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PEDAGOGICAL UTOPIA THROUGH THE CLASSICS

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ABSTRACT

This contribution takes a look at the close link that is created in the educational setting between the classics of the history of education and the promotion of pedagogical utopia, in the sense of a constant generative tension towards what is possible and what is "not yet." After disambiguating the concept of utopia, starting from the reference theories, we use an interpretative key to outline and analyze the value of teaching the history of educational thought, also as proposed in the classic works that metaphorically embody the founding characteristics of the very concept of education. Then the development of a pedagogical utopia is associated both with its capacity to solicit a projective and emancipatory thought, and with the ethical and political dimension intrinsic in the educational professional. As a process that affects the domains of existence and experience, it seems to be not only inseparably related to the educational function of the history of pedagogical ideas, but also a driving force for new experiences, new thinking on education, and a different future for education.

KEYWORDS: classics in the history of education; history of educational ideas; utopia; educational studies and utopia; classics and teacher training

1. UTOPIA AS A PEDAGOGICAL TENSION. IDEAS AND THE CLASSICS

The category of utopia is a characteristic of the meta-educational nature of the history of education. In the world of teaching, it seems impossible to speak of education without hinting at (and nurturing in students) that constant "tension towards" that animates the educational professionals, promoting a perception of the job of educator as a pathway that is always *in fieri*. In other words, it is the development of that utopian thought that enriches research on the history of education when it is envisaged as a propensity to imagine different scenarios.

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It seems appropriate to start by clarifying how the term "utopia" is used here, which is not in the etymological meaning generally attributed to it of a "non-existent place", from the Greek *οὐ-* (u-) and *τόπος* (tòpos), which literally means "non-place". As Cosimo Quarta – the Apulian philosopher and academic – pointed out, Thomas More's preference for the word "utopia" over "eutopia" (which means a "good place") led him to coin a neologism wherein:

> the ou-topia, the critical thought [*"critical" being used here in its negative sense – Author's note*], the negative is not for its own sake. For it not to be sterile, it must necessarily be connected to the 'positive', and give rise to a project for a 'good society'. In short, if the starting point is 'ou-topia', the arrival point must be 'eu-topia'[1].

In expressing the richness and complexity of More's thinking, this choice also explains what is simply defined in modern pedagogy as a "utopian thought" or "phenomenon". This is because the humanist needed a term capable of grasping and effectively expressing the two fundamental aspects of utopian thought – the deconstructing (negative) moment and the planning (positive and proactive) moment – thanks to the dual meaning of that initial "u". It can be interpreted either as a transliteration of the Greek negative "ou" (non), or as an apheresis of the prefix "eu", which carries a positive meaning (well, good)[2].

The purpose of this very brief incursion into the realms of philology is to clarify how appropriate it is to use the term "utopia" in the extended meaning it has acquired in educational discourse, where utopia *is* to all intents and purposes a "place". Better still, it is a spatial dimension in which thought can expand, a very particular category involving movement towards, a hope, a project, an aspiration, something in the making. It is precisely this passage in More from the "not" to the possible, from a "non-place" to a "good place" that identifies the pedagogical tension as an essential "emancipating anthropological vocation"[3].

There is a similarity with that idea of a possible utopia that Giovanni Maria Bertin describes, starting from Lefebvre's reflections. Bertin conceives utopia as a "possible tomorrow", referring to possible transformative conditions already taking effect in the present, but that will take more time to

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[1] C. Quarta, "Utopia: genesi di una parola-chiave", *Idee* 42 (1999): 41. See also under the item "utopia" in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas.* Vol. IV, ed. P.P. Wiener (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 458.

[2] Cf. C. Quarta, "Utopia: genesi di una parola-chiave", 42.

[3] F. Cambi, *Il congegno del discorso pedagogico. Metateoria ermeneutica e modernità* (Bologna: Cleub, 1986), 178.

complete[4]. As Maurizio Fabbri and Tiziana Pironi – who edited a recent publication on the education theorist of pedagogical problematicism – point out, this is a far cry from the idea of utopia as a non-place.

The second aspect to clarify before we begin concerns how the idea of utopia, *tout court*, is interpreted here when we define it as a tension that moves from the thought to the thinkable, from the experienced to the possible, a projection that enables us to perceive the educational work as a journey along a path that is never-ending, but always adjustable and improvable. It is in this journey that we return to the idea of utopian realism or real utopia.

