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Education in our time: competency or aptitude? The case for medicine. Part I [☆]



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Abstract This paper on the role that education plays at our time begins with a statement: to be able to understand the education's core; it is necessary to characterize its society. Distinctive features of today's world, lead us to perceive it as the ruin of civilization. Based on the limitless financial gain, education has a passive quality, responsible for maintaining the *status quo* as well as preserving the degrading attributes of actual societies: individualism, passivity, competitiveness, consumerism and high vulnerability to control and manipulation. Competency or aptitude are not synonyms; they are concepts pertaining radically different approaches to the practice and understanding of education. Competency represents the current tendency of passive education, where knowledge is just about acquiring and retaining information. Aptitude refers to participatory education, described in the second part of this essay. Passive education is present in the professional competencies model, specified in curricula, profiles, levels, school activities, evaluation, the concept of progress and social consequences. The argument is that this paradigm does not foster real progress defined as the primacy of values sustaining spiritual, intellectual and moral development- and is instead accomplice of the civilization's collapse.
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PALABRAS CLAVE

Colapso civilizatorio;
Control social;
Atributos degradantes

La educación en nuestro tiempo: ¿competencia o aptitud? El caso de la medicina. Parte II

Resumen Este ensayo (en dos partes) acerca del papel que juega la educación en nuestro tiempo inicia con una afirmación: para captar lo medular de la educación en boga, es preciso caracterizar la sociedad respectiva. Así, se identifican los rasgos distintivos del mundo actual, que llevan a definirlo como “*el agotamiento y la ruina de una civilización basada en el lucro*”

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Educación pasiva;
Conocimiento;
Competencias
profesionales

sin límites”, del cual se infiere el carácter *pasivo* de la educación “realmente existente” que mantiene el *statu quo* y preserva los *atributos degradantes* de las sociedades actuales: pasividad, individualismo, competitividad, consumismo y alta vulnerabilidad al control y la manipulación. En la disyuntiva: competencia o aptitud no son sinónimos, sino conceptos propios de enfoques radicalmente distintos de entender y practicar la educación. La *competencia* es lo actual de la *educación pasiva* basada en una idea de conocimiento como consumo, acumulación y retención de información. La *aptitud* es emblema de la *educación participativa*, motivo de la segunda parte. La *educación pasiva*, presente en el modelo educativo por *competencias profesionales*, se especifica en términos de programas, perfiles, niveles, actividades escolares, evaluación, idea de progreso y consecuencias sociales. Se argumenta que, lejos de ser palanca de progreso auténtico y primacía de los valores que sustentan la superación espiritual, intelectual y moral de la condición humana, es “cómplice” del colapso civilizatorio.

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“The hell of the living is not something to come; there is one, the one that exists here, the hell we inhabit every day (...). There are two ways of not suffering it. The first is easy for many: to accept hell and become part of it to the point of not seeing it. The second is risky and demands continuous attention and learning; to seek and recognize who and what, in the middle of hell, is not hell, and make it last and give it space.”

Ítalo Calvino (1972)

1. Introduction

This is two-part essay about the role of education in our time starts from an essential question: How is education at the historical moment in which we find ourselves? To answer this question, a journey that begins with a characterization of the path followed by modern societies is made, under a dissenting perspective of the dominant one (which proposes an unstoppable and ascending human progress), that leads to qualifying the present moment as the *exhaustion and ruin of civilization based on profits without limits*¹. It is because of this “diagnosis” that it can be inferred, with some objectivity, that the characteristics of education that actually exist (and not those that each educative tendency speaks for itself), far from being a leverage for authentic progress (based on values that sustain spiritual, intellectual and moral improvement of the human condition), have “peacefully coexisted” with the collapse of civilization.

As for the dilemma of the title between competence and aptitude, these are concepts—and not synonyms—typical of two radically different perspectives on understanding and practicing education: passive and participatory, respectively.

