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Values of teachers: a reflection between past and present (from the contribution of Portuguese educator Mário Gonçalves Viana)

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Abstract

In this paper we intend to reflect on the following questions: the contributions of the Portuguese educator Mário Gonçalves Viana to what we today understand as citizenship education; the dilemmas posed by thinking about citizenship in an authoritarian regime; the construction of identities with reference to a wider axiological table; and, in particular, for building a teaching deontology as we understand it today. In short, we will seek to use the example of this educator and his work, assuming its timeliness, to reflect on the professional values of teachers in its articulation with the ethical purposes of education.

Keywords: *values of education; teaching deontology; profession; vocation; art of teaching.*

1. Introduction

Mário Gonçalves Viana (1900-1977) was a Portuguese teacher and teacher educator, particularly in the area of physical education. Between 1951 and 1957, he became director of the so-called National Institute of Physical Education. He was the author of an extensive work in the areas of pedagogy, psychology and biography. Mário Gonçalves Viana reflected abundantly on the values of education and on a teaching deontology. Although close to the authoritarian regime and the then prevailing conservative nationalism, he embodied a project of humanistic education of young people based on a broad and sharable framework of values on which he tried to think. At the pedagogical level, Mário Gonçalves Viana manifested himself close to the conceptions and practices inherited from the New Education movement, which then appeared as 'active school'. In his thoughts on teachers, the author articulates the value of specifically professional dimensions with a reinterpretation of some of the traditional categories of teaching, such as vocation, mission and exemplarity. In this paper we intend to reflect on the following questions: the contributions of this educator to what we today understand as citizenship education; the dilemmas posed by thinking about citizenship in an authoritarian regime; the construction of identities (national, professional ...) with reference to a wider axiological table; and, in particular, for building a teaching deontology as we understand it today. In short, we will seek to use the example of this educator and his work, assuming its timeliness, to reflect on the professional values of teachers in its articulation with the ethical purposes of education. We will use as sources in this research some key pedagogical works of the author, including *A Educação integral* [Integral education] (1940), *Pedagogia geral* [General pedagogy] (1946), *O Professor* [The Teacher] (1947) or *Ética pedagógica* [Pedagogical ethics] (1954), as well as his production in the pedagogical press (*Escola portuguesa*

[*Portuguese school*], *Educação* [*Education*],...) whose content we will analyse in order to define and analyse the most important categories that structure his thinking. It is a work of documentary analysis on diversified sources based on a historical-philosophical approach and combining contributions from the Cultural History, Conceptual History and Micro-History. We assume, in particular, the thesis of the active role of representations in the construction of the educational field and their interpenetration with educational practices.

2. Pedagogy and didactics: between “educational science” and the “art of teaching”

In the pedagogical literature produced in the final decades of the nineteenth century and throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the attempts to substantiate the teacher’s work became classics, summoning the binomial, seemingly paradoxical, science and art (Pintassilgo, 2011; Woods, 1999). Mário Gonçalves Viana, who writes his works around the mid twentieth century, clearly states this dichotomy.

It is, therefore, essential that the master has the exact consciousness of the mission that he plays and that he is indeed able to perform the task. Education requires, besides intuition and appreciable general culture, a remarkable special preparation, based on the study of psychology, sociology, pedagogy and professional orientation technic. It is an art that should be scientifically studied. (Viana, 1940, p. 140)

The author emphasizes, without any doubt, the need for a scientific study of educational reality by the educators, of interdisciplinary nature and in correspondence with the ‘remarkable special preparation’, i.e., specialized, that their performance demands. But that is not the only element. Besides the requirement of a ‘general culture’, that is, scientific or humanistic knowledge, ‘intuition’ and ‘exact consciousness of the mission he plays’ are equally indispensable. The idea of ‘mission’ will be further analysed. For now, we want to emphasize the reference to ‘intuition’ that is articulated with personal profile, referring to a know-how resulting from practical experience.

Indeed, there are some people who imagine that only the teaching practice can educate the educator and give him the necessary experience; those people do not know that the principles are always useful to enlighten and guide the practice. (Viana, 1940, p. 141)

Despite the valorisation of the experiential dimension, the author admits hereafter that ‘the teaching practice’ is not enough to train the educator. The ‘principles’ are indispensable to ‘enlighten and guide the practice’. But that pedagogical and psychological preparation should not lead to excessive erudition; it should be strongly combined with its own practice.

The teacher needs to have a specific pedagogical and psychological preparation, directed towards an essentially concrete and practical sense, without any theoretical exaggeration from the sterile and flabby scholarship. (Viana, 1947, p.28)

Therefore, we find in Gonçalves Viana a formulation draft of a harmonious relationship between pedagogic theory and practice that comes close to the current conceptions on the subject.