In the definition of "utopian realism" proposed by Edward H. Carr, realism serves to correct the naivety and exuberance of utopianism, while utopianism serves to correct the sterility and cynicism of realism[5]. Because mature thought combines the ideal aim or goal (the utopian model) with observation and analysis (realist theories), utopia and reality can be seen as two sides of every human science, and as complementary categories at the same time. To paraphrase again from Bertin, it is only where we have both that there can be space for a well-founded thought capable of guiding experience.

Darren Webb – a scholar of the theory and philosophy of education – recently noted that Anthony Giddens and Erik Olin Wright both return to the famous British historian's thought, sometimes along similar lines and fifty years after Carr[6]. In referring to international policies after the fall of the Berlin wall, Giddens says there was a need for a new injection of utopianism, but it had to focus on real opportunities for change[7]. A few years later, Wright returns to Carr's characterization, distinguishing between the "purely utopian thinking" of utopias as fantasies or morally-inspired images of a society, unconstrained by any realistic analysis of its feasibility[8], and the "real utopias" that humanity has the real potential to achieve[9]. Darren Webb ar-

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[4] Cf. M. Fabbri, and T. Pironi, "L'educazione fra possibilità e utopia", in *Educare alla ricerca. Giovanni Maria Bertin precursore del pensiero della complessità*, eds. M. Fabbri, and T. Pironi (Roma: Studium, 2020), 209.

[5] Cf. E.H. Carr, *Utopia e realtà. Un'introduzione allo studio della politica internazionale*, trans. M. Mancini (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2009), 23-28.

[6] Cf. D. Webb, "Educational Studies and the Domestication of Utopia", *British Journal of Educational Studies* 64, N. 4 (2016): 432-434. See also D. Webb, "Where's the vision? The concept of utopia in contemporary educational theory", *Oxford Review of Education* 35, N. 6 (2009): 743-760.

[7] Cf. A. Giddens, "Modernity and utopia", *New Statesman and Society* 3, N. 125 (1990): 21-22.

[8] Cf. E.O. Wright, "The real utopias project", in *Associations and Democracy. The Real Utopias Project I*, ed. E.O. Wright (London: Verso, 1995), IX.

[9] Cf. E.O. Wright, "The real utopias project", IX; see also E.O. Wright, *Envisioning Real*

gues that a realistic utopianism should therefore be founded on existing tendencies, processes and orientations, but instead of conforming to a single utopian model, it should be restricted to specific elaborations of a radical utopian imagination in localized contexts[10].

Applying these very briefly outlined considerations to the history of education, it seems that a similar view of utopia could be congenial to the *logos* of the discipline, as it resembles a journey of exploration[11] where our attention is not on the final destination, but on processes and attitudes. As Mark Coté and his coworkers put it, "we look to utopia not as a place we might reach but as an ongoing process of becoming"[12].

So promoting the idea of a genuine and pedagogically well-founded utopian realism through the use of the classics in teaching the history of education at university gives future educators and teachers a precious opportunity to embark on a critical and problematizing process in which to negotiate and discuss the tacitly-accepted logic or principles lying behind certain radical forms of practice, and to formulate new views[13].

Looking at Italy's history of education, as Giovanni Genovesi and Tina Tomasi explain in their *L'educazione nel paese che non c'è. Storia delle idee e delle istituzioni educative in utopia*[14] [Education in Neverland. History of ideas and educational institutions in utopia], there is a strong emphasis on the utopian dimension in historical research on education. Outlining the ideas contained in the above-mentioned volume, Genovesi writes:

> Utopia is characterized […] by a mindful comparison between the current situation and a future one that is the same inasmuch as it develops from the former, but not the same because the inherent antithesis between praxis and awareness is reduced. This is thanks to the fact that the human operators involved want it to be reduced, and tend to want this more and more, as they have understood the nature of it, and they understand that it is feasible to pursue this goal. But this can be done in the course of time, not by escaping from time. If it is a human possibility, it is a historical possibility. Human time is a

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Utopias (London: Verso, 2010), 21.

[10] In the paper quoted here, Webb also proposes some examples of how realistic utopias have become a method and practice in several educational projects, of which he outlines the most salient features; for further details see D. Webb, "Educational Studies and the Domestication of Utopia", 431-448 in particular 432-434.

[11] Cf. E.O. Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, 246.

[12] M. Coté, R. Day, and G. De Peuter, "Introduction: what is utopian pedagogy?", in *Utopian Pedagogy*, eds. M. Coté, R. Day, and G. De Peuter (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 13.

[13] Cf. D. Webb, "Educational Studies and the Domestication of Utopia", 443-444.