After arguing and characterizing the deepest and most distinctive features of the present human world that support the diagnosis of a collapse in civilization, it is possible to infer that the prevailing form of education, which maintains the *status quo* and reproduces what I call the *degrading attributes* that underlie such collapse, which justifies to name it as *passive education*, whose detailed

characterization and exemplification with *professional skills* is the main component of this first part. The aptitude, cognitively based on criticism, is the emblem of *participatory education*, whose implications at a general level and particularly in medicine, and its desideratum: authentic human progress indissociable from the care of the planetary ecosystem, are the reason for the second part.

2. Current society as a mirror of existing education

Penetrating the educational systems of today’s societies, to assess their scope and limitations, merits and demerits or strengths and weaknesses requires robust and objective criteria that cannot be based on what each program states of itself. If there is something that characterizes most of these, particularly at the higher level, is the gap between the profile of graduates, usually charged with “almost superhuman” attributes and the effective results in their professional and social performance (where these attributes are absent or hardly insinuated). Hence, the need of going beyond what is placed in the formal document of any program (a priori) and scrutinizing its social effects (a posteriori). To focus and guide this search, it will be necessary to stick to this formula: “*the distinctive features of a society in a certain historical period are the most revealing indication of the type of education that prevails.*” According to this formula, to grasp the essence of the current education, it is necessary to characterize the particular society. In a globalized world ruled by the economic politics of the unrestricted opening of markets, financial deregulation, flexibility in labor contracting, and information and communication technologies², it is necessary, as a starting point, to identify the most *profound and distinctive features* which mark the societies and states of our time in many different ways, and infer and value prevailing education, with its infinity of variants and manifestations. Therefore, by giving priority to some features over others in this identification, a *dissident interpretation* is used with the so-called “negative

globalization”³, where the most significant and revealing features are different or contrary to what the dominant ideas hold and the deceptive appearances made by “*the mass media of manipulation*.”

2.1. The civilizational bankruptcy

To understand the present times, it must first be recognized that *ethnocentrism*—inherent to the human condition in its inextinguishable desires to dominate—now embodies a political-economic order imposed by the hegemonic power (the United States), its allies, partners and institutions (International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB), World Trade Organization (WTO), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which nullifies the effectiveness of politics within States as an option for the improvement of the living conditions of the majorities⁴. This makes redundant growing sectors of the population. Under this context, three features of the human world stand out as the most universal, rooted, and distinctive to capture the historical moment that we live:

- 1) The “supreme value” of human life is, more than ever, unlimited profit and gain at all costs; anything which does not contribute to profitable businesses, it languishes, tends to disappear or is not feasible
- 2) Human dignity is now a devaluated commodity to the point of becoming disposable
- 3) Real or *imaginary consumerism* of goods is “the universal identity card,” by action or omission, key support of the economic order and emblem of degradation

This triad underlies to the evident features that characterize, with many variants and expressions, the social movement of the modern nations, accentuated in an overwhelmed world by an unstoppable overpopulation:

- *Irrevocable social exclusion* grows in the broad strata of the population due to the irreversible contraction of the labor and inequality, which deepens poverty, marginalization and forced migration
- Working conditions are increasingly precarious, unstable, uncertain, insecure, stressful, and deprived of rights
- Slavery, formally abolished, returns under new coercive forms of intensive exploitation in the “fortunate” who enter the labor market
- In the labor horizon for the new generations, uncertainty, underemployment, transiency, unemployment, and discarding stand out
- The welfare state, submitted and dismantled by the neoliberal onslaught and the institutions of global control at its service, leave the precariousness and helplessness of the majority
- The governments, on the pretext of greater security, restrict and further constrain freedom, and use technologies to spy and watch over citizens, nullifying intimacy, privacy and infusing mistrust and fear
- Existing conditions of the majority are adverse for forms of life that are dignified, stable, satisfactory, serene, and fraternal or solidarity

