educational processes. They restrict the specific way in which we undertake life and development practices, and trigger a positioning (often unconscious), which means either maintaining and reproducing a global life model, perpetuating the inequality and oppressive conditions in all areas of life, or understanding the historical background and critical assumptions, which means the transformation of educational institutions.

The UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) report of the international commission on education states: Lifelong education is presented as one of the keys to access to the 21st century. This notion goes beyond the traditional distinction between basic and continuing education and responds to the challenge of a rapidly changing world. This demand continues to exist and even increases, and the only way to meet this demand is for all of us to learn how to learn (Delors, 1996).

Therefore, education must always adapt to the changes of society, and at the same time transmit the results of acquired knowledge, principles and experience. In addition, after the profound changes in the traditional survival framework, another obligation has emerged that requires us to better understand others and the world. We need mutual understanding and peaceful dialogue, why not harmony, which is exactly what our society lacks.

Within this global framework, four pillars on which lifelong education is based are put forward, namely, learning to understand, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be a person, which provide guidance for the career progress of higher education and reveal the synergy with the pillars and principles of popular education.

The development that pedagogy has reached as a science in today's world demands that education should promote a more complete preparation of the professional so that they can face the challenges posed to him or her by the society. In Cuba, the Ministry of Higher Education believes that the training of university professionals is continuous, including three stages: vocational training for undergraduates with a broad overview; employment preparation and postgraduate training aiming at improving vocational level and academic training (Bernaza, 2018).

In this sense, the popular education method is regarded as an alternative method, which provides a new form of synergy with the goals pursued by higher education. However, in the vocational training program provided by the University of Guantánamo, this problem is dealt with in isolation.

In the in-depth review of the professional development programs of the faculty of Humanities, Pedagogy-Psychology, Early Childhood Education and Art, it is evident that the problem of popular education has emerged, but has not been comprehensively addressed, including: pedagogy of tenderness; teamwork for business operation; life project, challenges to families; creativity and conflict resolution; gender and empowerment of women; illegal fashions and the influence on the identity and personality of young people; family orientation.

Studies carried out by prestigious Cuban researchers have specifically dealt with the topic of popular education in the national and guantanamero university context, the most prominent of which is the paper of Professor Cristina González Rifá, "*La Extensión Universitaria en la Comunidad Jagueyón*" (University Extension in the Jagueyón Community, Thesis (Option to the Master's degree), Guantánamo University Center, 2001), where the author applies the principles of popular education in university extension that contributes to community work.

The master's thesis of Ileana Jañez Reyes of the University of Guantánamo (2007) -- *The curriculum adjustment of the community research I subject of the social culture research curriculum to integrate Marti's thinking on popular education*, in which the distinctive elements of Marti's thinking on popular education are analyzed in correspondence with the requirements of the sociocultural studies course, and the historical trends that integrate this facet of Marti's thinking into the program of the subject Community Studies I.

Other studies have also worked on the subject, such as Professor Cristina González Rifá's doctoral thesis (2008), applying the principles of popular education in the elaboration of a university extension strategy that contributes to community work; the doctoral thesis of María Isabel Romero Sarduy of the Martha Abreu University of Santa Clara (2013) *Contribution of the training in popular education of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. memorial center to community self-development* where a case study of the experience of the national network of mass educators is conducted and the unity of the qualitative and quantitative from the dialectic is assumed among other research carried out.

From the above, it can be deduced that the professional development of university professors has dealt with the subject of popular education in an isolated manner without making any clarifications from a structured program that addresses this system of knowledge, nor has the introduction of many of the research results obtained been taken into account.

It is worth noting the existence of a reference program called "Popular Education and Local Experience Accompaniment Program of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Center". This program is designed for a diverse audience, specifically for the community level.