[14] G. Genovesi, and T. Tomasi Ventura, *L'educazione nel paese che non c'è. Storia delle idee e delle istituzioni educative in utopia* (Napoli: Liguori, 1985).

historical time. The synthesis between awareness and practice is a reality that is constantly becoming real[15].

The fundamental aspect, that Genovesi points out in relation to the utopian dimension in historiographic activity, concerns the very foundations of the history of education as a discipline. We dig into the past to find the roots of the present and the ideas for the future. It is easy to guess that the classics of pedagogy and education have an important role here because they contain theoretical reflections and practical educational experiences that are rooted in history. An awareness of their essential place in time and space becomes a driver for change in a fruitful emphasis on their utopian dimension[16].

The utopian charge of the classics of education and pedagogy thus nourishes and develops goals and means that become the stimulus and the yeast of the historical transformation of educational thought and practices. In every historically-given innovation in education and teaching institutions, we can find the "yeast" of utopia, the stimulus and the foundations on which to build a new educational and pedagogical thinking that focuses on new "humanly desirable"[17] developments.

To use a definition that echoes the thought of Ernst Bloch, the pedagogical utopia achievable through the classics is a way of looking at the world transparently and grasping what is novel[18], what has yet to come about, but might be. In the classics, we can feel the driving force behind education. There is always a utopian charge when we speak of education, just as there is always an educational project when we speak of utopia[19].

As the thought governing the action and the "engine that transforms reality"[20], the promotion of the category of utopia – and of the imagination as a projection of utopia – becomes a fundamental element in teaching the history of educational ideas in the academic world. It is contained in the inseparable relationship that it has with any pedagogical topic, and thus with the classics of education and the history of educational thought.

Like Freire's "possible novelty", with its inherent faith in the possible dream and the utopia to come – not yet clearly known and experienced, but

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[15] G. Genovesi, "Ideologia, utopia e ricerca storico-educativa", in *I silenzi dell'educazione. Studi storico-pedagogici in onore di Tina Tomasi*, eds. F. Cambi, and S. Ulivieri (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1994), 147.

[16] Cf. G. Genovesi, "Ideologia, utopia e ricerca storico-educativa", 150.

[17] G. Genovesi, "Ideologia, utopia e ricerca storico-educativa", 152.

[18] Cf. E. Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (*München*-Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1918).

[19] Cf. G. Genovesi, "Ideologia, utopia e ricerca storico-educativa", 150.

[20] C. Callegari, "La dimensione storica in Educazione comparata ieri ed oggi", in *L'educazione comparata tra storia ed etnografia*, ed. C. Callegari (Roma: Anicia, 2016), 63.

already dreamed of[21] – hope is the soul of education. Future teachers and educators need to have a profound understanding of the past and present reality on which to build their thinking about possible novelty, hope, and a realistic utopia.

2. PROMOTING PEDAGOGICAL UTOPIA THROUGH THE CLASSICS

The teaching of the history of education traditionally relied on the use of models, presented as exemplary educational practices from which to draw inspiration, or as pathways to follow. The great renewal of the discipline between the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s also triggered a reappraisal of the educational use of such tools, content and methods. Becchi, Genovesi and Tomasi, among others, underscored the obsolescence of such a rhetorical approach to teaching, especially in relation to the use of manuals. They saw the perfect, imitative and ideological model in decline, and a gradual shift towards a "rational" model that attracts but is also thought-provoking, that becomes a regulatory ideal for guiding action and thought, rather than an example to follow unquestioningly[22].

A further change seems to be needed now, towards an idea of the classics as models that can serve as a sort of geographical map of the signs of education[23], summarizing in them past, present and future. They can provide a frame of sense that can only be operational after the user has re-examined them, not passively, but in a move to construct, co-construct and fill the models with new meanings, and sometimes implement them. Basically, we are describing an approach that sees these models as an instrument for reflexivity, for promoting critical thought. A model can be reconstrued, not as an ideal or a guideline, but as one of the possible themes, necessarily intersecting with other themes and other possibilities, and amenable to further reinterpretations and causal relations that may have yet to be hypothesized[24].

Certainly the classics are primarily a source, a fundamental element of

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[21] Cf. A.M.A. Freire, "Approfondimenti", in *Pedagogia della speranza. Un nuovo approccio a "La pedagogia degli oppressi"*, P. Freire, trans. F. Telleri (Torino: EGA, 2008), 207-209.

[22] Cf. G. Genovesi, and T. Tomasi Ventura, *L'educazione nel paese che non c'è. Storia delle idee e delle istituzioni educative in utopia*; E. Becchi, "Retorica e didattica nella storiografia manualistica", *Annali dell'Istituto Antonio Banfi* 2 (1988), 91-107.

