

## **Educational change in Spain: between committed renewal and innocuous innovation**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper addresses the phenomenon of the pedagogical renewal taking place in Spain, which started around the turn of this century, from a socio-historical perspective and within the broader context of neoliberalism. It traces the evolution of these transformative educational pathways through the course of the twentieth century, focusing particularly on events that took place during the periods 1920-1937 and 1960-1985 as the key predecessors to the current reform drive, and it discusses the upsurge of new technologies and their impact in the area of pedagogical renewal.*

*The conclusions drawn are the outcome of exhaustive bibliographical review, extensive interviews with key figures in the historical and current renewal processes, and the theoretical discussions that took place among the team of researchers at the University of Girona who developed the research work entitled “The third wave of pedagogical renewal in Catalonia” as part of the ARMIF 2016-2019 programme. The conclusion is that education needs to be politicised to the effect that school is understood as a space where pupils learn how to live as a community through the recognition of and for others and allowing*

*the school community to be affected by what surrounds its pupils. Particular attention is drawn to the use of technological devices for their potential to control, and a call is made to the educational community to address the root reason for education, in other words its purpose, to bring about truly emancipatory change rather than simply introducing adaptive innovations.*

**Keywords:** *pedagogical renewal, educational change, innovation in education, politics and education, educational transformation, technologisation of education, politicization*

## **1. Introduction**

Education, as a characteristically and exclusively human activity, “cannot renounce igniting the desire to think, opening its doors to all and bearing the consequences of this shared aim from the basis of equality” (Garcés, 2013, p. 98). To this effect, all the facets of a task that accepts neither definitive solutions nor pre-established formulas, needs to be reconsidered and re-evaluated. We could say that education involves conceding that there is no point of arrival in terms of methodologies, objectives, the organisation of time and space and the production of content and knowledge, since its fundamental purpose is “to mobilize whatever is required for the subject to go out into the world and sustain themselves in it, to shoulder the unresolved issues that have constituted human culture, to incorporate the knowledge produced by mankind in response to them, thus tackling them with their own responses [...]” (Meirieu, 1998, p. 70). It is, then, its transformative potential that makes education a critical exercise per se. It is that state of alert between the given and the desired, a transition between nature and culture that entails thinking about what is human ad infinitum. And there are moments in time when this process of reflection and re-evaluation peaks, stimulating a process of

change which shakes (or aims to shake) the foundations of the educational model being implemented within a specific social context.

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries there have been basically three distinct periods of educational change in Spain; not political reform, but changes driven by the educational community itself that have conditioned and determined the course pedagogy has taken in this country. The first period began with the incipient changes that came about at the beginning of the twentieth century, which gained in momentum and became increasingly significant during the first two-thirds of the 1930s, or more specifically during the Second Republic (1931-1936). This reformist drive came to an abrupt halt in the Franco era, beginning in some parts of Spain immediately after General Francisco Franco's 1936 military uprising and spreading to the rest of the country after 1939 with the defeat of the legitimate Republican government in the Civil War. The dictator remained in power until 1975, during which time his educational model based on National Catholicism, segregation and authoritarianism was systematically imposed. The second period began in the late Franco era (mid-1960s) and lasted until the end of the 1980s, spanning a very specific, varied political context that included the social dismemberment of Francoism, the transition to democracy and the first democracy. The third period began to unfold around the new millennium, following a long chapter of educational mediocrity in terms of substantial changes and intensifying from 2005 onwards.

As would be expected, each period has its own peculiarities. Nonetheless, following authors such as J. Carbonell (2016), some of the characteristics of the first two periods are also apparent in the present process. These include the objective of effecting a methodological about-turn and the fact that in each period educator and educated are understood in ways that differ from the classic,

hegemonic approaches of traditional pedagogy. But it is also true that the first and second set of changes in education were produced in a modern social context (characteristic of modernity), while the third is taking place in the fully post-modern era with all that this entails.

Another important difference is that in the first and second periods the notion of pedagogical renewal is expressed openly, whereas in the third there is a tendency to discard this concept and replace it with the notion of innovation. Moving beyond merely terminological and nominalist concerns, these terms tend to contain rather different educational objectives and social-political pretensions, albeit not always clearly or concisely.

Throughout this paper, the focus is on analysing how these educational proposals that question the conventional, hegemonic model identify themselves and whether the educational changes understood as renewal or innovation involve distinct ways of understanding education. The territorial context of this analysis oscillates between Spain and Catalonia.

The paper is divided into three parts: in the first, we analyse the social contexts within which the three educational changes identified are produced, placing particular emphasis on recent events; in the second, the type of educational change taking place in each context is explained and here, as in the first part, the main interest lies in our contemporaneity; and the third part, in effect a continuation of the second, addresses the current use and sense of introducing new technologies. The paper ends with some conclusions that vindicate the need to politicise education in the interest of bringing about a truly transformative, emancipatory educational change.

## **2. Methodology**

The present paper originates from the research entitled “The third wave of pedagogical renewal in Catalonia” (ARMIF 2015), funded by the regional government of Catalonia, which enabled a team of researchers from the University of Girona to undertake a three-year investigation (2016-2019) into the characteristics of the educational change currently underway in Catalonia and the rest of the country, bearing in mind previous educational changes with the aim of identifying the continuities and discontinuities among them. To this effect, aside from the current investigations that form the basis of this paper, thorough fieldwork has also been carried out and is currently being evaluated.

