

Diana Csorba
University of Bucharest
diana.csorba@fpse.unibuc.ro

Argument for a Pedagogical Hermeneutics

Keywords

*Hermeneutics, history of pedagogy, pedagogical reflexivity,
historical hypothesis, interpretation*

Abstract

This study aims to epistemologically analyze a series of arguments for which pedagogy must consistently harness hermeneutic strategies of interpretation and meditative reflection on the meaning and significance of the paradigms of education and their evolution over time. Current practice demonstrates that there are many difficulties in establishing the authentic meaning of a text about education. The meaning conferred by the author of the interpretation may not coincide with the proper meaning of the work analysed, even if it goes without saying that the meaning of a pedagogical conception must flow directly from the work itself, determined epistemological and axiological. The history of pedagogy, as an academic discipline, provides the favorable context for the practice of reflexive hermeneutic skills. We believe that between archaeology and teleology proposed by any

pedagogical theory, the hermeneutics of the text necessarily interposes.

1. Introductory Hypothetic-Reflexive Context: History of Hermeneutics

Teacher training programs offer sporadic, random opportunities for the cultivation of reflexive – interpretative skills of the hermeneutic type. The study of pedagogy courses capitalizes on pedagogical reflection methods in the formula of epistemological models at the level of theory, or example of good practice that are analyzed by reference to the internship achieved by reference to the positivist model.

Identifying ways to practice and form the reflexive skills of future teachers has brought us to explore, analyze and check possibilities to capitalize on the History of Pedagogy course, in order to cultivate the reflexivity of future teachers by internalizing a specific algorithm of historical research of education and in particular hermeneutics as a method of interpreting texts.

We have become increasingly convinced that actively, perseveringly and carefully consider each faith or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the foundations on which it is based and the conclusions to which they refer is not only a challenge but a pressing necessity of academic learning exercises in the contemporary university space.

In this study we reflect from an epistemological perspective on some of the conclusions of the case studies that we have carried out in the course and seminar activities at the Department of Teacher Training, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Bucharest.

Accompanied by the question: "Does the hermeneutics of the pedagogical text succeed in being applied to pedagogy for

the cultivation of reflexive professional competences?" we analyze the interpretation albeit that the history of pedagogy gives the teacher concerned with his own pedagogical reflexivity.

Etymologically, hermeneutics originates in the Greek "hermeneutics" which signifies – interpretation. Dilthey's distinction between the two types of sciences: those "of nature" and "of spirit", between "explaining" and "understanding", will establish the concern to clarify substantially what hermeneutics mean in its essence. The 20th century will develop consistent theories about hermeneutics through the contributions of H.G. Gadamer (Heidegger's follower) to Germany and P. Ricoeur in France.

Hermeneutics appears as a way to interpret the meaning of human intentions and actions, relativizing the approach of truth conceived according to the model of positive sciences.

The specialized dictionaries insist on clarifying the meaning of the act of interpretation as a form of "explanation", of "translation" of the attribution of meanings, in one direction or another in order to clarify, find a hidden meaning, but also to judge a work in search of specific ways of expressing its true meaning.

The old Aristotelian method, consisting of the grouping of phenomena into classes and genres and the use of syllogistic reasoning which established that everything that is valid for a genre is valid for all classes subordinated to it, was a viable time and brought added clarity to the explored universe.

With the advent of Descartes' works, the universe no longer seems so simple to explore! He showed the ways and directions to go, achieving the junction of mathematics with physics, by the way that mathematics became not only an instrument but a model for physics, in which sentences would depend on principles considered obvious. "The spontaneity of

the spirit" and the "priority of psychic life over the physical world" – so clearly expressed in the established formula – cogito ergo sum! – gradually led to a revolution of concepts in science, to a new way of discovering through thought and experiment, the laws of nature. Later in history, Kant will affirm that it is our spirit that prescribes the laws of nature.

Neutral, in Romanian philosophy, Mircea Florian (2002) told us that Descartes' lesson deserves all our attention by referring to the two fundamental principles "superior certainty of consciousness" and the idea of "ontological value of thought".

Gaston Bachelard. In "La formation de l'esprit scientifique" (Paris, 1972), he carried out, much later, an analysis of scientific thinking and the progress of knowledge by overcoming obstacles. Bachelard groups under the name of "epistemological obstacles" the limits under which the previous knowledge stands and which must be overcome and replaced by another form of knowledge. Any truly new knowledge is preceded by an "epistemological rupture", a rupture that separates the natural experience, unique to each of us, from the scientific one, inaccessible to all. All "pre-knowledge" must be denied in order to reach a new knowledge. The perspective reappears as renewed in the contemporary space when the relationship between the epistemology of education sciences and the methodology of research in education asserts itself as priority and necessity.