[23] Cf. L. Bellatalla, "La Storia della Pedagogia tra dimensione concettuale e modello educativo", in *La Scienza dell'educazione: il nodo della storia*, ed. L. Bellatalla (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2006), 38.

[24] Cf. G. Fasan, "Storia della pedagogia e formazione dell'identità professionale degli insegnanti. Appunti per uno studio", in *Memorie ed Educazione. Identità, Narrazione, Diversità.* Vol. II, eds. G. Zago, S. Polenghi, and L. Agostinetto (Lecce-Rovato: Pensa Multimedia, 2020), 174-175.

any historical reconstruction, and this is especially true for the history of education. These works serve as evidence. Human existence is also the sum of countless experiences that unwind in multiple contexts, and culture – generally represented by the written text – has an undeniably important role.

Like a *Lichtung*, to echo Heidegger's words – an open space in which to stop and find comfort along the path to knowledge – the classics occupy a sort of extratemporal, latent dimension[25]. Luciana Bellatalla sees these works as representing a sort of conceptual utopia. They oblige readers to imagine themselves in another dimension, beyond time and space[26]. The particularly important and fruitful element thus seems to lie in the opportunity for these works to go beyond the boundaries of the cultural environment from which they originated[27].

Envisaged as timeless elements, with an inexhaustible charge[28] and a historical and meta-historical value[29], the classics offer future generations a content that can gradually be reinterpreted and newly understood. In a sense, these works are polysemic because those who read them do so in the light of their own times[30] and their own context. Ideas expressed in the classics often circulate and are culturally recognized even before we come into direct contact with the works themselves[31].

Outside the realms of pedagogy, the historian Francesco Pitocco suggested that a collection of essays written by the authors of the classics can be seen as an anthology of the history of the age to which they refer, but also as a compilation of historiographic techniques and methods integrated in empirical research. We can then accept the often-underestimated need to "accompany empirical knowledge of history with a thorough understanding of historical thinking", which leads us to the "discovery of the breadth and

[25] Cf. F. Cambi, "Rilettura di Classici della Pedagogia: criteri ed 'exempla'", in *I Classici della Pedagogia*, *Atti del seminario del CIRSE. Cassino, 3-4 December 1997*, eds. G. Cives, G. Genovesi, and P. Russo (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 1999), 82.

[26] Cf. L. Bellatalla, "La Storia della Pedagogia tra dimensione concettuale e modello educativo", 39.

[27] Cf. P. Levrero, "Pedagogia della storia e storia della pedagogia", in *Pedagogia della storia*, ed. P. Levrero (Genova: Il Melangolo, 2016), 25.

[28] Cf. G. Cives, "Ragioni e implicazioni dello studio dei classici della pedagogia", in *I Classici della Pedagogia*, eds. G. Cives, G. Genovesi, and P. Russo, 10.

[29] Cf. F. Cambi, "Rilettura di Classici della Pedagogia: criteri ed 'exempla'", 82; see also P. Levrero, "Pedagogia della storia e storia della pedagogia", 24-31.

[30] Cf. L. Bellatalla, "La Storia della Pedagogia tra dimensione concettuale e modello educativo", 40.

[31] Cf. L. Bellatalla, "La Storia della Pedagogia tra dimensione concettuale e modello educativo", 37-38.

intellectual freedom of historical research"[32]. When we grasp this breadth, our thoughts can move towards understanding the "ulteriority" and irreducibility[33] of these processes, refining the cultural tools that enable an in-depth and articulated interpretation of the present.

What Seveso called "ulteriority" reflects the sense of utopian tension as a continuous movement, a leap in thinking, and an operative projection. It is in this sense that the classics, by serving as a heuristic frame and dynamic contribution to the dialogue between educational theory and pedagogical practice, can promote a reflection on the historical dimension of educational thinking that expands the intellectual horizon and nurtures the orientation of day-to-day educating and teaching practice, to distinctly beneficial effect.

In 2009 Franco Cambi cleverly showed how the advent of the postmodern – intended as a post-ideological and pluralist approach based on an open-minded and flexible critical attitude – imposed new "guiding canons", though they had already existed for some time in educational research. These guiding canons relate on the one hand to "the *scientificity/scientification* of educational knowledge/action, and on the other to the *telos* of *emancipation*, with *utopian tension* as a third aspect"[34].