The recognition of the education's scientific dimension, on the other hand, can be articulated with the definition of teaching activity as a profession (Perkin, 1987). Broadly speaking, professionalization, perceived as an historic project, is something that we can intuit in the discourses of teacher educators and teacher trainers that, at different times, wrote in the pedagogical press or published pedagogical or didactical textbooks, even because it is a notion that prominently contributes to the appreciation of teachers and their work. The recognition of that professional dimension is present in the thinking of Mário Gonçalves Viana, for instance in the following excerpts:

Since a long time ago the magisterium profession is considered to be a profession of the highest social importance. (Viana, 1947, p.25)

The teacher should try to honour and dignify the profession wherever he finds himself. (Viana, 1954, p.26)

Not all people can perform such an important profession. (Viana, 1947, p.28)

The references to the profession, to its high social importance, to the need of teachers' contribution to its dignification are constant. The teachers are presented as being the real specialists of the educational act, holders, as noticed before, of knowledge able to scientifically support their activity and of practical experience able to enrich the principles that regulate them. Looking from a far to this professional rhetoric, today we could add the following. Despite its relevance, the discursive use of categories as profession, professionalism and professionalization also involves some risks. Firstly, the risk of mythologizing or of the merely rhetoric investment; that is, the creation of some kind of salvation narrative, lagged from reality. Secondly, the risk of being hostages of a professional paradigm inspired in liberal professions, hardly applicable to this specific case. The complexity of the teaching activity, if we consider its historicity and its several dimensions, is not compatible with reductive views. Therefore, the notion of profession does not deplete the attempt of definition, being convenient to conjugate it with other categories as, indeed, we potentially find in Mário Gonçalves Viana and in other educators of this period.

3. 'Vocation', 'mission' and 'passion' as teaching dimensions

Teaching comes often idealized and sanctified in teachers' discourses, specifically when seen on the long run. Teachers' investment in their work and the implications of that work on society's future are quite outstanding. The activity is generally presented as being a mission, with the appearance of teachers as real teaching missionaries, apostles or priests. The religious references are constant, exactly evoking the religious roots of the profession. The elements referred here are well present in the thinking of Mário Gonçalves Viana, as can be perceive in the following examples.

Therefore, there is no true School without teachers that are up to their mission. (Viana, 1947, p.28)

Not everyone can be an educator. The educator needs to have a little bit of apostle. (Viana, 1940, p.140)

It is clear that vocation plays, in this case, a major role: Education is more than a science; it is an art; it is not something that you can learn; it is a gift that you are born with. (Viana, 1940, p.142)

The magisterium is more than a profession: it has to be a career of sacrifice and apostolate. (Viana, 1955, p. 146)

And that brings us to the unavoidable topic of vocation, a topic of yesterday and today, articulable with both conservative and progressive discourses in pedagogical matters, that is. It should be considered that vocation does not exclude, in many arguments, the resource to other categories to define the teaching profession, nor it necessarily represents a decontextualized look upon it, as some contemporary authors have emphasized, besides, its meaning is variable, being, in some cases, already far from the religious foundation that is in its origin (Hansen, 1995). As can be seen on the previous quotations, profession and vocation do not arise as antagonistic categories, appearing instead to complement each other.

Both in this case and in the case of other authors, the notion of vocation arises articulated with other topics related to the teacher's figure, such as the need to consider practical details, an approach to its understanding as metier; the part played by emotions when it comes to the involvement of his students; the importance of the teacher as an individual and his natural exemplariness.

The school is essentially the teacher. (Viana, 1947, p.7)

The teacher should seek to perfect himself as a human being and as an Educator. (Viana, 1954, p.24)

The teacher should respect the human dignity of each student. (Viana, 1954, pp. 29-30)

Whatever the subject he may teach, he always has a thousand and one opportunities to educate the students, by examples and by words. The punctuality and aplomb with which he should present himself in class are already important educational elements. To be a teacher he should be morally elegant, imposing authority more by his attitude's prestige, correction and composure than by his wrathful words or emphatic expressions. (Viana, 1940, p.143)

The rooting of the profession in a moral tradition is, actually, a constant reference in the discourses of teachers and teacher trainers (Hansen, 2001). The student as an individual and the respect he deserves arises as an essential starting point. The teacher is a teacher depending on his student. That is what gives meaning to the classic dichotomy, of religious background, master – disciple. That is also what supports the definition of the teacher as an educator. The growth of the child or young person represents the commitment of the teacher and his complete investment in that person and in the achievement of that desideratum. Therefore, the topic of master's exemplariness, permanently glossed by the pedagogical discourse, can be understood regardless of times or trends. This idea is embodied in the following statement: 'to be a teacher one needs to be morally elegant'. This is an enormous responsibility considering the human frailty

that conditions the teacher, any teacher. But this is mostly a rhetoric that seeks to legitimize and dignify the professional practice, anchoring it in a supreme ideal – the training of future citizens and the building of a new society.

Underlying the previously presented reflections by Mário Gonçalves Viana is also the topic of ‘passion’ in education, another of those that arises at different moments of the pedagogic reflection about the teacher’s figure, topic that actually leads us to the unavoidable presence of the affective dimension in educational relationships and that was recovered more recently by the British academic Christopher Day (2004). Thus, both vocation and passion appear as metaphors of a teaching based on moral values and purposes, of a teacher that believes in ideals referring to human perfecting, of a commitment that is simultaneously rational and emotional, and of a creative and defying professional practice, conditions that are historically intuited by some educators, both in theoretical and practical terms, and currently susceptible to another level of systematization.