But without continuing the historical trip, we appreciate that even today, any speech about the method is not redundant and numerous discourses are proposed, in different areas of human knowledge. Pedagogy could not and must not remain far from these debates. Any speech about the method will always be accompanied by a set of interpretations in an epistemological laboratory of hermeneutic consistency.

2. Pedagogical Reflection: About Hermeneutic Strategies

Appreciated as historical messages, pedagogical texts reflect, globally, the image of a determined "pedagogical time". We wonder, in the hermeneutic process how can we connect to the authentic rhythm and vibration of that time, when, historically, we are part of another pedagogical time and beyond?

Education is inseparable from historical, social, legal, political, psychological, etc. We identify in a positivist manner numerous causation that require explanatory, nuanced and fine interpretations to clearly delineate the lesson that history can portray.

"Pedagogical work as a way of existence is a subjective act, consubstantial with the human, reflecting by distancing itself from less important, random aspects, the essence of one's own vision of the world, life and specifically of education. This does not mean breaking history, but just revealing its merits. Distance and proximity to pedagogical work allow the historian to learn the deep meaning of reflection, its place in the explanation of the universe of education." (Csorba, D., 2015, p. 498), we appreciated, in an article focused on discovering whether historical experience can represent that normative court capable of supporting pedagogical reflexivity.

Current practice demonstrates that there are many difficulties in establishing the authentic meaning of a text about education. „The meaning conferred by the author of the interpretation may not coincide with the proper meaning of the work analyzed, even if it goes without saying that the meaning of a pedagogical conception must flow directly from the work itself, interpreted in the social-cultural, scientific, complex context that has determined it." (Csorba, 2015, p. 499).

In this problematic space we are interested in the predictive-objective qualities of hermeneutic strategies, the rigor and methodological objectivity that they must prove in the process of establishing the pedagogical, authentic meaning in determinative relationship with the historical truth, the scientific truth.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, a German philosopher, appreciated in the book "Truth and Method" (2001) the idea that, "interpretation" as an act, is comprised of three moments: "understanding", "interpretation" and "application". Each of the three moments presents a particular, defining specificity: "to understand" implies to identify the true meaning or appropriate to the primary intention for which a message has been proposed, "to interpret" implies to give the message new and different understandings, "application" means adapting to a concrete, identifiable situation and extracting a practical-educational meaning. The author emphasizes the idea, important for any hermeneutic act, that moments are indissociable.

We see this very clearly in the space of pedagogical hermeneutics: we cannot achieve understanding without the interpretation of messages. Synthetically derived significance in the end of a research of the history of pedagogy, is found in the preliminary anticipation from the beginning of the research, anticipation associated with interests and decisions conditioned by contemporary problems of theoretical or practical nature for which solutions are sought.

For example, any reading of the history of pedagogy implies the highlighting of a meaning that cannot be dissociated from the guidelines, interests and even the cultural formation of the historian! An important notion proposed by philosophers helps us to understand more easily this inter-determination of the three moments. It's about the phrase "hermeneutic circle".

The teacher's consciousness, concerned with the research of education, will describe "circles" initiating infinite dialogues possible with the essence of the phenomena studied in order to then allow himself to build new perspectives of approach and understanding based on what happened through reconciliation with what is.

The analysis of controversies in the study of the sciences of education is in the process of expansion and we notice how many polemics are born in this space. The methodological constraint that we feel in this context is the concern to follow with caution and wisdom the authors of pedagogical statements and not to do so in a teleological manner and to take them all seriously! A focal distance is needed in this respect: historical reporting and an anti-retrospective approach, with the authors who come to collectively define a meaning.

More often than not, consensus occurs more easily when the material is standardized and researchers are cultured from each other and from the techniques they harness in research. In the space of education and its history as an object and as a theoretical court, the formulation of epistemological questions is an obvious difficulty and provokes us insistently.

Educational reality is perceptible only fragmentarily and through prisms (social, cognitive, ideological, political, economic, philosophical, etc.) that are always deforming, and it is normal to appear a plurality of legitimate and interesting sentences. Even if we assume that in education the world is orderly and stable it never shows itself in its immediate truth. We will always be in the education research space in a position to initiate and re-initiate readings that will suggest what the order of the "pedagogical nature" might be!