This means that there is a need to develop a professional refresher program for university teachers in popular

education. Therefore, as the current research situation shows, this is a subject that has been studied less in previous studies, which has been proved by the few theoretical studies on this subject and the studies conducted in the context of Cuba. However, the practice of popular education in the field of international and domestic higher education has a history, and its significance is no less than heterogeneity or hegemony. Given the particularity of the background, Cuba's popular education tradition has something in common with other countries. Struggle is different, but the essence of liberation is similar.

Literature analysis shows that there is very little popular education in universities, so it is necessary to formulate a program with a reasonable structure to combine the content of this subject with higher education, which is conducive to the appropriateness of the teaching process, and will help individuals change in society, where the origins, precursors, characteristics, pillars and principles of popular education are deepened in order to develop the dialogic and contextualized education demanded by the new times.

The purpose of this article is to compare the pillars and principles of Cuban higher education with popular education in order to demonstrate the synergy that exists between them and the need to include it in the professional development of university professors from structured programs with an integrated knowledge system, taking into account that it is one of the modern pedagogies that contributes to the achievements of the new millennium.

2 Development

Social development requires continuous processes of creation, dissemination, transfer, adaptation and application of knowledge. Knowledge, closely linked to practice, is a transforming social force that the graduate program permanently encourages to promote the sustainable development of today's Cuban society. Hence, there is a need for university professors to join an uninterrupted process of professional improvement, where the university plays a leading role, with the purpose of contributing to a better performance and human growth.

The report of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization of the International Commission on Education in the 21st century entitled "Delores Report" (Delores, 1996) emphasizes the four pillars of lifelong education: learn to understand, learn to do, learn to live together, and learn to behave.

Learn to understand and combine a sufficiently broad general culture with the possibility of deepening knowledge in a small number of subjects. This also means learning to learn in order to be able to take advantage of the possibilities offered by lifelong learning.

Learning to do in order to acquire not only a professional qualification but, more generally, a competence enabling the individual to cope with a large number of situations and to work in a team. However, we should also learn to do so within the framework of various social or work experiences provided to young people and adolescents, either spontaneously due to social or national background, or formally due to the development of alternative teaching.

Learning to live together by developing understanding of others and the forms of interdependence to realize common projects and prepare to deal with conflicts - while respecting the values of pluralism, mutual understanding and peace.

Learn to be a person, so that one's own personality may flourish and one may be in a position to act with more and more independence, judgment and personal responsibility. To this end, education should not undervalue any of the possibilities of each individual: memory, reasoning, aesthetic sense, physical abilities, aptitude to communicate. While formal educational systems tend to give priority to the acquisition of knowledge to the detriment of other forms of learning, it is important to conceive education as a whole. It is in this conception that educational reforms should seek inspiration and guidance, whether in terms of curriculum development or in the definition of new pedagogical policies.

Popular education is formed from collective construction. As an educational concept, "it has the ethical choice of

practice, theory, education and transformation" (Mejía, 2001). This kind of ethics transcends the field of school and its practice is rooted in all transformation actions for the marginalized and excluded people in our world. Among the people in charge of this construction, we have Freire, who set the course through the philosophy that underlies popular education. We can find the four pillars that constitute the backbone of this educational method in his thoughts:

1. The ethical pillar, which accounts for the ethical position (conscious or unconscious) expressed through values.
2. The epistemological pillar, which has to do with knowledge, with the essence of education.
3. The pedagogical and methodological pillar, which refers to how education is done and how knowledge is worked.
4. The political pillar, which defines the political position and implies "taking sides", not from a partisan point of view, but from the role that each person assumes in the world (Núñez, 2004).

These four pillars: ethics, epistemology, pedagogy and politics, are components of any educational system. Therefore, to achieve consistency in educational choices, the educational option must recognize the human being in an integral way (abilities, skills, knowledge, relationships, spiritualities), in order to position him/her as a subject and not as an object of knowledge. This situation completely breaks the concept of scattered knowledge and significantly changes the traditional teaching methods (Núñez, 2004 p. 11-17).