- Systemic corruption interlaced with crime is universalized, and it is diversified under the impunity protection, degrading the institutions at all hierarchical levels, from the local to the international scale
- Abuse and dispossession of the strong over the weak persists, and projects and emancipation claims, autonomy or independence of ancestrally subjugated populations are destroyed
- Wars are diversified and masked (asymmetrical, of low intensity) as “means of negotiation” to perpetrate remains, impose economic, political or discouragement interests, elimination or extermination of the submitted or adversaries of hegemonic power, with its catastrophic consequences
- Terrorism, the “side effect” of the western warfare (mercenaries and fanatics recruited for the “dirty work” to frighten and weaken the enemy), gets out of control as a resource for the “weak” to perpetrate unheard atrocities as revenge for grievances and ancestral humiliations or at the service of the interests of the “strong” to undermine submitted regimes, submerging defenseless populations into fear, insecurity, and despair
- The humanitarian tragedy of internal and external migration, forced by hunger, precariousness, exclusion, dispossession, war or terror, spreads and grows
- “The civilization of excesses and waste” that contaminates air, water, and soil in all corners of the planet, decimating the vitality of living beings. Along with the toxins that are applied to the plants and animals of consumption for the sake of the productivity, they poison quietly and inexorably
- The devastation of ecosystems (caused by extractive industries, urbanization, large-scale monocultures, hydroelectric plants) is growing, extinguishing forms of life, and forcing the migration of native people and weakens the regulatory processes of “mother earth” (background curtain of global warming)⁵
- Global warming, irreversible and progressive⁶, so-called anthropogenic (the fossil energy corporations, mainly responsible, still lobby to deny it), which alarms and mobilizes groups and communities, is the effect of a predatory, insatiable, implacable and criminal model of accumulation that seriously compromises the viability of planetary life and, in particular, the human one!
- To this count, an intangible (from the imaginary of the people) can be added: the *faith* in progress symbolized by the incessant advance of science and technology, which implies the *control of the consciences* derived from the certainty of a better future. By generating trust, it favors conformism and resignation to an ever more adverse present. This faith, by obscuring the understanding, *conceals* the logic of technological development in our time: responding *primarily* to the interests of profitability and operating *mainly* as a device to control consciences and bodies to the service of power and domination. Hence, the development of greater and more dynamic economic and political priorities: the military, spacial, computer, medical or information and communication technologies (ICT). It also gives rise to *illusory expectations* of the scientific knowledge, the most recognized and influential in the lives of populations and the main depository of their hopes for a promising future, turned into a mirage of

progress because, by reducing itself more and more to the role of input of the technological innovation, it has been subordinated to the logic that underlies the technological development that has distorted it in its critical, creative and liberating potential, transmuting itself—almost always behind the backs of scientist—as an ally of domination and an instrument of social control⁷.

It is clear that this outlook of the public domain is perceived in different ways and with variable sensibility by the populations, mostly because of their location in the framework of social, economic and political relations, and the degree of mediation they have been subjected by different means of control and manipulation.

For a few residents in their comfort zone, it is about “matters of others that do not compete with me, that is life.” For the vast majority, used to a fragmentary world, some traits are worrying, pressing or even unbearable because they are close or experienced in their own flesh, and are cause of suffering, restlessness, discomfort, resignation, protest, resistance, rebellion, escapism or forced migration; others are judged as aliens, distant or even perceived. For others, “the world dislikes me, but there is nothing that can be done” or “it is time to organize and act,” and for some others, “to live is incredible.” For my part, I interpret an inhospitable historical stage of absolute insecurity and uncertainty⁸, misplaced by values in the forms of being, acting and coexisting of societies and empty of the real existential meaning, that justifies and grounds a diagnosis that I judge unavoidable: “Our world plagued by an absolute degradation is evidence of the exhaustion and ruin of a civilization based on unlimited profit, which has turn into merchandise the most sublime and most fragile of the human condition, and profitable the worst atrocities and planetary devastation”⁹.

I pose ruin and not civilization crisis because we witness the social collapse of the spiritual and moral values of the human condition; that is to say, degradation has been anchored in the most hidden of subjectivities, where it perpetuates itself to extremes unpublished by its global character and, because by force of habit, and it is not even perceived as such! As for the material living conditions increasingly precarious, full of uncertainty and insecurity, as the laceration and the only recognizable aspect of degradation—the poor, the usual victims—conceal the background: the “normalized” ways of being, of the motives to act and of the forms of coexistence, in the social and global.