This paper draws on specialist bibliography on this matter, in addition to the content of interviews conducted with leading figures involved in the current and previous processes of educational change, and the ideas that emerged from the scholarly debate that took place during the two seminars held at the University of Girona in February and May 2018.

Concurring with Denise Najmanovich (2001), the epistemological shift towards complexity exposes multidimensionality inviting exploration of the dynamic interactions and transformations in the culture of complexity. Hence, our approach shifts from the search for certainties to the acceptance of uncertainty (Morin, 1994, 2004). From this perspective, the methodology used has two different but complementary focuses: the historical focus based on theoretical-conceptual analysis, and the critical focus based on the interpretative reconstruction of the content derived from the seminars and transcribed interviews (Stake, 1998; Simons, 2011; Yin, 2014). In developing the historical-conceptual analysis, we share with Vilanou (2006) an interest in the historical evolution of the concepts, how they fit together and their differing levels of

significance. In this case, data collection was carried out in three phases by the inter-disciplinary research group made up of ten scientists from different areas linked to education. In the first phase, a bibliographical search on educational renovation was performed, followed by the collective task of constructing a theoretical framework to underpin the investigation. The second phase consisted of organising a series of seminars, each of them focused on addressing one of the themes that appear in this work and based on interventions given by the different specialist in the subject matter. The speakers were one expert in curriculums, one in didactics, one in methodology, one in new technologies, two education historians who specialise in the history of pedagogical renewal in Spain, one educationist specialised in new educational trends, one educational sociologist, one philosopher, and one anthropologist. Each of these experts presented their subject matter, linking it with renewal and current educational approaches, thus paving the way for a discussion on each dimension of education, the conclusions from which were drawn on to shape the thesis advanced in the present paper.

In the third and final phase, twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with leading figures in the 1960-1985 and current periods of educational renewal. All of them were conducted by pairs of members of the investigation team, who created a relaxed environment where the issues in question could be discussed in great depth. While the interviewees were not given the interview script prior to the interviews so as to capture their spontaneous responses to the question asked, they were given a briefing about the principal theme, the reasons why they had been selected for interview, and the foreseen duration of the interview. The selection criteria applied to the interviewees was first their decisive role as members of key groups and associations linked in a historical sense to the renewal movement, such as the *Asociación Rosa Sensat* and the *Federación de Movimientos de Renovación Pedagógica*; and second, their condition as leading

figures in the current renewal, as was the case with members of the Fundación Jaume Bofill and the Fundación Jesuitas Educación, among others. To this effect, the experts selected are members of pioneering educational projects that are driving the current changes, such as those linked to the Red de Escuelas Libres. Notably, prior to conducting the seminars and in-depth interviews, participants were informed about the researchers' interest and the use that would be made of the information gleaned. Additionally, given that the seminars and interviews were to be recorded, participants were given a legal document which expressed the research teams' commitment to complying with confidentiality principals and guaranteed the anonymity of their interventions.

The information collected from the interviews and seminars was transcribed literally following Gail Jefferson's criteria (1984) and was later exploited by means of the ATLAS.Ti program, having previously codified and categorised the data according to the aims of this paper. Qualitative content analysis was selected as the data analysis methodology to capture the interviewees' subjective meaning and the personal, untransferable interpretation of their narrative. The content analysis of this narrative was based on the profoundness of each specific case, in addition to both common threads and the singularities that made them unique. From this perspective, Simons (2011) proposes generalisation as a key criteria of validity not only from a technical and methodological stance, but also in recognition of any similarities and differences based on each experts' professional experience. Once all the interviews and content of the seminars had been analysed, the data was triangulated to substantiate and justify the paper.

### **3. The context**

All educational theory must be put into context to be fully understood and legitimately evaluated. This premise, which is shared by many authors (Viñao

2002 and Moscoso 2011), is necessarily applied to the analysis of change. Hence, the characteristics, dynamics and projection of educational change cannot be understood without providing the social, political and economic context in which it is produced. This analytical principle is applied to avoid making fruitless, transitory assumptions and abstractly interpreting what each reform, innovation or renewal has meant for the history of education. The difficulty here, however, is how to contextualise change from within the context that produced it, without the usual historical distance from which this type of analysis is usually made. Aware of this conditioning factor, the following text will describe the current onto-epistemological reality from the perspective of the critique of postmodernity as a philosophical paradigm, addressing the question as to what kind of change is possible within this context. We are obviously not talking about the possible as an absolute concept (because anything is possible), but about possibility as that which fits into a gelified reality (López-Petit, 2009)<sup>1</sup>. And beyond what Bauman called liquidity, the existential mode characterised by adaptability as a way of being in the world and change as an essential condition for such an approach, one must situate oneself in a context where change only appears to be subject to this condition.<sup>2</sup>

For Bauman (2007) the liquid world is a complex, ambiguous, uncertain, paradoxical, even chaotic one that moves at high speed and where established knowledge is systematically questioned and so quickly becomes obsolete. Wisdom transmutes into inspiration and in this existential progression memory is no longer essential because the challenge of education and knowledge is to achieve singularity, uniqueness, distinction. From this perspective, what mutates – changes – takes priority over permanence. In other words, with change as the ontological priority what is invariable in the idea of education is being questioned because what endures is understood as being an insufferable encumbrance with



nothing to offer. We concur with Esteve's (2016, p. 16) on this matter, that "in education it is just as important to see what is changing – in the historical, social and technological context – as what is enduring in so far as it is a clear-cut, directed matter – on the anthropological, social and even political level".<sup>3</sup> This leads us to the next phase of our reflection on the relationship between what changes and what endures, but now from the perspective of another previously mentioned existential metaphor.