Likewise, a comparison between the principles for the direction of the educational process presented by (Addine, 2002, p.82) and the principles of popular education reveals similarities between them:

2.1 Principles of the unity of the scientific and ideological character of the pedagogical process (Addine, 2002)

Principles of Freire's popular education:

The political nature of education: because the popular education is defined and expressed in favor of the liberation of the oppressed, and against capitalism. Its aim is human emancipation, the reinvention of power based on the dream that a new society without oppressed and oppressors is possible. It is based on this that it promotes the reflection and critical development of men and women in the process of liberating, building and shaping their daily social reality.

Historical and contextual interpretation of reality: from a critical view of social reality, from everyday spaces to macro-social spaces.

Conscientization: the development of the ability to critically analyze reality. In other words, we have the ability to determine the causes and consequences of our position in the whole social relationship with others, reveal the myths of defending the rule, cover up the differences between nature and things that may change, and propose alternatives from the perspective of liberation.

The changing and unfinished character of social reality: reality is regarded as permanent and can be improved, so it is always transformed to improve it.

2.2 Principles of linking education with life, social environment and work in the process of personality education (Addine, 2002)

Principles of Freire's popular education:

The holistic, comprehensive approach to reality: its premise is to deal with reality at cultural, social, psychological, historical, anthropological and other levels, and to have a complete concept of the subject's thoughts, feelings and actions.

Dreams and utopias: as part of creative, renovating thought, it begins with a critical analysis of the conservative Utopia thoughts.

As a space for the development of men and women's capacities for self-transformation, as a starting point for social change, as a way and tool for social change, popular education is not only limited to the field of schools, but also extended to the whole society.

The importance of dialogue: as a way to build knowledge collectively, issues, critical examination of reality, fraternal debate and contributions of all people are crucial on this way.

2.3 Principles of unity of pedagogical, educational and developmental aspects in the process of personality education (Addine, 2002)

Principles of Freire's popular education:

The option for group work and the possibility of assuming different roles in the process (rapporteur, spokesperson, coordinator), are conducive to horizontal nature.

This popular educational proposal can be reshaped, reformulated and permanently enriched. In other words, its characteristic is that it can always be improved as an unfinished proposal.

Horizontal communication in the learning process: it is shown to overcome the contradiction between educators and learners without diluting the role of educators. There is no doubt that educators also have specific knowledge to contribute and have methodological weapons to promote the knowledge process.

2.4 Principles of the unity of emotion and cognition in the process of personality education (Addine, 2002)

Principles of Freire's popular education:

Popular education is the space to develop the ability of men and women to transform themselves, the starting point for social change, and ways and tools for social change, which is not restricted to the school environment, but extended to society as a whole.

Humanism: popular education promotes a humanistic conception of the world, in which human beings are subjects, protagonists of history, and not mere objects. Hence, values and concepts such as dignity, justice, equity, autonomy, freedom, responsibility, commitment and emancipation are important.

The ethics of life: It is based on the values and principles which place human beings as the center and goal of social activity. In other words, it is a kind of ethics against capitalism and its functionality, practicality, discrimination and exclusion, that is, against the large human groups "not participating in competition" in this society, since they were deprived of their basic right to life.

2.5 Principles of the collective and individual nature of education and respect for learners' personality (Addine, 2002)

Principles of Freire's popular education:

Respect for differences: that is, it explains the positive evaluation of the richness of diversity. It is a world in which there is room for others, a world in which there is room for all those who are different, but not for those who are antagonistic, a world that does not exclude. The choice of group work and the possibility of playing different roles in this process (rapporteur, spokesperson, coordinator) are conducive to horizontal nature.

Horizontal communication in the learning process: this is expressed in overcoming the contradiction between educators and learners, without diluting the role of the educator, who undoubtedly also has specific knowledge to contribute and has a methodological arsenal to facilitate the knowledge process.

It can be seen that the principles on which the popular education is based are in close synergy with the principles for the management of the educational process in Cuba, so that the use of this methodology in higher education is valid, not only because of its novelty, but also because it can contribute to enrich the teaching and promotion process.