It is in this sense that the fundamental role of a model that unfolds in numerous canons confirms its importance today, thanks to their mobility, to the open-ended dialectic, in an educational device capable of serving as a way of educating a future community that is both dialogical and committed at one and the same time[35]. This makes it all the more important to return here to two of the characteristics that Cambi mentions. One is the *telos* of the emancipation and utopian tension. Although it is necessarily situated in a past that has been, a classic conveys an intrinsic projective value that intersects with the idea of "how things are" and "how things might be".

The Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye emphasized that the bond between the forming of utopian thought and the reading of the classics is an imaginative process. It is rooted in literature and the classics because the literary imagination envisages possibilities rather than objectives[36]. In other words, a dialogue with the classics of education and pedagogy still feels like a generative encounter, even in the passages that introduce and contribute to

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[32] F. Pitocco, "Avvertenza", in *Storia delle mentalità*, ed. F. Pitocco (Roma: Bulzoni, 2000), 9-10.

[33] Cf. G. Seveso, "Introduzione. I classici nella ricerca storico-educativa", in *Storia dell'educazione e delle pedagogie*, S. Santamaita (Milano: Mondadori, 2013), 7.

[34] F. Cambi, "Il 'canone' in pedagogia: presenza, struttura, funzione", in *Sul canone della pedagogia occidentale*, ed. F. Cambi (Roma: Carocci, 2009), 44.

[35] Cf. F. Cambi, "Il 'canone' in pedagogia: presenza, struttura, funzione", 46-47.

[36] Cf. N. Frye, *L'ostinata struttura. Saggi su critica e società*, trans. L. Terzo and A. Paschetto (Milano: Rizzoli, 1975), 116.

the construction of a solid historical understanding, because these works metaphorically embody the founding characteristics of the very concept of education[37].

The projective effect that stems from reading the classics facilitates the development of a humanizing and conscious professional expertise on genuinely pedagogical foundations. As Paulo Freire put it, moving beyond "mere" – if such an adjective could ever really be used to describe it – educational professionality in the project of a humanity receptive to the language of possibility and hope:

> Dreaming is not only a necessary political act, it is an integral part of the historical-social manner of being a person. It is part of human nature, which, within history, is in permanent process of becoming. […] There is no change without dream, as there is no dream without hope[38].

Such receptiveness can be trained and promoted, starting from the contribution of the history of educational thought and ideas that favor the creation of a confident professional presence, in the sense of an "awareness of a presence, of the peculiar way of being, and of being in the educational relationship"[39]. An awareness of our professional presence projects a professional "dream" onto ourselves, and necessarily onto our own presence, onto the educational relationship, and onto Others.

When this process is mediated, facilitated, co-signified and co-constructed with the lecturer's help, our imagination can become a pedagogically well-founded operative creativity, a historically constructed awareness. An appropriate interpretation of the classics consequently necessitates an educational mediation in an academic setting to ensure an appropriate, critical and pondered modulation of the utopian charge that it conveys. If we look at the past without referring to the conditions and characteristics of the context we are examining, we become guilty of "retrospective utopianism"[40]. Because the ideal of any particular period should not be confused with a universal norm, it is important to look at the points of rupture and discontinuity,

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[37] Cf. L. Bellatalla, "Ambito e problemi della ricerca storico-pedagogica", in *Storia della pedagogia. Questioni di metodo e momenti paradigmatici*, L. Bellatalla, and G. Genovesi (Milano: Le Monnier, 2006), 36.

[38] P. Freire, *Pedagogia della speranza. Un nuovo approccio a "La pedagogia degli oppressi"*, 96.

[39] G. Serafini, "Utilità della storia della pedagogia e dell'educazione", in *Problemi e prospettive della ricerca storico-pedagogica. A cura di S.S. Macchietti*, M. Chiaranda Zanchetta, S.S. Macchietti, and G. Serafini (Roma: Bulzoni, 1990), 112.

[40] M. Wolfenstein, "The Social Background of Taine's Philosophy of Art", in *Ideas in Cultural Perspective*, eds. P.P. Wiener, and A. Noland Rutgers (New Brunswick-New Jersey: University Press, 1962), 297.

starting from the context (both spatial and temporal) that needs to be adequately analyzed and understood.

It seems worth recalling that the "utopian realism" discussed by Darren Webb is founded on the promotion of utopian views that anticipate radical alternatives to the *status quo*. They leave the imagination free to facilitate change and well-grounded utopias[41]. Hence the generative capability of a realistic utopian thought, because a possible alternative view of society – and consequently of teaching, experience and the educational relationship – lies in its critical, imaginative and catalyzing power[42].