It is evident that the diagnosis of civilizational collapse is opposed to the interpretation spread by the mass media of global control: “We have reached the age of knowledge societies”, headed by the self-appointed advanced democracies that, according to this, manage the technologies for progress and the achievement of superior forms of coexistence, respect and guarantee of human and social rights on a universal scale (I ask this question: what knowledge is spoken that coexists, is indifferent or covert civilizational sinking? to answer it later). Such an idyllic insight inculcated in the minds of the vulnerable recipient (the vast majority) reveals the enormous effectiveness of the control of consciousness and bodies that operate the mass media of persuasion and manipulation in the service of domination on a global scale. In Malcolm X’s words: “If you are not wary of

the media, they will make you love the oppressor and hate the oppressed.”

The quasi-omnipotent means of control, with the effect of excluding dissenting discourses (which multiply and come to light despite everything), make one believe in an inexorable reality, where collapse is “only an obligatory phase, painful and transient of our ascending path to progress”. This slogan “masks” the degradation and conceals its root: the political and economic order that prevails at the global level. The foregoing forces us to consider: what makes the populations, even of dominant societies with high levels of schooling, so insensitive, “blind” and vulnerable to control and manipulation, to the degree of showing collective attitudes and actions that can only be interpreted, in the light of collapse, as mostly permissive, omissions or submissive with an unjust order that harms them so badly?

3. Predominant education

The answer to that question, reversing the proposed formula, must be sought in the characteristics of education that prevails in present societies, where the immense multiplicity of educational systems, in their apparent diversity, that self-qualify progressive, innovative and better than their competitors, in the background are comparable by the type of graduate that is inferred from social and professional performance, with accommodating and symptomatic characters with degradation (epigraph) or indolent and submissive with the forces that underlie civilizing collapse. Within these characters that the school contributes to reproduce, that are “breathed” in today’s dense social atmospheres and constitute a kind of *ethos* of the current human condition, the following stand out:

- *Passivity* to the excesses and abuses of manifest power in submission to domination and control
- *Individualism*, or “each his own, and every man for himself”, which leads to taking distance from collective interests and their claims, or to indifference to events that occur beyond the near circle, even shaking the collective consciousness
- *Competitiveness* that favors relations of rivalry and exacerbates *the will to dominate* with its aftermath: oppression, inequality, and exclusion.
- *Consumerism*, real or imaginary, that sustains an economic model that devastates the planet, supplants and adulterates intersubjective bonds and controls the desires of people by inducing, channeling, and realizing them through the market of all kinds of satisfaction.
- *Vulnerability* for all the matters that escape to understanding (the cognitive interest restricted to the working place), anchored in a hyper-specialized and reductionist formation.^a

^a The reductionist hyper-specialization, which I call *exclusionary specialization*, generates cognitive disinterest in the specialist for the historical and social context where he had to live, his work is cognitively restricted to his specialty and disregards, as such, from what surrounds him, whether it be the near circle or events that shake and affect him.

I designate *degrading attributes* to these characters because they underlie blindness, insensitivity, indifference, and complicity, with the degradation that penetrates everything, and the social permissiveness with the unbridled mood of profit that almost finds no obstacles and resistances to make their interests and lead to the most extreme, destructive and fatal consequences.

To understand the universal validity of this type of education that contributes to the social reproduction of degrading attributes, it is necessary to go back to the past, when the division of labor dissociated the production from the use of knowledge. Therefore, scientists, or their equivalents in other cultures or times, assumed the social order to generate it, and the school has delegated the role of safeguarding, accumulating, ordering, systematizing, and transmitting knowledge. Since remote times, schoolwork was forced to equate information with knowledge and to favor in the learner's receptive, acquiescent, cumulative, dogmatic, and uncritical attitudes with "the established truths." The school has based its action on an idea of knowledge as consumption, *accumulation, and retention of information*, with variants and nuances according to the education system in question. This is the reason—epistemological—that justifies the designation of prevailing education as passive, because the role of the student, far from being a participant in the generation of knowledge and protagonist of his time, is that of spectator-consumer¹⁰.