Popular education has been, at times, undervalued by certain specialists who tend to say that it lacks theoretical foundations or that it responds to "popular" educational practices and is therefore devoid of scientificity. However, this educational proposal starts with an integrative diagnosis of daily practices and in this sense, it is a path to explore transformation. If we analyze the principles underlying this proposal, we can see that it is in close synergy with the

objectives set out in the pillars of education: inclusiveness, the humanistic status of the proposal, respect for differences, holistic approach, people-centered and purpose, teamwork.

Mejía (2001) also pointed out that popular education has been configured from a collective construction. As a conception of education, "it has practices, theories, pedagogies and an ethical option of transformation". Different groups have contributed to the accumulation of education since the development of popular education: pedagogy of inclusion, pedagogy of gender, pedagogy of dialogue or cultural negotiation, etc. In these proposals, pedagogy is never reduced to the technical level, nor to procedural level; on the contrary, it emphasizes the dialectical process that questions reality (society, politics, economy, culture), as well as the ideological and socio-political implications of pedagogy.

Van de Velde (2007) stated that the problem lies in the fact that the concepts of "formal", "non-formal" and "informal" education are terms loaded with interpretations. The qualification "non-formal" is often used to disqualify. It is even worse in an "informal" situation. Rather than "dividing" educational options, it would be appropriate to continue to emphasize the importance of the systemic approach to education as a phenomenon, no longer just local or national, but "global".

From this systemic approach, it is possible to identify different spaces (territorial or virtual space) with particular educational expressions, recognizing the importance and the undeniable, proper, positive and necessary value of the interrelations between the different spaces. The "school" (another concept with different meanings), as traditionally conceived, is only one space and is not detached from other spaces such as: the family, friendship relations, the neighborhood, social culture, inter-generational relations, and the relationship between men and women, media.

According to the author, popular education should not be opposed to formal education as if they were incompatible, or to associate exclusively the former to non-formal or informal processes, but to take the effectiveness of each one in the construction of knowledge to respond to the problems of the social reality in which we are involved in many ways, and in either case we resort to the theoretical accumulation of the phenomena analyzed.

Popular education has been nourished by diverse referents, which have outlined its transdisciplinary character, keeping a close relationship with the interpretative paradigm. For popular education, the experiences of different human groups (whether of gender, race, ethnicity or creed), generally marginalized, have a fundamental place in the social investigation of the causes of injustices, resorting to emancipatory theory. As assumed in this article, it is an ethical, cultural, political, pedagogical conception, committed to social praxis whose referential point is the transforming action of reality, for which it is necessary not only to know reality but also the subjectivities of human beings and to study their relationships, their behavior, history, identities, assuming them in a critical and proactive way. In this process, it finds theoretical and methodological supports in the mentioned paradigm.

There is no doubt that there are many contributions. Considering that popular education not only brings us into the way of understanding education but also into a position to understand and act in the world. Therefore, its contents are assumed from different disciplines, the present study invites us to take those approaches that offer a foundation from the educational branch. In this regard, it is worth clarifying that these references are also listed as part of the principles and methods of popular education. Here, we agree with Romero (2013), who said that "popular education, as an educational suggestion of critical pedagogy, assumes these references in its content as part of the challenge to the traditional and hegemonic education system" (Romero, 2013, p. 27).

Similarly, when committed to a more democratic and inclusive approach, popular education is affected by social constructivism and other trends, which have had an impact on some crucial aspects. For example, students may interact with others to build knowledge by emphasizing their role in this process. From the perspective of sociology, the research

carried out within the framework of the new sociology of education also emphasizes the active role of the subject in constructing the educational reality related to daily life and background.