In the teaching of history of pedagogy at university, the way the past has been variously represented over time becomes a collective construction to add to our individual construction. Two different experiences, two different significations concur in forming that historiographic habitus that Bourdieu saw as a structuring structure[43]. As a corollary noted by Serge Tomamichel, one of the fundamental educational uses of teaching the history of education would lie in nurturing the student's ability to grasp the knowledge that studying this discipline produces, creating a decisional memory and modelling a historiographic habitus[44]. These are among the fundamental reasons why the history of education can claim to be useful to society.

This habitus intersects in a dialectical relationship with imagination and utopia, becoming an ability to think about the self. It becomes a creative activity that transforms the reality of the present and gives birth to the reality of the future – inevitably echoing the words of the Polish education theorist Bogdan Suchodolski[45]. Symbolic thoughts make room for the possible, and the capacity to give new shape to the universe – now drawing on the words of Cassirer[46]. According to Suchodolski, such an idea of utopia is character-

[41] Cf. D. Webb, "Educational Studies and the Domestication of Utopia", 431-448.

[42] Cf. R. Williams, *Towards 2000* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1983). See also G. Genovesi, "Ideologia, utopia e ricerca storico-educativa", 150.

[43] See P. Bourdieu, *Le Sens pratique* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), 88-89.

[44] Tomamichel wrote: "L'*habitus*, en tant que prédisposition à percevoir, analyser et à agir est ainsi construit par un groupe social d'appartenance dont il est en même temps le marqueur. Cela ne signifie pas, pour autant, qu'un tel schème classificatoire soit exclusivement façonné par le groupe social sans inflexion possible, notamment sous l'effet de l'éducation et la formation. C'est en ce sens que le terme d'*habitus* historiographique peut être défini, comme une prédisposition indissociablement façonnée par un héritage social et par une acculturation historiographique, à percevoir, analyser et agir en mobilisant une connaissance du passé". S. Tomamichel, "L'histoire de l'éducation confrontée à son utilité sociale: approches et perspectives systémiques", *Espacio, Tiempo y Educación* 3, N. 1 (2016): 157.

[45] Cf. B. Suchodolski*, Pedagogia dell'essenza e pedagogia dell'esistenza*, trans. U. Barbano (Roma: Armando, 1965), 109-110, 113. It is important to clarify, however, that – in the Polish education theorist's view – the reality of the future – the real educational criterion – goes beyond utopia, that he sees as unachievable.

[46] Cf. E. Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*

ized as much by the imagination as by the power that derives from it[47].

Because an education on utopian thought implies the capacity to "refuse to accept the status quo, naïve realism, and ideological and scientific dogmatism"[48], it becomes fundamentally important to pass through a critical understanding of those utopian narratives that have become classics also in the world of education. Their historical presence in the educational discourse bears witness to their being acknowledged the above-mentioned capacity: this is the case of Plato's *Republic*, Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Campanella's *City of the Sun*, More's *Utopia*, and Rousseau's *Emile*. By offering an imaginative view, their generative capacity lies more in suggesting new possibilities[49], and dismantling prejudices, than in suggesting examples or ideals that might or might not be followed.

As a corollary to these considerations, a further crucial aspect of pedagogical utopia seen through the classics seems to lie in the ethical tension that accompanies it, in proposing a better education and teacher training, guided by a solid awareness of the value of the imagination in rational procedure. This is not only a commitment to search for the real. It is also a thought experiment[50], a process for signifying this search, giving it an emotional charge[51] – the "tension" mentioned earlier or, in other words, the feeling that "everything is still possible"[52]. In educational professionals training, this may mean promoting and soliciting a professional and ethical intentionality that is partly – but clearly not only – constructed, starting from a historiographic habitus.

This passage becomes fundamental when we turn our attention to the political dimension that the educational professions have, and that needs to be taught as a tension towards political-social and political-educational im-

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(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), 133.

[47] Suchodolski wrote: "Imagination is the force by means of which the individual, alongside his everyday practical life, leads an imaginary life which becomes the starting point for creative activity that transforms the reality of the present and gives birth to the reality of the future. Thus understood, imagination is one of the driving forces capable of establishing a scientific and technological civilization which challenges the validity of natural conditions, capable, too, of introducing social justice and of creating a type of human being who, thanks to imagination, is able to lead a richer life"; in B. Suchodolski, *"Education, between Being and Having", Prospects, Quarterly Review of Education (UNESCO)* 6, N. 2 (1976): 174.

[48] R. Fornaca, *La ricerca storico-pedagogica* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1975), 4.