Gelification (López-Petit, 2009) is the state of matter when the liquid and the solid fuse in density and structure so that although there is adaptability there remains a certain rigidity, thus generating a state of confusion. It is a fuzzy rationale that blurs the world and creates general indeterminacy. This confusion of states is incorporated into the postmodern paradigm as a radical philosophical critique that recoils on itself. In other words, the questioning of modern, founded, binary assumptions with universal aspirations – which postmodernity is capable of casting into doubt - stirs up onto-epistemological power, displacing the individual into territory without references. As Bermudo (2010) affirms, the constraintless condition of the contemporary individual is defined by deprivation of practical wisdom (moral and political), which necessarily has repercussions for education. And herein lies the importance of analysing the context for education, because the solid fundamentals which up to now all educational theory has required have been diluted and mystified, hindering its implementation and development.

In territory without points of reference, education is lacking those all-encompassing cosmovisions and political narratives that used to determine its how and why. Nonetheless, at least for the time being, this new circumstance need not be viewed as entirely catastrophic since it does involve a certain release

from the rigidity of the assumptions of modern pedagogies. Postmodernity as a negation of the modern educational paradigm also has a liberating effect, despite this not being the only direction it could take, in the sense that it is thanks to the possibility of casting doubt on the entire onto-epistemological basis that inflexible authority – the unidirectionality of the educational relationship, the idea of learning as transmitting knowledge, the definition of gender in strictly binary terms and the disciplinary use of the school time-space – is being reconsidered. We will come back to this point later.

But before delving further into strictly educational change, not only the current social context but also those of the other two periods of educational change mentioned previously must be described, given that they are the benchmarks against which the present moment in education must be compared and contrasted. Without making a detailed analysis, to defend our thesis about educational change it is imperative to understand that during the first two periods the political dimension of education explicitly formed part of the pedagogical debate because society then was conceived politically. In the philosophical paradigm of modernity (to which these two periods belong) the political – as that which is concerned with the relationship between shared problems and freedom – was visible and explicable. The existence of macro-narratives and antagonistic cosmovisions of how to live facilitated the existence of reference points outside the discourse. The existence of real, opposing political units – each with their own economic, social and cultural rationale, and so on – was a sign of the politicization of modern, erudite existence. Power was visible and identifiable. The political – as a broad concept and a precursor to politics – formed part of education in an obvious way.

Postmodernity, however, began to crack open this solid, delimited, identifiable reality as an unstoppable deluge. Fundamental truths, generators of dogmatic and all-embracing cosmovisions, had also given rise to very fixed cosmovisions that had exposed the dark side of these same fundamentals. And so postmodernity arrived to dissolve the epistemological fundamentals of knowledge, history and culture, to condemn the perversity of modern dogmatic politics and, in fact, to cast doubt on the social project, or in other words, on reason itself. The problem was that the political was also washed out in the deluge.

The postmodern philosophical tsunami that at first liberated thought from the ultraconservatism of the fundamentals was explained as a liquidification – to use Bauman’s terminology –capable of dissolving even the most solid of epistemological rocks. Nonetheless, it also had a downside, which was the blurred, horizonless reality left behind once the solid and the established had been detached. In the current gelified, introverted reality not only is there no room for other political narratives, but there are not even any discernible cracks through which to catch a fleeting glance of other realities. Any cracks through which change could be conceived are filled immediately they appear because the capacity of the gelified reality – the territory where neoliberalism understood as “the predisposition of governments to increasingly favour free market solutions over governmental intervention, and individual effort over the provision of collective safety nets” (Mundy et al., 2016, p. 6) develops- to absorb criticism means identifying reality as one sole narrative. This narrative is global mobilisation (López Petit, 2009), where not only are there no external referents to hold on to, but where what appears as criticism is what feeds the very rationale of profit, productivity and efficiency characteristic of today’s capitalism. As touched upon previously, the disorienting capacity of this new existential paradigm has left the individual suspended in a virtual limbo where the practical

wisdom of yesteryear, the wisdom that was capable of undermining the management with a strike or of putting an end to work for wages by occupying land, is of no use. The new ontological reality means that the political is played out on a different playing field altogether, in distinct conditions, with new stakeholders. The rules have changed.

In our opinion, a major characteristic of this new reality is depoliticization, the end of politics. As Domínguez (2011) points out, this finality, characterised by the ontology of indeterminacy, reduces the subject to an isolated, impotent individual incapable of transforming the reality that surrounds him anywhere he goes. Because once Marxist-rooted antagonism has been defeated and postmodern ontological indeterminacy used to full advantage, neoliberalism produces a new subjectivity. Postpolitics has reduced the citizen to an individual, rendering the social dimension of existence meaningless as a way of averting conflict based on class, gender or origin. The modern citizen has been disengaged from his belonging to a political reality – the state – with rights and duties and has mutated into a mere consumer. While his classification as citizen had already deidentified him from his condition of class – disengaging him from his material reality – his status as consumer essentially makes him a mere asset in the global market. The contemporary individual is a compulsive consumer of material and immaterial goods, of relationships, experiences, culture, education and policies. The world is something consumable and the modern citizen consumes it because that is his reason for being, behaving like a satisfied customer when his purchase satiates his desires and kicking up a fuss when it does not. His only community is the one comprised of individuals who shop at the same supermarket as he does, use the same mobile application and share the same virtual social networks. But when communication devices or simply shared interests are mistaken for authentic community, then community becomes nothing more than fiction.