This passivity makes the school "harmless" and irrelevant to the powerful forces that conform the subjectivities of our time and condemns it against its ideals, aspirations, and expectations, to perpetuate the *degrading*

attributes and rarefied atmospheres where bankruptcy civilizing nests. From the above, it follows that any pretension to change schools—in order to distance oneself from degradation and contribute to the spiritual, intellectual and moral progress of societies—requires a new foundation over other *epistemological bases*, where learners develop their *inherent cognitive potentialities*, based on criticism, to lead them to an enlightened conscience of themselves and the world they inhabit.

In order to characterize the *passive education*, it is necessary to clarify its epistemological basis, and for this purpose, the best way is to contrast the two typologies that have been proposed to understand education¹¹, whose differential characteristics obey to theories of knowledge (referred to the scholar environment) diametrically different: the *passive*, universally valid, that assigns the student a role of spectator-consumer-accumulator of knowledge, and the *participative*, of almost clandestine presence, based on criticism, where the student is the protagonist in the development of his own knowledge. Both theories are confronted at various points (Table 1) to characterize them reciprocally and illustrate their differences¹².

About what is involved in epistemology, *participatory education* is a deal in part II of the essay. It now stands out that knowledge, according to the *passive* theory, is referred to the question that remained pending, since it coexists, is indifferent or concealer of civilizing ruin. This idea of knowledge led to its ultimate logical consequences in the educative scope, will allow me to identify and precise the distinctive characters of the *passive education* (PE) in different aspects: programs, profiles, levels, school activities,

Table 1 Differences between knowledge theories.

Passive	Participative
Generating knowledge is the power of scientists in the various fields of knowledge	Generating knowledge is inherent to the human condition, which has been inhibited or denied secularly
The information on facts or theories is comparable to knowledge	The information is "raw material" that only when criticized can become knowledge
To know is, in essence, to be aware of the current of the different disciplines using the recognized sources	To know is fundamentally to deepen in self-understanding and the context
The verisimilitude of information is based on the recognition of the experts in each field	The verisimilitude of information lies in "surviving" to an increasingly acute and penetrating criticism
Knowledge is an external good accessible to any subject that can acquire it	Knowledge is an elaboration of the subject resulting from the critical reflection on the vital experience
The act of knowing is dependent on the capacity of consumption and accumulation of the subject	The act of knowing is reliant on the elaboration power of the subject using criticism
The process of knowledge consists of understanding, accumulating and retaining the relevant information of each subject	The process of knowledge consists of reflecting the life experience, criticizing the related information and elaborating own points of view
Every effective cognitive act involves separating intellect (objectivity) from affectivity (subjectivity)	The condition of all authentic cognitive act is the integration of affectivity and intellect (reflection of life experience)
The driving force of cognition is an attentive and disciplined intellect	The affectivity that arouses the object of knowledge (interest, inclination, passion) is the driving force of cognition
Authentic situations of knowledge, occur outside the classroom, are owed by specialists in artificial and controlled spaces (experiments)	The cases of genuine knowledge arise when the reflexive experience of the subject has learned to exercise critical in depth

evaluation, and the idea of progress or social consequences. As these characters are generic, they do not refer strictly to concrete and specific situations; however, as can be appreciated, the vast multiplicity of the present educational systems manifests, in his action and its effects, with infinite forms, variants, intensities, and nuances, the presence of good part of such characters^{13,14}.