[49] Cf. N. Frye, *L'ostinata struttura. Saggi su critica e società*, 111 and 116.

[50] Cf. D. Halpin, "Utopianism and Education: The Legacy of Thomas More", *British Journal of Educational Studies* 49, N. 3 (2001): 309.

[51] Cf. G. Genovesi, and T. Tomasi Ventura, *L'educazione nel paese che non c'è. Storia delle idee e delle istituzioni educative in utopia*, 57.

[52] Cf. A. Nóvoa, "Modèles d'analyse en Éducation comparée: le champ et la carte. Les sciences de l'éducation pour l'ère nouvelle", *Caen*, N. 2-3 (1995): 9-61.

provement. It is indispensable to promote the capacity for transcendence from reality, and a constant projective *vis* that is intrinsic in any educational project, but there is more. In pedagogical utopia, the educational moment is inseparably connected to the political moment[53], enabling us to grasp, analyze and revisit the social, cultural and educational variables that interact with ideas, theories, practices and institutions.

As an example, we propose an Italian 20th-century volume that manifests an idea of education steeped in civic and democratic responsibility, making it well suited to the above-outlined approach to using the classics of educational thought – though it is not often presented in teaching settings. This is the *Atto di educare* [*Act of Educating*] by Aldo Capitini (1951). In reflecting on education, Capitini dwells on several moments of rupture and "aperture" – to use a term he is fond of – in which a gap in "conformist repetition" paves the way towards "what is releasing, transforming, creative"[54]. As Tiziana Pironi points out, the dimension of the present in Capitini is constitutive for the construction of a different future[55]. Education must claim the chance to be a civil presence, a participation, a dialogue, a source of free information, a basis on which to edify a future open to everyone.

Capitini's rich voice and educational expertise pave the way towards an idea of education as a force driving a tension that embodies a dissatisfaction with what there is – a feeling by no means sterile and immobilizing, but serving to stimulate a tension towards freedom. What is needed is a plan, an education concept that has been built with a utopia "asserted in its profound and creative dynamism"[56] in mind. There are certainly plenty of educational inputs, but we briefly mention this example to emphasize the generative capacity of those classics – and some works that are not yet classics – that interpret education as a "liberating breeze"[57]. They reveal how its profound value has been sought at various times and in different settings, and how it has been a driving force and an instrument for imagining a better future.

CONCLUSION: THE PEDAGOGY OF THE CLASSICS

Utopia as a pedagogical tension seems related to the desire – noted by Hannah Arendt – to change the terms of our existence, where a person's free will

[53] Cf. G. Genovesi, and T. Tomasi Ventura, *L'educazione nel paese che non c'è. Storia delle idee e delle istituzioni educative in utopia*, 16.

[54] A. Capitini, *L'atto di educare* (reprint, Roma: Armando, 2010), 38-40.

[55] Cf. T. Pironi, *La pedagogia del* nuovo *di Aldo Capitini. Tra religione ed etica laica* (Bologna: Clueb, 1991), 138-146.

[56] T. Pironi, *La pedagogia del* nuovo *di Aldo Capitini. Tra religione ed etica laica*, 146.

[57] A. Capitini, *L'atto di educare*, 38.

and freedom are envisaged not in individualist closure, but in a profound relationship with the community[58]. This tension can be interpreted as a force that educates towards reciprocity.

As Henry Giroux put it, utopian thinking seems so closely related to an educated hope that we can see "educated hope as a form of utopianism", and "utopian thinking as a form of educated hope"[59]. In Giroux's analysis, a science of education that promotes the utopian thought of educated hope aims to develop the abilities that enable people to recognize their potential as agents of change, capable of imagining new forms of democracy, and of taking the action needed to construct them[60].

It is in this sense that we can see the potential for practical application of the utopian tension and educated hope as load-bearing categories of a democratic education. This is not something that can be taken for granted, as regards reading the classics and the history of education, for instance. As Simonetta Polenghi said, "a society that gives up teaching the past raises generations without enough cultural tools to deal with the present, and therefore with the future, and incapable of decoding sometimes cleverly masked antidemocratic messages". She goes on to say:

> While xenophobic trends are on the rise in Europe and on the other side of the Atlantic, the Council of Europe attributes to education and the teaching the history an essential role in containing racist regurgitations and intolerance of diversities, be they religious, social or cultural. […] Historiographic research and the teaching of history have a key part to play in the processes of gaining an understanding of a population's cultural identity, and of recognizing the values of 'others'. History teaches us to cultivate our own, individual, family and social roots. It teaches us to defend our shared values, to understand and preserve Europe's centuries-long inheritance. At the same time, it deconstructs myths and ideological beliefs, and shows how concepts such as civilization and race have changed over time[61].