Because social networks – the par excellence paradigm of the social dimension of modern-day existence – are very fragile entities in political terms. And don't be fooled, because the only thing that really exists in this simulation of self-organised community is the profits and losses it generates.

This reality obviously has nothing to do with a political life because in it there is no place for the community as an ontological entity, one where its members decide how to live. And so the community, in general, does not exist and politics is no longer the tool of emancipation. Politics is merely managing what there is rather than being part of the collective liberation process; or to put it another way, postpolitics is nothing more than the technical know-how that serves to keep public order and minimize conflict. Its justification is the defence of individual liberties, touchstone of the liberalism that in the new context is in fact nothing more than individual consumer freedom. Because in the same way that gelification metaphorically explains a reality that seems to be shifting in some senses but rigidly fixed in others, the end of politics – in the terms described here – conceals new forms of subjectivisation and invisible control. The exaltation of the individual through the fulfilment of his desires, the invitation to share his opinions from his sofa at home and the celebrated access to information from any device and in any circumstance are expressions of this friendly, new, seductive subjectivisation. Concealed power is the strongest power.

And so beyond postpolitics, what we talk about nowadays is psychopolitics (Byung-Chul Han, 2015) and neurocapitalism (Giorgio Griziotti<sup>4</sup>, 2017) as the forms of power used by neoliberalism to maintain and intensify the rationale of profit. The production of new subjectivities that shape the dominant ideology – and identify with reality – is fundamentally based on technologies of the self and digital technology (especially Big Data as the capacity to accumulate massive

amounts of information). The psychologisation of reality – made possible thanks to new technologies capable of exposing individuals' thoughts and desires – has channelled malaise, blame and pointlessness towards the individual himself. Depoliticization is psychologisation; violence is now directed inwards (instead of at the social-economic system), leaving the way open for consumer goods, the only thing nowadays that is truly free. And this change in direction of the gaze, this simultaneous blaming and fetishism on the part of the individual, transforms human beings into merchandise. The individual no longer opposes the circulation of capital because he is too busy trying to adapt to this mobilization as best he can. Simultaneously boss and slave, his main concern is his employability, his me brand that must generate returns. And to obtain maximum returns he must become accomplice to the system that exploits him, he must make it his own. As Bourdieu (1977, p. 44) said “power that manages to impose meanings and imposes them as legitimate while concealing the power relations, adds its own strength; in other words, it adds a specifically symbolic force to these power relations”. And this is where psi techniques come in; this is where the new education comes in which, even though it claims to be the opposite, is political.

From this stance, our debate about innovation and renovation makes sense because it forms part of the analysis of the context from which we can interpret the why of the educational change we are being sold and the where it is heading. Keeping this in mind is key to not getting washed along in the wave of the new and forgetting, as we said previously, to pay attention to what endures which, likewise previously pointed out, is fundamental to education. The matter of educational change, then, must be linked with social change in the same way that education and society, and educational theory/practice and context, cannot be separated. Accepting, then, the described ontology, we must ask ourselves what type of transformation on a social level can we bring about in this translucent

confinement identified as reality before applying it in the area of education. Two brief points must be made prior to addressing this question.

In our opinion, this transformation obviously calls for defiance, a defiance that involves what Benjamin (2010) called the destructive character.<sup>5</sup> Without this spirit movements are reincorporated into the system, strengthening it, feeding it on tools that change hands and are used without warning or suspicion. This is why, first, the change we propose must start with setting aside the rationale surrounding power, and this requires time, time to think, and silence; and second, it must be based on the understanding that the isolation of the individual, his existential aloneness, is the necessary condition for his subjectivisation – and his subjection - to the neoliberal rationale. Only by understanding human beings in collective terms (and not as the sum of individuals) can resistance be mounted to the subjectivisation that enslaves them. Freedom is only understood in absolute terms. Emancipation is collective, else it is not emancipation.

#### **4. Educational change**

Education is dependent on the context. The context changes, but the factors that in many ways determine education, remain the same. We have described the present as a depoliticised existence where psychology and digital technology carefully construct a support system – be it by design or unwittingly – for global financial capitalism. But this voluntary affiliation is flawed since the social inequality and existential malaise intrinsic to capitalism appear cyclically, and especially at times when tension in the regime itself is at its peak, because it is then that education emerges as both a question mark and hope, activating the mechanisms of educational change. But before delving into the educational change in Spain in the last decade, the international context needs to be examined, since while it is true that there are peculiarities and differences between the



different state education systems, there are also some shared elements and unifying trends that guide education systems across the world (Fullard; Stevenson, 2019).