3.1. Passive education

The life experience (LE) comprises the affectionate experiences that arise in the peculiar interactions of each person with the objects that are significant to him: the self (conflicts, restlessness, curiosities), close or attracting people. Other living things, diverse, material and symbolic things. Activities, events or spectacles of all kinds, or unexpected and shocking situations (the affective quality of the experiences varies according to the geographic, social, economic and cultural circumstances of the subject, and their age)¹⁵. The LE, as the axis of reflection and cognition, is excluded from the plans, curricula, and school activities in the PE; such absence—the root of passivity before knowledge—is the greatest obstacle for the learner to enter through a path alternative to that of social reproduction of degrading attributes. This discard of LE in the PE means that affectivity—the motor of action—manifests that what interests, attracts, moves, worries, attracts attention or awakens the curiosity of students is deliberately silenced or denied in the classroom, which in turn minimizes or nullifies the possibility of awakening the motivation (passion) for the knowledge. Instead, the student is introduced by a heteronomous path that does not allow him to the understanding of himself or the world in which he lives in or helps him to raise awareness of his facilitations, inhibitions, limitations, scope, inclinations, potentialities, uncertainties, fears or dissatisfactions that mold their way of being and acting, nor does it realize the benefits and possibilities of collective and synergistic action in the effective achievement of shared goals and objectives (individualism). Under PE, graduates, having insensibly internalized degrading attributes, the ethos of today's societies, are forced to accommodate adverse and precarious working circumstances or be excluded. The distinguishing characteristics of the PE¹⁶ are as follows:

- a) The topics of study dissociated or out of phase of the LE are often meaningless for what interests, stirs, worries or arouses the curiosity of learners. Herein lies the most powerful reason for dropping out
- b) By reducing the cognitive act to consumption and memory of information, the cognitive potentialities inherent to every subject are numbed
- c) The main "cognitive power" encouraged, particularly at the basic level, is the memory of ideas and facts disconnected and meaningless! That is a learning fleeting and irrelevant to the lives of learners
- d) Dissociation of theory and practice at all levels of education, academic subjects on the one hand and practices on the other, attempting an illusory linkage starting from theory—which has preeminence—favors dogmatism and the deployment of impoverished experiences, bounded and stereotyped
- e) It discourages or nullifies the desire for knowledge represented by the subjects to be studied, mostly unrelated and meaningless, which must be remembered under penalty of disparagement or exclusion
- f) The student's role is to obtain, consume, accumulate, systematize, remember and apply the knowledge generated by others (the obvious truths). In these circumstances, the criticism of the information is conspicuous
- g) The traditional role of the teacher, effective transmitter of knowledge (the didactic of the information teaching) now, with the presence of ICT, is the advisor in the search and the trainer in the acquisition of knowledge (the knowledge reduced to information)
- h) By propitiate tacit and uncritical acceptance of established truths, it encourages, at best, a reading consumerism that is counteracting the vulnerability to manipulation of which the graduates are imprisoned
- i) The school environment [tasks, work report, learning priorities or performance requirements (memory)] promotes passivity (before knowledge), individualism, competition and the uncritical consumption of information
- j) The idea of progress is instrumental (availability of ICT) that facilitates distance education (the face-to-face is expensive), where the face-to-face relationship is dispensable; allows to obtain new instantaneous information for greater consumption and accumulation, and to have channels of communication and diffusion without limit (consumerism)
- k) The evaluation, when operating mainly as a means of control, classification, censorship or exclusion, raises negative feelings and attitudes of rejection that detract from their contribution to learning (self-criticism a contradiction)
- l) The graduates are carrier subjects with degrading attributes: passive, individualistic, competitive, consumerist and manipulative, with important projects of "each his own, and every man for himself."
- m) Its result is the exclusionary specialization, the current form of division of labor where the specialist, prey to reductionism: "what is important is to be aware of the novelties of the field of activity, the rest is flour of another bag", does not develops cognitive interests about himself and the world he has to live in, he is the victim of manipulation for all the issues that he does not understand and oblivious to the collective causes
- n) The vision of the world of the graduates is fragmentary that prevents them from capturing events that shake the collective conscience and depend on the "experts" of each field; it immerses them in a world full of uncertainty and insecurity and generates an aversion to complex and integrative thinking
- o) Graduates reproduce the degrading attributes that characterize current societies, where inequality and planetary devastation deepen and civilization collapses

It is reiterated that the forms of expression of the PE vary enormously; as it ascends in the hierarchy of levels, tend to be less ostensible, more inconsistent, attenuated

or disguised, which does not mean that they move away from passivity because the idea of knowledge involved in the educational process remains. Besides, it is necessary to clarify that the “goodness of the school” is often attributed to certain professional and personal achievements without realizing that it is usually a personal effort to develop inclinations, potentialities, and qualities in different places to the school and frequently, “despite the school.”