4. The moral dimension of teachers’ work: teaching deontology

As it has been shown, for the Portuguese case, by the studies of A. Nóvoa (1987; 1998) the definition of a set of the teachers’ own norms and values constituted an essential dimension of the teaching activity professionalization process. Even without the presence of a deontological code, accepted as such by the teachers, these contributed, at different times, to the development of ethical principles, sensed as such; these principles experienced a widespread presence in the produced discourses, like some kind of ‘crystallization of the ethic experience’ of those teachers (Cunha, 1996, p.118). An important aspect is the fact that through those principles an auto-regulation of professional practice is aspired. Teaching deontology is, in this sense, perceived as something built from inside the profession, resulting from a particular reflection about the practice, and not as something imposed from the outside by the State. As an informal alternative to that imposition, several educators and teacher trainers gradually contributed, namely in educational and teaching press pages and in pedagogical and didactical textbooks, to the creation of some kind of implicit teaching code that was meant to be, afterwards, appropriated by increasingly broad and conscious layers of the class.

In the work of Mário Gonçalves Viana, the topic of ethics or teaching deontology has a central place, as can be seen in works such as *O Professor* (1947) or *Ética pedagógica* (1953). That may even be illustrated by the following examples:

The magisterium is a complex activity that imposes several and delicate duties. (Viana, 1955, p. 159)

There are some aptitudes and skills that always have been considered essential to the magisterial activity: honesty, prudence, patience, serenity, impartiality, acceptance, kindness, child comprehension, discipline spirit, self-control, etc. (Viana, 1947, p.27)

Considering what was said, the teacher has [...] multiple duties to fulfil, duties that can be systematized according to the following relations:

- a) Teacher’s duties related to himself;

- b) Teacher's duties related to the students;
- c) Teacher's duties related to the profession;
- d) Teacher's duties related to its colleagues and those beneath him;
- e) Teacher's duties related to the student's families. (Viana, 1954, p.24)

The author expresses a clear awareness of the importance and the part of teaching deontology as a way to enhance and dignify teachers and their work, asserting them as true teaching professionals. He even proposes, at several times, some kind of deontological code, based on a set of ethical values, as the ones indicated above, and involving several dimensions of the professional practice (the relationships with students, colleagues, families, etc.).

5. Final considerations

The background context that Mário Gonçalves Viana had, when it comes to his biographical path, the Salazar's New State, was a particularly difficult context to the professional teaching practice and to the implementation of alternative pedagogies, considering the strong ideological and moral control, intellectual censorship, and political repression exerted on all citizens, at the same time that teachers, in particular, saw their pedagogical autonomy become quite restricted and aspects of their daily life subjected to a strict control, besides suffering the consequences of some measures leading to a certain deprofessionalization. These constraints have not prevented Mário Gonçalves Viana from developing his own pedagogical thinking based on a humanistic ethic, despite the political proximity he had towards the authoritarian regime of the time, thinking that was also very marked by the influence of the assumptions of the so-called Education or New School, as they are appropriated, from the thirties of the twentieth century, by conservative or catholic pedagogical currents. The designation Active School arises, in many moments, as a term with more correspondence to the effort of reinterpretation.

One of the most central concerns present in the work of Mário Gonçalves Viana is the importance of a reflection about ethical foundations of professional teaching practice. In his point of view, the teacher's work should be conducted by deontological principles, being the teacher himself an eminently ethical figure, which conveys us to consider his moral exemplarity and the need of a close articulation between the individual and the teacher. This discourse comes associated with the belief, very present in the author, in the high social value of education and, consequently, in the relevance of the social function performed by the teacher.

Accordingly, the definition of the teacher as a teaching professional, holder of a scientific based knowledge and user of specialized technics, emerges as another central axe of the thinking of Mário Gonçalves Viana. The recognition that teaching is a profession does not mean, to this and other authors, that it is the only dimension present in the definition of what it means to be a teacher. Other categories are here summoned and reinterpreted, namely categories that integrate, on the long run, teaching tradition, specifically mission, vocation or priesthood, many of which are metaphors or analogies referring to the religious roots of the activity.

These two rhetorical, professional and religious, do not appear as contradictory but rather as complementary. It is intended, in any case, to legitimize the work of teachers and contribute to their social dignification. The same complementarity is given to definitions that use metaphors and analogies of artisanal or officinal inspiration and that tend to enhance the practical and experiential aspects of teaching, in other words, that look at teaching, using the words of the time, simultaneously as a science and an art.

It is clear for us, at the end of this path, that the discourses of educators such as Mário Gonçalves Viana have, among their purposes, stimulated, between all teachers, the share of a set of beliefs, ideals, values, specialized knowledge and desirable practices, considered in any case as essential elements for the construction of a symbolic community and as a fundamental step to the process of professionalization.

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