The educational phenomenon we are analysing must be placed within what Hargreaves and other authors identified as The Global Educational Reform Movement (GERM): “[A] new, official orthodoxy of educational reform is rapidly being established in many parts of the world” (cited by Sahlberg, 2016, p. 132). According to Sahlberg (2016, p. 130), the beginnings of this agenda of educational reforms can be traced to the decade of the 1980s when governments realised that the current education systems would not be able to contend with the economic, technological and social changes that were occurring on a global scale. Based on this analysis, the World Bank and the OCDE started to implement reform in schools which, considering human capital theory, would boost efficiency and productivity, imposing a commercial rationale on the world of education with the apparent objective of reducing poverty. The new methodology was underpinned by supposed evidence of how human beings learn: “The breakthrough of constructivist approaches to learning gradually shifted the focus of education reforms from the teacher to the student and learning. According to this paradigm, intended outcomes of schooling emphasize deeper conceptual understanding, problem solving, recognition of multiple intelligences, and advancement of social skills” (Sahlberg, 2016, p. 132). The idea was that this approach, together with the imposition of a competitive rationale on schools and defence of the free choice of schools for families, would increase the quality of education in line with new international standards. However, the outcome of the GERM guidelines on learning and the administration of schools has in fact been to standardise educational processes, enabling educational results to be measured and compared on a worldwide scale, thus creating the conditions required for



competitiveness, the cornerstone of neoliberal rationale (Laval, 2013) and today's citizens' *modus vivendi*, and to establish benchmarks for guiding state education system reforms. From this perspective, instead of reducing poverty and advancing towards equality, educational success has become about the capacity to compete and gain an advantageous position over others. Meanwhile, education systems across the world ignore the matter of educational inequality as a key factor to understanding persistent poverty, while introducing education programmes wherever there are none. The point is that education for all does not necessarily mean better living conditions for all or more social justice. What in fact the educational model imposed through global policies does is promote educational practices geared towards seeking maximum personal benefit; education to get a better future salary. In Bonal's words, "human capital theory includes an implicit conceptualization and interpretation that reduces human behaviour to instrumental motivation and the ability of individuals to act only as utility maximisers" (2016, p. 102). In other words, it imposes the anthropological model of utilitarianism. To this effect, the global education policies guided by GERM are conceived in merely functionalist and adaptive terms, and their results measured in commercial terms, the only legitimate criteria of quality education. The main objective of educational change is thereby set and the dynamic of global mobilisation (touched on previously) comes to rest in education, where once again the neoliberal rationale is ensconced as the only possible, desirable discourse, further strengthening its hegemony. But how are these policies enshrined in the educational change movement in Spain? And are they easily identifiable? Is there any way to resist them? Faced with this challenge, what we propose is an exercise to politicise education in these post-political times. As we have consistently sustained up to now, in the face of global mobilisation we need to politicise our existence as a way of safeguarding our freedom. The first step in doing so is to understand the political nature of education; and the second step is

to analyse and understand the pedagogical discourses that shape the current innovation and reform movements. To this effect, and beyond analysing the discourse of these movements, we will take a brief look at the educational approaches of the renewal movements in previous eras – through their texts and their leading figures – to help us understand how they differ compared with the pedagogical undercurrent of the current reforms.

As Freire (2006, p. 33) said, “the politicisation of education is the quality it has of being political; in other words, the capacity it has for knowing what educational policy is being fomented, what and who it favours and what and who it opposes”. This involves considering the direction power is moving in, what is feeding and promoting it, and what is diminishing and undermining it. This is how almost a century ago Milani (Scuola di Barbiana, 1998) understood the classist spirit of school and the need to construct educational spaces of resistance, which in his case was through language as an essential tool to analyse reality. His purpose was simply to raise awareness of social injustices.

Because like we said previously, lack of awareness and the complicity between individuals-consumers and the powers that be make that power invisible, thus strengthening it. And this complicity is achieved by seduction, by promoting entrepreneurship, stimulating creativity, encouraging us to be the best we can, investing in perfecting the “me”. The goal is voluntary subjection to the dictatorship of capital through an education that constructs neoliberal subjectivity. That said, the fact that education serves power is nothing new, but fortunately neither is the resistance to it that emerges. But what we have to do in gelified times is learn to walk through tricky new terrain. Let’s try to do so.

The calls for innovation coming from different educational areas is mainly focused on changing classroom methodologies, redistributing spaces, redefining the role of the teacher and especially using technologies as a launching pad for the new educational paradigm that is inevitably emerging. However, what has disappeared from the discourse and sunk worryingly into oblivion is what we believe has framed all processes of educational change in school culture: social transformation. One of the interviewees puts it this way: “The ideological discourse of ideas in schools is something that is not happening and I think it has been taken out [...]. For me, the problem with these innovation programmes is that the ideological discourse about school will keep on disappearing. Reform has especially focused on the more technical and technological aspects, and especially on changing the classroom distribution, proposing new organisational forms, and so on” (interview 3, p. 5, l. 47). And regarding the context of Catalonia, this interviewee affirmed that the socio-political dimension of education “is something that still needs to be addressed. Just look at what’s happened with all the business with *The Process* -I am referring to the movement, starting in 2010, in favour of the Independence of Catalonia- all the controversy that has emerged is totally lacking in focus, all they talk about it indoctrination. I think that the question of the society-school relationship is something that still hasn’t been well thought out” (interview 3, p. 5, l. 34). As already pointed out, this phenomenon has occurred because of the depoliticised context we live in, and that is precisely why when we talk about educational change it is essential to decide whether or not we are committed to politicising education as a key element for social transformation.