As in the process clearly described by Polenghi, when the classics are used in the teaching setting, there is a *pars construens* designed to construct

[58] Cf. H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 11; see also H. Arendt, *Tra passato e futuro*, trans. T. Gargiulo (Milano: Garzanti, 1991), 249.

[59] H. Giroux, "Something's missing: cultural studies, neoliberalism, and the politics of educated hope", *Strategies* 14, N. 2 (2001): 238 and 245.

[60] H. Giroux, "Something's missing: cultural studies, neoliberalism, and the politics of educated hope", 235.

[61] S. Polenghi, "Presentazione", in *Educare alle diversità. Una prospettiva storica*, eds. M. Gecchele, and P. Dal Toso (Pisa: ETS, 2019), 9-10.

an individual and collective identity, and to give value to otherness[62]. This alternates with a *pars destruens* that, as in Bacon's original interpretation, deconstructs the *idòla* and – in the case in point – teaches a critical approach that goes beyond prejudice, ideologies and myths[63]. It is in this sense and in this way that history – and the classics along with it – could in themselves be considered a form of pedagogy.

Through the utopia and the utopian reach expressed in the history of educational thought and its classic works, the present becomes receptive to a time of collective change. Monuments to existing power relations can be deconstructed, becoming the ashes from which the utopian future can rise. In a future dialectically interwoven with the present, as Fredric Jameson put it, "ontologies of the present demand archaeologies of the future, not forecasts of the past"[64]. It is in the archaeology of the ruins that we can envisage the possibility of the future, and it is the utopian content or utopian tension that points the way[65]. Starting from More's idea of utopia, Karl Mannheim also exalts this deconstruction process designed to "shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time"[66]. Webb likewise emphasizes how the most powerful pedagogical effects of utopia lie in cultivating a capacity for:

> defamiliarising the familiar, familiarising the strange, liberating the imagination from the constraints of common sense, throwing up new solutions to pressing contemporary problems, generating new patterns of desire and catalysing change[67].

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[62] There is an echo here of Marrou's words on history as an instrument and a means for achieving freedom, emancipation, beyond any limits and impediments of the original positioning of every Self in the context of becoming, which enriches and opens up new perspectives; cf. H.-I. Marrou, *De la connaissance historique* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1954), 261-264.

[63] This idea brings to mind the "demystifying" approach to the history of ideas proposed by Quentin Skinner and later critically discussed – as part of his studies on the history of education – by Marc Depaepe. See Q. Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas", *History and Theory* 8, N. 1 (1969): 3-53; M. Depaepe, "A Professionally Relevant History of Education for Teachers: Does it Exist? Reply to Jurgen Herbst's State of the Art Article", *Paedagogica Historica* 37, N. 3 (2001): 629-640; M. Depaepe, "Philosophy and History of Education: Time to bridge the gap?", *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 39, N. 1 (2007): 28-43.

[64] F. Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: essay on the ontology of the present* (London: Verso, 2002), 215.

[65] Cf. T. Lewis, "Utopia and Education in Critical Theory", *Policy Futures in Education* 4, N. 1 (2006): 14.

[66] K. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: an introduction to the sociology of knowledge* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 173.

[67] D. Webb, "Educational Studies and the Domestication of Utopia", 442.

So there is no *telos* preserved in history, no eschatology starting from the classics. It is the process of deconstructing and reinterpreting the classics in academic institutions where they are taught that nourishes the existential dimensions and experience of those who benefit, who come into contact with these dimensions in the work. Promoting a discussion on various theories in their historical genesis and their concomitant presence in today's world[68] becomes an opportunity for unveiling and working on the three dimensions of past – as ideas and instances developed in a given time and context, and by a given individuality – present – as a moment in which other questions, times and contexts emerge and influence our rereading and reinterpretation of a work – and future – as a tension, a successive novel plan. Finally, it becomes a dialogue that places time and space as the two constitutive variables: while they are delineated in the various above-mentioned dimensions and in dissimilar interacting contexts, they become clear as necessary forms of the historical-educational debate, and they are grafted onto a history of ideas and of pedagogical-educational experience that, in being taught, they also turn into a force driving new experiences and new thought.

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[68] Cf. R. Fornaca, "È finita la ragione dello studio dei classici della pedagogia?", in *I Classici della Pedagogia*, eds. G. Cives, G. Genovesi, and P. Russo, 25-29.

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