3.2. Professional skills

With respect to education by *professional competences* that represents the most generalized educational model, the first thing to consider is that its acceptance and popularity does not derive, as is often claimed, from a supposed superiority over other models that preceded it or are contemporary, but from its origins: the entrepreneurial power that in these times implants and renews forms of exploitation without restrictions (slavery variants, which are applicable qualifiers in several of these cases) that result in greater productivity and efficiency of work, raise the competitiveness of corporations in the fierce struggle for the control of the markets and the achievement of increasing rates of profit, and that now ventures openly and without modesty in the actions of the school.

The intromission without bluntness of the entrepreneurial arrogance in the school space, in order to demand an educational configuration according to their interests, coincides with the rise of the economic neoliberalism that gained momentum and took shape in the deregulation of markets and financial activities; in the offensive against the work weakling or annulling legislations and labor rights fruit of historical struggles; in the progressive dismantling of the states, of welfare with the consequent accelerated privatization of social services¹⁷. This system spread on a global scale starting the eighty-decade, incorporating the economies of the subordinate countries into their sphere of influence, facilitating their spoliation. Since then, the education based on *professional competencies* has experienced a decisive impulse and a growing penetration, by introducing itself as a transcendental step towards the progress of education in its various modalities and levels, which tends to become universal^{18,19}.

Regarding our environment, in order to locate the current situation in context, it is necessary to go back to the 1917 Constitution and recognize that a country project was launched considered its ethnic and cultural diversity, which sought to strengthen its identity, independence, and sovereignty, and to approach to an equal and just society; however, state authoritarianism drowned social participation in its role as an inspector of acts of government—the root of impunity—which was the breeding ground enriched with rampant and contagious corruption in the ways that institutions operate. This situation, along to a progressive governmental commitment to continental hegemonic power (in collusion with dependent domestic enterprises), resulted in the abandonment of the project for decades. This claudication to the economic and political interests that now rule the planet, also manifested itself in relation to the national educational project that arose with J. Vasconcelos,

who defined a path of his own, which was discontinued and gradually lost its course, became blurred, and increasingly incongruous, erratic and dependent, permeated by corruption and political control. Thus, the changes imposed on the school obeyed the dictates of the outside evidencing that our condition of “colony” has never disappeared. In these times of deep decomposition of the educational system, the inclination to overestimate what comes from outside and to disesteem or ignore what emerges from its bowels (forced historical simplification due to space) is notorious.

It is derived from the above, that the official education system has incorporated almost indiscriminately novelties from abroad or, rather, has prepared the official curricula, following the foreign educational styles of the moment. Emphasis is made on preparing because, in the case of adoptions—not of own initiatives in response to identified problems—supposedly adapted, followed by their imposition and improvised and vertical implementation, when colliding with the customs and habits of both teachers and students, Generates resistance and its supposed implantation is usually a fiction that creates the illusion that things changed because they are now called otherwise.^b

They are emblematic cases of these impositions of the fashions in turn: behaviorism and “objectivitis,” constructivism and cognitivism, modular teaching, operating group, problem-based learning and now, education based on professional competences^{20–23}. To this, a symptomatic omission can be added: Paulo Freire’s “subversive” ideas^{24–26}. Nor to say of the criminal violence disengaged by an illegitimate, inept, authoritarian and corrupt government to annihilate the teaching dissidence to an imposed educational pseudo-reform that implies subordination (to the capital) and greater degradation

With the above, I am not stating that fashion, in turn, should, in principle, be discarded. In the case of the professional competences they contribute, by instance, they provide an adequate systematization of the working capacities involved in the proper performance of many professions; specifying the “know how” within certain contexts and describing in details the set of skills involved in that competence in that competence is no small thing. It is not about ignoring numerous and meritorious efforts undertaken to adapt higher-level plans and programs to this model, also incorporating others such as learning based on problems, particularly in medicine^{27,28}. However, to the adjustments and modifications of the educational programs to the fashions of the moment, it applies the above mentioned about the *gap* between the profile of the graduated student settled