There were times in the last century when one of the ways the desire for social change through education found expression was through creating self-directed educational networks independent of the state, an approach characteristic of

revolutionary thought. This was the case with the network of rationalist schools in Catalonia in the first third of the twentieth century, which attempted to rid schools of religious dogmatism by replacing it with scientific, experimental knowledge. While this self-management approach has not been fully revived, current pedagogy has remained influenced by the principles laid down by Ferrer Guardia<sup>6</sup> in his unique act of defiance against the state and the church. The New Unified School Council (CENU) educational project was implemented right in the middle of the civil war, the rationalist principles underpinning it affirming that “we aspire to create a New School where the flame of freedom and progress is never extinguished; an education that knows how to drown out the atavistic impulses of hatred and struggle in the souls of children and knows how to ignite the instincts that incline towards solidarity and love between men”<sup>7</sup> (Decree of the CENU<sup>8</sup>, 1936). This experience, interrupted by Francoism and its specific political agenda, can still be traced through to the pedagogical renewal movements of the late 1970s and mid-1980s, a time when the differences between the two educational approaches would become very apparent, as illustrated in one of the interviews when we talked about the differences between the various stakeholders in this period of renewal: “[The association of teachers] Rosa Sensat labelled us [the Federation of pedagogical renovation movements] as communists and anarchists, while Rosa Sensat was clearly socialist. This was a cause of conflict (interview. 2, p. 5, l. 45). Even though the revolutionary postulates that conceived of education as anti-establishment and antagonistic to the state had given way to more reformist arguments, educational change within the framework of the school system continued its struggle for a democratic education. This point is made by some of the key players in the educational reforms of the 1970s and 1980s when asked in the interviews about the dynamics of the educational change movement and how they experienced the transformative nature of their endeavours: “The general feeling was that we wanted a different

world. You didn't know which world, but you knew you wanted a different one" (interview 4, p. 5, l. 13). "There was frenzied activity because there was an [educational] model that fitted into a country's political model; it wasn't just education, the education system... [Political change] was very important (interview 5, p. 6, l. 3).

Catalonia also opted for a public system that defended the Catalan language and culture, a non-authoritarian social model and mixed schools. Countering the Francoist educational model, the progressivist parties unanimously agreed on this matter: "The political parties stuck their neck out. Not so much with the laws, but with political decisions that clearly marked a new direction. Nowadays, there isn't..." (interview 2, page 8, l. 3).

There were also calls from some sectors for a state school geared towards the labouring classes, questioning the sense of a system which, according to the *Movimiento de Escuelas en Lucha* (which was mainly concentrated in the metropolitan area of Barcelona), reproduced the capitalist social order. The collective *Weekends* (1978), one of the movement's leading groups, adamantly vindicated the importance of positioning the fight for a different educational model firmly within the state school system, in the belief that creating alternative educational experiences does not challenge the system because it is in public education that the state's ideological control is most apparent. Only within the framework of the state school system can the state apparatus and the school as a tool to reproduce the social system be opposed. And so began a period of challenging the assumptions of Francoist education, which would leave its mark on how the education system developed in the following decades.

It was during this second period of educational change that the renewal movements emerged, developed and fought for a state school system that embodied the ideals of democracy, social justice, equality and coeducation. Implicit in this change, understood as the appropriation of what is meant by public, was criticism of the education system as a way of reproducing the established order. Demands were made for an alternative social project, one that was free and egalitarian and identified with democracy and opposed the dictatorship. Changing the school system was the lever for bringing Franco's regime to an end.

What underpins our argument is the fact that despite notable differences depending on the moment in time, important educational change has always come about through social change: the two go hand in hand. As we have seen, the matter of the purpose of education has been the determining factor in all the attempts in the history of education in Spain to make changes in favour of freedom, equality and social justice. "For me, if [educational change] is divorced from its "why" and its final purposes it becomes a different way of learning and teaching, and the ethical and moral part once again gets left aside... the ideological part of why we do something is ignored" (interview 3, p. 6, l. 2).

Obviously, we have pinpointed the movements that have driven change from the pedagogical left because historically speaking these are the ones that have made the greatest impact. Considering that the state education systems have been conceived from within the capitalist economic model and liberal political thought, it is hardly surprising that the severest criticisms emerge from the working classes, from the libertarian movements which, under the umbrella of socialism and based on progressivism, aim to pit social models antagonistic to or generally critical of capitalism against it.

As Esteve (2016) pointed out, these movements mainly identified with the term renewal because of its suggestion of the idea of renovation. Seeking this renewal did not mean that there was no need to introduce new methodologies, teaching methods, ways of organisation and so on. On the contrary, they were basic requirements, but they were understood within a wider framework that linked them to political positions and anthropological models other than the presiding one. “Historically, innovation has always been linked to more technical concepts, hasn’t it, rather than to changing the cogs and wheels? And renewal is more a political concept; it’s about re-thinking the purposes, the “whys”. So for me, it is still a valid differentiation, because it tells me a lot of things” (interview 3, p. 4, l. 17). “To innovate is to put something new into practice. Renewal, pedagogical renewal, well we have always linked this to a personal and collective commitment with respect to the purposes of education. This means an ethical commitment which involves a commitment to children and young people, to families, to the project it forms part of, to its social role, to the social commitment we think we have to take on and which we can’t avoid. For me, this is the difference” (interview 5, p. 8, l. 30).