For a long time in the history of pedagogy, pedagogical evidence is the result of localized interrogations of a series of

educational ideas and practices. The scientific effort consists, in this case, of correctly appreciating their overall relevance. Of course, we will not forget to point out that lack of consensus plays a key role in science and particularly in the space of socio-human sciences such as pedagogy. A theoretical and "positive" discourse succeeds critical and approximate approaches and the "History of Pedagogy" offers rich opportunities for the formation of hermeneutic skills of future teachers.

We must admit that any scientific activity is one of interpretation and invention placed in a spatial context (physical, social, etc.). Such a perspective conveys to us that any scientific approach in the field of education can be conceived as a temporal succession, as a sequential and progressive accumulation of discoveries. Depending on their veridicity, they are diffused and so we have a rather spatial representation of knowledge. We can recognize the heterogeneity of the regimes of legitimacy and harmonization—the agreement of the authors—on the substance and effects of pedagogical readings—that another future will contradict or not!

Producing and negotiating meaning between the different actors of a pedagogical reading for the production of pedagogical knowledge is an essential condition of pedagogical hermeneutics. The emergence and fixation of the meanings of the texts read requires an effort to explain and contextualize the multimodal.

The focus on a number of historically conditional needs determines the lack of depth of the research conclusions, because the actors of pedagogical readings are ideologically dependent on the networks in which they act.

In historical research, the relationship between hermeneutics and hypothesis goes beyond the much-known meaning of the natural sciences, where the hypothesis is an unknown rationale of a sentence that gives the explanation of

a fact. In its substance, the historical hypothesis is itself a form of interpretation, a sentence about the past before it is subject to verification, with a certain degree of retrospective - reflexive and anticipatory foundation.

Pedagogical hermeneutics develops in a systematic process of analyses and synthesizes that will tamp in the process of retrospective knowledge of the world and the reality of education, which is of epistemological, axiological or even ontological interest. "The formulation and foundation of hypotheses in the pedagogical research process but also in the process of reflective interrogation on the decisions necessary to optimize professional practice, refer to the decoding of primary information through external and internal criticism of sources / data. The establishment of facts and explanation (including the establishment of the law) and the construction of the historical image is gradually achieved through successive integration and theoretical reintegration" (Csorba, 2015, p. 500) through the hermeneutics of the text.

For the value of hermeneutics in the historical research of education, it is important to remember that, more often than not, contemporaries see only the literal meaning of each of the successive facts. The true meaning of events will only be shown to future generations. If in the phenomenological sense of the word, "understanding" represents the sense of the living meaning, the interpretation transcends the meaning of the lived, because it discovers a hidden meaning.

The epistemological rupture between direct experience and explanatory theory about that experience is evident, from experimental science to interpretive science. In the first case theory is a set of formalized sentences (a mathematical language), in the second case, theory is a proposed meaning. Of course, we do not deny that an interpretation can be ingenious, convincing by its own light but always arbitrary because there

is no experimental device to validate its righteousness or falsehood!

As a modern work of art in which the idea of "expressing the truth" is not predetermined in the unrepeatable act in which it was conceived, increasing its valences with the passage of time, being continually recreated and redefined by all those who become co-authors in the process of interpretive reading. In a broader analysis framework, the educational phenomenon is an "Opera aperta" an "open work", as Umberto Eco would call it, which makes all those who want to understand its meaning, "small new creators", broken away from foreign influences, identifying new messages, thinking critically, deriving new hypotheses, interpreting.

3. Hermeneutics in Historical Research of Education: Possible Applications or Pedagogical Reflexivity

We can formulate hypotheses on how to decipher the information contained in the springs, hypotheses on their critical analysis, hypotheses about causalities, which can integrate all information about the past, proposing a specific narrative on which we will reflect. Questions are formulated and ways to find answers are anticipated.

Hermeneutically, the hypotheses can be formulated as attempts to answer, before giving a basis to it and as an answer after its basis to the questions asked. In the process of formulating questions specific to historical research, as well as during the reflective process, we operate with three types of questions presented as fundamental (Csorba, 2015, p. 498/500): (a) fact graphic questions such as: What happened? The answers consider describing the realities, their complete presentation, in most situations in a narrative perspective; (b) explanatory questions: Why did this happen? How did it

happen that it happened? What relevance does a current problem have in the recurring problematic context of past/but future educational theories and practices? (c) theoretical questions: What scientific laws can be established by studying the past of educational experiences, at the level of theory and generalized practice?