^b The reason is simple: if the protagonists of the educational act, students and educators are pressured or forced to act in a way they do not know, for which they were not consulted, sensitized, convinced or initiated, the desired change can not occur even assuming good disposition. Moreover, in a system such as ours (at the basic level), where the state has degraded the teachers’ union and fought against dissident political control of their bases of support, the rarefied school environments where there is no desire to overcome and search for better ways of doing things, both authoritarian impositions and administrative and bureaucratic demands, which can not be overlapping with the committed teachers, we can anticipate destiny of the new features reflected in the programs: it will almost always be a dead letter.

in the curricula and the effective results in the professional and social performance. This is because we live a kind of “program fetishism,” and we are convinced that education is transformed by the fact of changing it. Although adaptations sometimes incorporate some methodical and procedural aspects, the emphasis is on changes in curricular content (not on the cognitive and critical strategies that students might develop in addressing those contents), whether they are expanded, updated, deleted the obsolete ones or add new ones. In this way, it is considered that the renewal of topics is what justifies and makes it possible to achieve the desired profiles of the graduated by the new attributes that will characterize it: “progressive”, “avant-garde”, “convincing”, “updated to the new times”, “respond to market needs”, “dress and sell well”, “they are in fashion” or “can not be left out”, which in the current situation, could only be presented as an act of illusionism.

One problem with fetishism is that “*theory inform, but does not form*” and, therefore, the intended attributes are often unattainable, due that the core of the formative process of the citizens of our times is not in the passive school (tending to social relevance, displaced by the ICTs), but in the social environment where the events framed by the *degrading attributes* in a globalized world precipitate us to civilization collapse. Let us see some examples of “qualities of the graduate” raised in programs of the model by *competencies: The capacity of critical thinking*, incompatible with such modality that assumes established truths, in societies “anesthetized” using persuasion and manipulation. *The ethical commitment*—desirable in all citizens—that can only arise from the ways of being and living from the example of significant people in this regard; that is to say, is largely unviable in a time marketed to the extreme where corruption, where corruption wins, simulation and human dignity is only a devaluated merchandise.

The ability to generate new ideas, inaccessible in an educational model that gives priority to the technical skills of competences in the interests of productivity and the efficiency, with the aggravating of a historical context of societies subjected to the control of minds and bodies.

If we now consider the epistemology of *professional competences*, we can see its affinity with the EPS, since the idea of tacit knowledge is consumption, accumulation and the retention of information, from which we derive the following:

- a) The *gap* between the profile of the graduated (non-viable) and its professional and social performance framed by the *degrading attributes*
- b) To ignore, reject or misunderstand *criticism* as a key instrument for participation in knowledge and professional improvement (part II)
- c) Emphasis on the skills to be developed: the mastery of the means and technical procedures (not of the cognitive powers)
- d) Your desideratum, turn the novice into an expert
- e) That congenial with individualism, competition, and consumerism
- f) That is a prominent representative of the *exclusive specialization* that makes professionals vulnerable to manipulation and is the root of social passivity before the abuses of power and domination

It should not be forgotten *that professional competences*, covered with the aura of educational progress and adorned with “pedagogical and humanistic” attributes that are strictly collateral or foreign, are a result of the unrestricted intrusion in the scholar environment, of the business interests in their attempt to intensify the exploitation of labor (euphemisms such as “productivity and efficiency” are used), in order to satisfy the perpetual need for greater profitability and competitiveness of companies. In this self-styled “avant-garde” or from the twenty-first-century education, “its original meaning and reason to be can not be hidden: to turn the school into an efficient factory of qualified, versatile, uncritical, docile, subjected, market tempting and, above all, disposable as it may be convenient workforce. If, as educators, we aspire to another possible, hospitable and inclusive world, we must not continue in the path that has lead us to the collapse of civilization; from there the need to realize that the model based on *professional competences* is not the path to the social progress, it represents the renewed, updated, camouflaged and deceptive face of passive education that contributes—by omission or commission—to the social reproduction of the *degrading attributes*, operating as a conveyor belt of the machinery of power in its pretensions to maintain the *status quo*.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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