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Teaching and the right to education: a reflective exercise regarding the Pilar CDMX program

Docencia y derecho a la educación: un ejercicio reflexivo a propósito del programa Pílares CDMX

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I present, drawing on the reflexive exercise proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, an analysis of my one-year experience as a teacher in the Puntos de Innovación, Libertad, Arte, Educación y Saberes (PILARES) Program of Mexico City. This program, aimed at guaranteeing the right to education as part of social development, was launched in 2019 as a public policy designed to reduce inequalities and expand access to educational, sports, cultural, and economic autonomy opportunities, from a community-based approach, for sectors of the city that have been historically excluded. The reflection is structured around three axes: my social origin and position; my professional trajectory and sociological training; and the distance (*skholè*) from which I construct this critique. These axes operate as conditions shaping my pedagogical practice, my relationships with the community, and my interpretation of the institutional objectives. I also seek to examine the tensions between the social mission of the program and the material, administrative, and structural limitations it faces. Finally, I propose a tentative research agenda that identifies key and urgent points for the critical analysis of this program.

Keywords: Community Education; Social Program; Reflexivity.

RESUMEN

En esta ponencia presento, desde el ejercicio de reflexividad propuesto por Pierre Bourdieu, un análisis al respecto de mi experiencia durante un año como docente en el Programa Puntos de Innovación, Libertad, Arte, Educación y Saberes (PILARES) de la Ciudad de México. Este programa, orientado a garantizar el derecho a la educación como parte del desarrollo social, fue planteado en 2019 como una política pública dirigida a reducir desigualdades y ampliar el acceso a oportunidades formativas en los ámbitos educativo, deportivo, cultural y de autonomía económica, desde un enfoque comunitario, para sectores de la ciudad históricamente excluidos. La reflexión se articula a partir de tres ejes: mi origen y posición social; mi trayectoria profesional y formación sociológica; y el distanciamiento (*skholè*) desde el que elaboro esta crítica. Estos ejes se configuran como condicionantes de mi práctica pedagógica, de mis vínculos con la comunidad y de mi interpretación de los objetivos institucionales. Asimismo, busco examinar las tensiones entre la misión social del programa y las limitaciones materiales, administrativas y estructurales que enfrenta. Finalmente, propongo un esbozo de agenda de investigación que identifica puntos nodales y urgentes para el análisis crítico de este programa.

Palabras clave: Educación Comunitaria; Programa Social; Reflexividad.

INTRODUCTION

To express a series of concerns and reminiscences about my experience in community education, I engage in an uncomfortable and substantial (I hope) process of reflexivity, both as a scientific endeavor and a professional practice. This experience was part of my work within the social program “Puntos de Innovación, Libertad, Arte, Educación y Saberes (PILARES)” (Points of Innovation, Freedom, Art, Education, and Knowledge). This program emerged as a possible solution to the constitutional requirement that all inhabitants of the country must complete 12 years of formal education, since, as we know, this right is not fulfilled for everyone. The average in Mexico City is around 11 years of formal education.

In addition to this, education is less accessible for people belonging to vulnerable groups and/or living in areas with low or very low IDS levels. These people usually face problems in accessing basic services, are more likely to experience a teenage pregnancy, and face greater exploitation and violence than other social groups. They are also restricted in their ability to access better-paid jobs that would allow them to escape poverty or reduce their vulnerability due to their low level of education (SECTEI, 2024). The program’s designers sought to address this problem through a corrective approach: free access, proximity, and an inclusive approach to community education.

Based on my participation in this program and the tools provided by the field of sociology (Bourdieu, 2006)—in particular, a specific academic community, historically situated and politically oriented, etc.—I seek to put reflexivity into practice as an approach, methodology, and research process to analyze the tensions that exist in the program due to material limitations and long-standing social problems.

In other words, I seek to outline a series of points to investigate, while problematizing or reflecting on the conditions of possibility that allow me to make this preliminary analysis. This reflection has three guiding threads: my origin and social position; my professional career in sociology; and my (partial, if you will) distancing from my position in and towards scholastic life (Bourdieu, 2006; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2009).

Problematization (objectification)

Despite reform efforts, the school institution continues to be a space where inequalities are reproduced to varying degrees. In particular, in Mexico City, it is true that for people living in areas with a low Social Development Index (SDI), in situations of extreme poverty, moderate poverty, or just above the poverty line:

- There is early entry into paid and unpaid work, which interferes with their educational trajectory.
- Areas with low SDI are often located on the urban periphery, meaning they are farther from educational centers that offer better infrastructure, teaching staff, and material resources.
- Moreover, as indicated in the SECTEI report (2024), “people in vulnerable situations are often excluded from formal educational institutions” (p.13).

Vulnerability is understood to encompass the first two conditions (socioeconomic and socio-territorial) and other social determinants, such as gender identity, ethnicity, and disability.

For this reason, the PILARES centers, through their Cyber School area, have sought to offer free training alternatives to continue, resume, or begin educational processes at different levels. Their workers provide advice and support from teachers and workshop leaders, using a non-formal community education approach with an inclusive perspective. They have a learning infrastructure, including computers, internet access, and reading collections, which are important resources in the current educational context. They are located in peripheral areas of Mexico City, predominantly in low Social Development Index (SDI) areas. They offer flexible hours, Monday through Saturday, which facilitates reconciliation with other daily activities, such as work and/or caregiving.

Therefore, PILARES seeks to operate as a mechanism for correcting inequalities. It aims to establish itself as a viable educational alternative for people who have dropped out of school or are educationally disadvantaged as a result of their low SDI and/or social vulnerability. The program combines community pedagogy with a multimodal approach, allowing for both collective learning and individualized attention (Valdez, 2023, p. 118; Escobar, 2022).

However, the training these figures receive is insufficient in pedagogical, psychological, and technological terms. Portillo (2021) points out that “training in theoretical knowledge about learning, development, and human behavior was not developed at any point in the course,” which creates a gap between the program’s educational intent and the preparation of its staff. Casimiro (2024), in his role as Project Coordination Leader (LCPO), makes the same point.

On the other hand, Pérez (2024) documents that more than 60 % of PILARES Scholarship users have been forced to maintain and verify their participation in *tequios* to avoid having their scholarship amounts deducted during the month, which could reflect clientelistic practices. Likewise, it appears that neither the ministry nor the program’s management has any reports or evaluations that clearly demonstrate the program’s good performance. Garduño (2024) points to results that make it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the program’s effectiveness in combating educational backwardness.

Likewise, based on my participation in the program, like other researchers, I can attest to the ongoing dispute regarding the status of Service Facilitator Beneficiaries (BFS), that is, the people who work in the program. This dispute centers on labor recognition. Added to this is the issue of budgetary adjustments, which call into question the functioning of PILARES, from problems with infrastructure maintenance to cleaning and security service providers. In addition, there is a series of disputes within the program regarding the understanding and approach of various actors to “what community education is” and “how it should be exercised.”

CONCLUSIONS

For now, I have proposed some clues to help me analyze the role of PILARES. As a program designed to address inequalities, it faces a series of key problems that compromise its effectiveness and long-term sustainability. What remains now is the process of self-analysis based on the three axes I have proposed to interpret my point of view on this phenomenon, both by explaining it and by comparing it with the positions and proposals of other researchers outlined in the previous section.

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