

Translations, Traditions, and Tensions

Gustavo E. Fischman
Arizona State University

Sylvia Grinberg's work is an erudite invitation to participate in a reflective exercise that addresses two central questions. To what degree is it still possible to achieve the promise registered in the notion of education in modern schools? Can educational phenomena be considered as separate from the paradox of cultures?

There is no doubt that Grinberg's questions are important and that their relevance goes beyond the specific location of the author as a professor in a university in Argentina. The importance of Grinberg's proposal and her decision to use classic European philosophers and sociologists — such as Simmel, Weber, and Benjamin — to ponder upon those two questions related to contemporary problems of educational reform in Latin America generate a number of conflicting issues — several of which are recognized by the author. I will base my response on those conflicting issues.

The extent of the translation of various academic traditions is the first tension or conflicting issue that is explicit in Grinberg's treatise. Grinberg, an Argentine philosopher writes in Spanish about contemporary school problems of Argentina using, for the most part, ideas of European authors such as Weber, Simmel, Nietzsche, Benjamin, and Agamben. Her paper written in Spanish is presented in a Mexican city, but at a conference on philosophy of education in which most of the participants are North Americans who will present their works in English. The person who responds to Grinberg's work is also an Argentinean. Living in North America, this Argentinean is not a philosopher, although he often reads about philosophy of education, and has a great deal of experience in North American academic conferences. To which audience should I prioritize my response? To my North American colleagues or to Grinberg? Should my analysis focus in suggesting strategies of how to translate Grinberg's traditional European-Argentinean argumentative logic for a North American audience? The problems of translating academic traditions are quite complex and there is no single or infallible answer for all situations. In this particular case, I will recognize and point out the existence of tensions or conflicts associated with the translation of academic traditions, leaving an opening for the debates this conflict may bring about.

The second tension, related to the previous point, concerns Grinberg's writing style. I would argue that this tension results from a divergence regarding the familiarity and relative distances with forms of knowledge. In her initial discussion, Grinberg shows familiarity and ample knowledge of Western European philosophical traditions and critical sociological traditions. The references to Arendt, Benjamin, Weber, Nietzsche, and Simmel are numerous, erudite, and appropriate. Her discussion of the changes and the logic informing the educational reforms in Argentina are equally well presented. The tone of this section of the text denotes that Grinberg is a local actor who is living through and reflecting about the educational

reform in Argentina. Grinberg's writing style, and the logic of argumentation is tensioned because while she discusses the philosophical traditions it is through the extensive and explicit use of authors and bibliographical references, but to discuss Argentinean educational reforms and the situation of young people, she uses indirect and less explicitly academic arguments. This strategy assumes that readers are familiar with the Argentinean context.

In a similar manner, Grinberg seems to assume that her readers, involved in the areas of philosophy and education, should be familiar with some of her premises that need no explanation. Such is the case with her use of the notion of "the promise of education" based on the work of Arendt, which is not explained, or with phrases such as "one of the texts that explains with greater clarity is that written by Adorno after Auschwitz" which also has no explanation other than the book reference. This lack of details, which presumes the reader's familiarity and prior knowledge of the subject, is perhaps more evident and problematic when discussing the specific Argentinean case; for example, when referring to the "teaching of competencies" in Argentina, which is presented in a synthetic and generalized manner, without any information about what those "competencies" are that would allow an understanding of how teaching is developed, implemented, and made effective within the Argentinean context.

This text contains other tensions that would also be important to explore:

- To what degree do the conceptual translations derived from the intense and extensive use of European authors of classic philosophy and sociology of the past century generate a consistent, comprehensive, and relevant conceptual framework that helps readers understand the situation of the schools and youth of contemporary Argentina?
- Why are the perspectives of Argentinean and Latin American authors nearly absent?
- Even when attempting to reflect within the philosophical tradition, would not it be appropriate to base some of the statements regarding "most" or "numerous" with data that would help differentiate among recent, chronic, and structural phenomena?
- How is it possible that, after describing such a complicated and critical scenario, Grinberg's text ends on an optimistic note?

As I stated at the beginning of this text, there are multiple tensions throughout Grinberg's well articulated and developed text. Those tensions should not be seen as indications of conceptual weakness. On the contrary, they indicate a good grounding in the field of study and the difficulty of articulating coherent and convincing discussions while crossing the borders of disciplines, languages, and academic traditions.

Grinberg's ideas continue the long tradition of scholars that invite the reader to explore and discover pedagogical, political, and dialectical propositions in which reflexive practices have a leading place within the classroom. These explorations are

not guaranteed to succeed. However, they appear to be more appropriate than the models implemented in Argentina and several other countries to increase the possibilities of reinventing an educational promise that could configure schools as radically reflexive, public, and democratic spaces.