Having said that, it is also true that when analysing educational change driven from below and from the left, the question is what type of innovations does a radical movement which beyond educational change seeks a different, less segregating and classist socio-political organisational model require? The answer is obvious: it requires political innovations and a re-evaluation of the political dimension of education.

Our thesis is that, within the international context we have described above, the educational changes being imposed in Spain are precisely those that ignore the relationship between innovation/renewal and social change. They are the ones



that do not address the matter of the purpose of education in a transformative sense and in a way that tackles fundamental questions about the political condition of human beings. They do not associate education with identifying the causes of inequality, nor do they develop this notion as a reflection of how power is exercised and shaped. This concealment is usually justified by citing the unpredictable and inevitable future for which we supposedly have to educate our children and which, consequently, does not allow us to think of constructing a different world, given that the future of this one is not in our hands. Another of the justifications is based on a false neutrality, which transforms any attempt to educate into subverting a social order. From this perspective, school has no other objective than to update the reproductive function of education, even though the changes in school dynamics are being sold as a radical transformation with social implications. Furthermore, it must be noted that the majority acquiescence to this discourse (and its practical consequences)—including among the most combative sectors—is explained by the difficulty in understanding the political nature of education within the confusing context we have described, which is also how the sectors advocating progress and renewal are kept disorientated, as one of our interviewees pointed out: “What worries me is the discourse of the political left [...] What they are doing is consolidating the Status Quo model. It’s the failure of the lowest classes (interview 7, p. 28, l. 34 ).

This is how education becomes nothing more than simply modifying the repertoire of pedagogical techniques, thus diminishing its potential to transform. As we will now see, this change is geared towards facilitating pupils’ adaptation to an unpredictable and changing future where they will be valued for their capacity to collaborate without resistance, for their docile employability. The outcome of the educational process is that pupils normalise their incapacity to transform reality and impact on their surroundings, renouncing taking part in



deciding how to live in a community and committing themselves exclusively to achieving an advantageous position that brings them individual benefits. An example of the process of the depoliticalisation of schools becomes most apparent in the area of participation: “Now, politics has a lot to do with organised participation. [In previous times], the idea was that state and state-funded private schools had to meet some minimum requirements as a collegiate body, called the school council, as a space for family participation. This has now changed to such an extent that the role of pupils’ families in school is practically anecdotal. What is politics? Politics is when you influence the transcendental decisions made in your surroundings. This has changed enormously and in such a way that the school council, which was conceived for a specific reason, has totally transformed and become diluted over the years. That is politics” (interview 5, p. 10, l. 30). Let’s examine this idea in further depth.

One of the benchmark movements currently spearheading educational change in Catalonia is the platform Escola Nova 21<sup>9</sup>, which brings together and channels already existing initiatives with the aim of effecting a change at the level of the system and geared towards schools that wish to make this change. Their approach centres on updating the educational system by “fully adopting a proposal aimed at developing skills for life in our historical context and learning practices based on existing knowledge about how people learn”.<sup>10</sup> These skills for life are summarised as learning to know, to do, to coexist and to be in order to rise to the challenges posed by a globalised world “defined by its complexity and interdependence and by the challenges this brings: sustainable development, poverty and inequality, major population movements and violence, gender inequality and exponential technological change”. While these principles could find a place within left-wing ideology, what is surprising is that the goal is to meet current challenges rather than to analyse their causes and eradicate their effects.

Because what exactly does ‘meet current challenges’ mean within the framework of the global mobilisation we have described? In our opinion, what it means is situating all social phenomena under the rationale of profit. In other words, what it means is that poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa is addressed by putting its population to work extracting minerals; that gender inequality is translated into encouraging competitiveness among women in the labour market; and that sustainable development is fomented through selling biological products to those who can afford them. This does not mean that EN21 concurs with the probable injustices generated around this mobilising policy. In fact, quite the contrary. As one of its members puts it: “The discourse of Escola Nova 21 has nothing neoliberal about it; that is a popular misconception”, going on to say: “Show me a single document, a single text, or a single action [that supports that assertion]. [You’ll see] if you talk to the schools. What [EN21] does is empower teachers” (interview 7, p. 4, l. 27). Nonetheless, the fact of promoting a change where “[the] proposal consists in developing people, [in the] typical skills for life discourse, learning to learn, self-directed learning, evaluative training, and so on...” (interview 7, p. 4, l. 27) means they are simply positing a functionalist educational model, one that works to adapt the pupil (or more accurately, all pupils, since all pupils have the right to educational success) to the given reality, just as we pointed out at the beginning of this section. And although this necessarily forms part of the function of education and it defines a comprehensive model, what we are lacking are educational proposals that are capable of confronting reality rather than accepting it.

