

Comment on the Thesis “Critical Intelligence in Epochal Philosophy”

Rosa Maria Torres Hernandez
Universidad Pedagógica Nacional

Fernando Salmeron wrote: “The past is not lost. History is not a mere succession of events but an ingredient of the very makeup of man. It’s not that the Mexican people have had a specific history — for example, that of the liberal movement; the truth is that the Mexican people are their own history — and not just in the form of recollection.”¹ This assertion is applicable to comment on the essay submitted by Teresa Yurén, in which she states that she is not trying to reconstruct the past, but to point out what is significant about it in the present.

Yurén tells us that the present/past requires “another glance.” That glance is found in the philosophy of epochal education. She specifies that, when she refers to epochal philosophy, she is thinking about “the objectives, principles, and values that correspond to a certain way of conceiving education in a given historical moment and that result in educational policies that confer a given direction and meaning to educational practices.” In order to recover the epochal philosophy, she refers to discussions that present interpretations imposed with normative force, even though the key element is the “axiological criteria” or value that operates as the structuring element of the historical period. The emergence, scope, climax, and decline of the “axiological criteria” is what earmarks the process, it is what renders it an account of the movement of continuity/discontinuity of the representations.

The procedural aspect of the representation in the order of the educational projects is established in the link between theory, guidelines, and ideology. In her analysis, Yurén establishes that there are six educational projects with their respective philosophies. The enlightening project, the civilizing project, and the positivist project correspond to the first Mexican National State, while the revolutionary project, the developmental project, and the modernizing project are part of the second National State.

Whoever identifies the tracks of the educational projects in the here and now of education in Mexico will agree that it is necessary to pay attention to epochal philosophy because the logic of the discursive dispositions is not limited to ideas expressed and to themes presented.² It should be added that the discussions should be understood in their specificity and as texts that will have to be removed from their limitations as documents to be converted into elements that show the irregularity/regularity of the processes.

Here we are in an encounter that addresses the philosophy of education in which Yurén recaptures discourses in order to study the trends that educational projects have had in Mexico. It is certainly a challenge to courage and identity, our own and those of others. What seems to be the structure of the study is also the form. I understand that it is not a classification of periods, but a challenge to ponder what

they mean and how objectives, principles, and values have impacted and are impacting education. I do not want to attribute to the Yurén what I believe is the intent to debate the idea that, when addressing the language of education, you address the language of morality, which, for me, is the essence of this topic.

The challenge, however, was proposed by Yurén. She engages in an extremely complex journey — she has never been a thinker of guileless ideas. Her point of departure, from my perspective, is not the independence movement of 1810, but the present, the educational project as it exists today, although it certainly is a present that recognizes the imprint of the past. I want to insist that Yurén’s thesis leads to question what the philosophy of education analyzes. If we accept what she states, we are bound to discuss the moral discourse of education, provided we address other various elements of discourse, which are already part of the text.

As with every thesis deriving from systematic and penetrating work, her thesis is not limited to exploring a single area. Another reflective pool consists of the “axiological criteria” identified by her. Rather than considering each, I wish to recognize the expressions manifest in the principles of the educational projects. Mentioning the principles of the enlightening project, Yurén says “they established a free and uniform public education for all citizens, and the promotion of learning of all that was necessary.” The civilizing project corresponded to the liberty of teaching, obligatory and free elementary utilitarian public education. Meanwhile, the positivist project authenticated the principles of free obligatory education at the basic level, as well as the unification of a national voice and the teaching of a “common foundation of truths.”

The principles of the educational projects with the surge of the second National State are, to the revolutionary project, “freedom, secularism, and free education, ratified and enveloped in a cultural mystique that conferred the status of apostle to the teacher.” The developmental project maintained obligatory, gratuitous, and secular aspects to which ethnic, linguistic, and cultural plurality were added while preserving the homogeneity of the educational content. Yurén indicates that, for the modernizing project, productivity is the principal driver of policy, and efficiency, *per se*, is a goal with a higher priority than equality and democracy. She affirms that, within the modernizing project, there is what I call hybridization between functional rationality and existential concern.

If this is the mosaic produced by the educational projects (I am only mentioning the principles, but I am taking into account the sum total of the assertions expounded) and if, as I believe, Yurén herself shows that philosophy is critical intelligence, I must focus on two projects, the civilizing and the revolutionary projects, because they are the framework of the “axiological criteria,” that is, the ligature that marks, not the yearning of the past, but the opening, while the revolutionary project was possible thanks to the civilizing project.

The idea of a nation and the concern for human dignity of liberalism contributed to the national trajectory, even though the revolutionary project shows that other roads had to be found because we are heirs not only to liberalism but also to our

indigenous past. Thus, the representation of the revolutionary educational project showed social redemption. The revolutionary educational project is inscribed in the constitution of the national trajectory and in the space of an era when there were revolutions around the world, when a free society was conceived, a society that would allow human beings to take part in their communal life.

The explicit past of the liberal project, and perhaps also of the civilizing and the revolutionary projects, are a hinge of theory, guidelines, and ideology. However, that hinge is based on the premise of the State constitution, for the reasons stated by Yurén: “The philosophy of epochal education in Mexico overlaps educational policies that emerge from the state apparatus.”

Here we have a forewarning for the philosophy of education. We may have to revise the moral language of education, study the argumentation of discourses in order for certain declarations, such as those related to compulsoriness or ethnic plurality, to be legitimate and regulatory, and to leave an imprint. We may have to analyze the enunciation as the horizon, to see the world in a logical sense, willing to understand arguments beyond the constitutive level of their political functionality and willing also to recognize their persuasive strength.

We know that the remains of the past are in the discourses, but critical intelligence is in the area of philosophy. There is where Yurén finds the nutrients for her thinking. She ponders the contemporaneity of the modernizing educational project. She analyzes the efficiency-existence tension. Although Levinas would not recognize himself in an existential perspective, I believe we can think of modernity in tension; we are not prisoners of our contemporaneity and Yurén’s document makes this evident. The “axiological criteria” of modernity deserves prompt reflection from a philosophical perspective. Currently Mexico and its national trajectory refer to other “axiological criteria” in educational projects that boast to be universal.

Concern regarding how the epochal philosophy is configured in the time in which we are living fosters debate among those of us marked by the imprints of those educational projects and also those from other areas. Now is the time to discuss and debate the difference, but from a common conviction, understanding the importance of the philosophy of education as analysis. Yurén’s text certainly contributes to this debate.

1. Fernando Salmerón, *Filosofía y Educación* (Mexico: Colegio Nacional, 2000), 255.

2. Roger Chartier, *El mundo como representación* (Barcelona: Gedisa, 1995).