Narrative responses can be formulated in many ways, theoretically infinite, but if we consider the legislative-prescriptive answers we expect as precise formulations as possible, which requires rigour and objectivity in the reflective process of drawing the conclusions of our studies.

Open to the philosophical positivist guidelines, taking over the models of nature research, pedagogues have sought and assiduously seek absolute truths to justify the science sense of their own pedagogical conclusions. In opposition, history determines the pluralistic structure of ideas and practices about education which, at a glance, suggests a "pedagogical anarchy", with Dionysian features, which prevent us from easily anchoring in the quiet port of a definitive and compact system. Certain opinions, contrary to pedagogy, state that there is no historical explanation in the scientific sense of the word but only a way of organizing stories about education, in an intelligible plot. It is accepted that the pedagogical truth is from a historical perspective, a truth relative to the times, cultures, people!

The relativistic adherence of pedagogy to historical becoming has made history, apparently, a kind of guillotine. Are we passing or not, the test of time with the substance of wisdom of our conclusions about education? „Under the impact of the establishment and affirming of humanistic sciences and the resoundingly dispute over the issue of scientific rationality and other types of rationality, hermeneutics acts today as a major theoretical and

methodological enterprise, bringing together, through an authentic style of thinking, "the experience of truth" and the historical consciousness, as well as a cognitive model which subscribes an emotional participation in the modern reconstruction in logic, methodology and philosophy of science, in the history of philosophy and culture. In Plato's dialogue *Ion*, Socrates says that "poets are nothing more than translators of gods, each possessed by that one who has them in control", and performers, those who sing the texts of poets, are called "interpreters of the interpreters". Similar to poets, the experts in a domain, particularly those of education, are in a position of translating the significance of metaphors crystallized in time with regard to education. An exercise of historical analysis allows identifying the main metaphors that have led to the foundation of the educational process as a whole in the diachronic and the synchronous perspective" (Csorba, 2015, p. 767).

An absolute pedagogy could be recognized by its timeless character, severing any form of connection with the past, expecting from the future confirmation and preservation, perpetual. Hence the fear of approaching, in an apollinic spirit, the thoughts of education that reflect a reality, marked, especially in this century, by an unprecedented dynamic, of major transformations, difficult to predict and control. And yet time has no patience! Precisely, the impossibility of a system of absolute truths, in terms of education, brings pedagogy dependent on history. Indeed, it could reduce pedagogy to its history. Not necessarily in the restrictive and harmful sense, that of reducing such a complex field to a number of associations between the educational ideas and practices of certain times, but especially with a view to accepting the dynamics of the field as a space for continuous becoming and transformation.

In pedagogy, the experience of truth is contextualized and it depends on the productive nature of the systemic understanding of specific realities. The concern to establish epistemological pedagogy, as socio-human science, systematically envisages references to an axiological and methodological framework of historical type. The hermeneutics of any pedagogical text refers to a specific period, well delineated over time. This approach does not take into account eminently historical reasoning, but, in particular and more often, (more or less declared), pedagogical concerns.

The history of pedagogy is a product of pedagogy and not of history. The spirit in which a history of pedagogy is developed is the sure sign of the specific transformations of the field of pedagogy. On these issues we continue to reflect. The reticence, more or less openly stated, concerning the exploitation of historical research in the evaluation of the educational phenomenon, synchronically and diachronically, call into question issues concerning the relativity of this type of approach.

In a framework of analysis of the relationship between philosophy and history, Mircea Florian (2002) affirmed a significant aspect that can be analyzed prolifically in the space of the relationship history and pedagogy: "Until now historical research has been of great use a history of systems, types of thinking, not problems. The systems come and go, but the problems remain" (Florian, 2002, pp. 192-193).

The problems facing the school of our time come and go back with a recurrence that is hard to imagine, in uncontrolled waves, no matter what solutions are proposed and what sources of pedagogical scientific foundation they may have. One of the purposes of pedagogy should systematically pursue, identify and historically reveal the problems that the school has faced and faces for a time and a space and how they have been

thought ably reflected in the pedagogical works of the time. Cultural problems and values demand historical temporality, but also ensure the independence of thought from the historical aspect.

Pedagogy is forced to integrate history, time, the place of realization into an indefinite process of the problems it strives to solve by referring to the cultural values of humanity to which it is subordinated and for whose permanence justifies its existence and meaning. History thus becomes an integrative factor of a system of socio-human conceptions, and the association of temporality with pedagogy is not a sign of weakness but on the contrary.