As part of critical pedagogy, popular education is inscribed as an emancipatory political-pedagogical conception that bets on a democratic and liberating education and as an alternative to traditional pedagogy where people have the opportunity to build/be in a democratic relationship based on dialogue and participation. In this sense, the ideas of Paulo Freire, Henri Giroux (1990) and Mejía (2001) have made many contributions. As for the former, reference is made in the process of the next section, although some of his ideas have been identified in Giroux's thought as the role of educators (which is also related to the essence of the organic intellectual's Gramscian thought), and the necessity of politicization and political education of pedagogy.

For Maya (2001), popular education is a kind of action pedagogy. It not only restores criticism and transformative suggestions, but also makes educational facts become a proposal to change the world that the subject has an impact on it. It is not only in the procedural positive pedagogical sense, but also the most important is to commit to the task of an unjust world, which must not only be changed through global action, but also through the direct choice - action of people involved in educational activities. A change with values indicates the principle of Utopia: my reality can be changed by my actions, and my collective actions can change the society.

All these authors sustain the idea that education is also a political project, and schools are not neutral places. Therefore, teachers must assume an active position whose exercise is not reduced to that of mere teachers or only to concentrate on how to transmit knowledge better. Teachers must play the role of transformative intellectuals and for this: "(...) they must create the ideology and structural conditions they need, and conduct writing, research and mutual cooperation in curriculum development and power sharing" (Giroux, 1990).

Following this idea within the critical option, Apple and Beane's (1997) study *School for Democracy* stands out significantly and as an unavoidable reference for our research. Their proposals underline the need for a practice of this nature in the educational space where it is vital to create democratic structures and processes that shape school life. In this line, they emphasize the importance of participatory mechanisms and dialogue between students, teachers, parents and community members for collective decision-making (Apple and Beane, 1997).

They also consider that the curriculum should be a democratic space that questions reality and reflects on problems and issues of daily life. It "invites young people to shed the passive role of knowledge consumers and assume the active role of meaning makers" (Apple and Beane, 1997, p.34). Hence, the construction of knowledge as well as other processes is far from being traditional because it recognizes the creative and active capacity of different people.

Finally, it is worth noting that the concept of democratic schools has something in common with the experience promoted by popular education methods. Their essence includes the principle of sharing power, questioning and subverting the leading logic of knowledge production and promotion, and the principle of promoting values such as cooperation and collaboration from their own experience. Similarly, the vision of finding a space to learn from the experience of democratic life in school is not the most important.

Popular education also promotes ethical-philosophical principles such as: a humanistic conception of the world, which places human beings as the center and goal of social activity, assumes a holistic approach to reality, promotes respect for differences, gives great importance to dialogue, promotes horizontal communication and group work in the teaching-learning process (Romero, 2013).

The richness of the popular education proposal lies in its alternative character (especially if we put it in the context of traditional and conservative education), as it provides a new perspective and can observe the education process at any time.

To sum up, pedagogy in higher education and the methodology of popular education have an inevitable synergy and a clear intention to transform the subject and society. Therefore, on the one hand, it is necessary to restore the pedagogical and methodological heritage of mass educators from educational, social and political practice, on the other hand, through the vocational improvement resulting from the training provided by universities to the society, we continue to reformulate and formulate new proposals to meet the current challenges faced by higher education since globalization.

3 Conclusion

Popular education is developed in coordination with higher education, which is committed to the 21st century and has obvious main body and social transformation intention. Therefore, on the one hand, it is necessary to restore the teaching and method system generated by mass educators from educational, social and political practice; on the other hand, in the face of the current challenges in higher education since globalization, we continue to formulate and put forward new proposals for the career progress generated by the training provided by higher education to the society.

The elements provided not only explain the theoretical reference, but also provide us with aspects related to the pillars and principles of popular education. These aspects work together with higher education. According to the results of the international consensus contained in the report of the UNESCO International Commission on Education, we are committed to higher education in the new era.

It reveals that higher education needs to develop comprehensive vocational training programs to solve the knowledge system of popular education, and promote cooperation with academic, work, research and promotion departments to help solve the ongoing challenges brought by the current responsibility-oriented environmental and social transformation.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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