Pedagogy needs more than any other discipline of its history. If the sciences of nature, called exact, not by chance, can ignore people, pedagogy must not detach itself from them, their specific peculiarities and their human purpose, established at the level of destiny. The person is historically conditioned, and from this derives an essential peculiarity of pedagogy and its object of study – education – which is addressed to the unique people – the historical character. "The role of the historian is to discover, under these diverse appearances, the eternal man, always like his own" (Aries, 1995, p. 66), Philippe Aries tells us in a reference work for the grounding of historical research.

Multi-perspective in history research is not simply the application of the hermeneutic method. It aims to expand the scope and depth of historical analysis on a particular theme or phenomenon. Until the 1980s and 1990s, historical research was focused on transmitting a huge amount of information, organized chronologically, with a predominant focus on events and personalities. After the 1980s, the first concerns differed from those previously mentioned, which must be considered by both education historians and reflective teachers.

There is currently a widening of the centers of interest, aiming at a "total history" encompassing different evolutionary, philosophical, economic, social, political, cultural, educational series capable of providing a systemic picture of reality in its temporal perspective. The problem of a predominantly narrative history (important to be properly recognized and harnessed) is today subordinated to a new perspective of analysis and interpretation, following the conflicts of ideas and phenomena of anticipation or constancy that mark and/or structure a certain evolution. Account shall also be taken of the interdisciplinary relationships that exist and can be highlighted in evolution. Deepening a temporally determined stage sends interrogations to the content of a previous or/and future period, addressing the invitation to open new investigations, recalling that there is still "unwritten history" and uninterpreted (see Csorba, 2015, p. 33).

4. Open Conclusions: New Spaces for Pedagogical Hermeneutics

The use of the past allows a better understanding of concepts, their emergence and dynamics, their reflection in educational practices, as well as current scientific methods. It can be appreciated that there is a genuine historical evolution of the notions of a field and that with the passage of time many expressions have changed their meaning, but in a symbolic sense of context, they can be used inappropriately. History allows the practice of the skills to achieve interpretations and correlations between categories of facts, ideas, realities, allowing clarification of the relationships between the development of individual thinking and that of configured temporal scientific ideas.

History helps to explain and understand the nature of research/knowledge activity, allowing the demarcation between the ideologies of some epochs, between the initiated scientific theories and the promoted school practices. Routine, the proposed models of action for imitation are critically analyzed, from the perspective of clear benchmarks in their area of theoretical foundation as well as in that which has in mind the educational practice with advantages and limits, vulnerabilities, special conditions.

Interpretation of current practices will be achieved by reference to a coherent set of theoretical models and pedagogical applications, validated or invalidated by time, or temporarily ignored for objective or subjective reasons (see Csorba, 2015, pp. 20-22).

On the basis of the same sources, representations of educational facts, accepted and proven pedagogical theories argued in educational practice can lead to more or less similar reconstructions of the past as well as reflective projections of formative, future approaches. The history of pedagogy, like the history of any field of socio-human knowledge, recognizes that the more a sentence refers to a greater chronological and geographical area, the more its theoretical character extends beyond the constraints of individual facts. The so-called "ontological spaces of the historian" (Topolski, 1987, p. 6) are thus created, being, as the framework drawn in research by one's own knowledge, attitudes, within which the research undertaken can be moved.

Both education historians and reflective teachers must build common hermeneutic spaces that allow for axiological and praxiological understanding. Of course, independent of their own hermeneutic spaces, reflexive historians and practitioners must critically question - interpretively the

universe of education, prolonging any hermeneutics in the space of solving contemporary school problems.

References

- Aries, Ph. (1995). *Timpul istoriei*. București: Editura Meridiane, București.
- Csorba, D. (2011). *Scoala activă. Paradigmă a educației moderne*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.
- Csorba, D. (2014). Recursul la trecut. O istorie deschisa spre viitor! *Revista Concept*, 8, 30-42.
- Csorba, D. (2015). Metaphor in Science Education. Implications for teacher education. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 180, 765-773.
- Csorba, D. (2015). Historical experience-principle of pedagogical reflection. *Management Intercultural*, 34, 497-502.
- Florian, M. (2002). *Experiența ca principiu de reconstrucție filosofică*. București: Editura 100+1 GRAMAR.
- Gadamer, H-G. (2001). *Adevăr și metodă*. București: Editura Teora.
- Topolski, J. (1987). *Metodologia istoriei*. Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București.