Another case in point is the Jesuitas Foundation <sup>11</sup>, which seeks to shape “flexible people open to change with the ability to think about what talents they have and mould them to evolving situations [...]”<sup>12</sup>, thus explaining why the emphasis is placed on skills and differences, two essential values in a hyper-competitive

market that demands adaptability. Because banishing the communal, the shared, the things that become objectified in culture gives way to the imperative to construct the neoliberal subjectivity that is busy at all hours and entrepreneurial in times of crisis. “One of the things we do in the Horizon 2020 project is define the model of the person we want, a responsible person who is committed to the community, a democratic citizen who is committed to the world, who fights for a sustainable, creative, innovative country that has initiative. These are the characteristics” (interview 6, p. 17, l. 15). But what we ask ourselves is where is the proposal to educate people capable of tackling injustices and standing against the hegemonic model rather than simply participating in global mobilisation based on creativity and initiative, the skills upon which all emphasis is placed? As one of the interviewees said: “There were some minimum requirements the world used to ask of pupils before anything else: values, thinking about others, thinking about tomorrow, thinking about things, realising that things can be different. A different world, we want a different world, [this desire] is everywhere. [...] But on the other hand, there’s this attitude of we have to do what we can whatever the world asks of us. Excellence, the current obsession with excellence. Right from nursery school there is this thing that children need to be entrepreneurs. But there are things in the world that you have to try to achieve and things that you have to try to overcome” (interview 4, p. 10, l. 47). Other new approaches place the onus on the subject himself. But while these often minority stances are coming from a very different angle from the ones analysed previously, they too ignore the need to transform society as an inseparable element of educational change. They follow the approach of what one of the interviewees criticises about the new educational models: “[The current school model] is not a compensating platform for social inequalities. [...] The sociological studies continue to tell us that pupils from poor families have fewer chances. This idea that school must be a school for citizens, that it must produce

people capable of questioning, people don't take that into account anymore. I think that these are the things that need to be reconsidered now. How to recover this pact there used to be between society and school, given the current situation we are experiencing.” (interview 3, p. 6, l. 42 ).

In the opposite vein to rekindling this pact and in the line of avoiding educating based on a social model, there is the Red de Escuelas Libres (XELL)<sup>13</sup> who, on their website, affirm that “Our main interest is in creating respectful spaces in relation to the needs of children and adults”.<sup>14</sup> While this principle is irreproachable from a humanist perspective, we see it as symptomatic in the sense that this goal is unrelated to transforming the whole. It is yet another example of the disappearance of the social dimension and the vision of the collective from educational practice and discourse. Hence the notion of *live pedagogy*, which rules out any extrinsic motivation on the part of the child, promising instead to respectfully accompany the natural unfolding of their intrinsic self; in other words, “support, while fully respecting the essence of each person”. And that is why they talk about live education, “because we believe that the basic foundation of what education should be resides in what we are in essence, living beings. Rather than basing ourselves on a prior ideological approach about what we want society to be like, we believe that the starting point should be a vision of how life manifests itself through us (CRAEV, Resources and advice centre for live education). This biologist premise of education has the virtue of seeing the natural as unquestionable, leaving the ultimate purpose of education in the hands of empirical evidence. But as is common knowledge, science is not definitive but responds to a set of determinate values. The solid foundation contributed by “current psychology and neurosciences [...] about the importance of ensuring the needs of infants before any political or ideological objective”<sup>15</sup> is the same one as diagnoses ADHD in thousands of children in the Spanish state in response to their

inadaptation to the school system. Although the aim of live pedagogy approaches like this one is that infants develop freely with an emphasis on their wellbeing and emotional stability, the fact that they have no impact at all on the social dimension of education simply translates into overprotecting children from the shortcomings of society. Instead of educating to change society, the deal is to avoid contact with it because in order to achieve the wellbeing previously referred to, children “must satisfy their internal needs. If external pressures do not allow for this, then the organism can become imbalanced on several levels: somatic, emotional, cognitive and so on”.<sup>16</sup> Given the multiplicity of external pressures and the flagrant collective imbalance, from this point of view education is in danger of becoming a type of therapy whose only destination is the me, an infinitely vast space where capitalism can take full advantage. It is what Solé and Moyano (2017, p. 107) have identified as the psi colonisation of educational discourse where “learnings are not linked with culture but with behaviour; in other words, when education has renounced cultural transmission, [then] what remains is simply the moral praxis of examining the conscience”.

That said, what is especially revealing is that CRAEV vindicates – in our opinion contrary to all prognosis – renewal movements because “they have put into practice educational experiences based on a broad outlook with respect to infancy and education”. And that XELL simultaneously cites art therapy, seitai, gestalt psychology, psycho-corporeal therapy, bioenergy therapy, the Waldorf pedagogy, the Montessori pedagogy, Paulo Freire and libertarian pedagogy, as some of its influences. This hotchpotch of apparently contradictory approaches not only fits with the gelified reality we have described, but it also illustrates the point that anything goes in this new cycle of educational change apart from anything that sheds doubt on the capitalist model as the definitive socio-economic paradigm.

In short, alternative social projects have disappeared from all these proposals. Education is not conceived as resistance or critique, but as adaptation, albeit adaptation to uncertainty. Neoliberalism's ideological hegemony acts as the solid that entraps the liquid, inviting new methodologies, ways of distributing spaces, and even new teacher roles, but it is difficult to grasp the sense of these changes unless we take a globalising perspective and question the principles of work, competitiveness, production and profit. This is when it becomes evident that the monopoly of instrumental reason which confers purpose on education also imposes servility on the system.

The distinctive feature of this new liberal offensive is the supposed freedom and unquestionable success promised by current educational change: you can choose your own agenda, discover your talents and put your life projects into practice. But beyond this, what is actually being implied is that blame for not being successful and not being free falls entirely on the individual, thus liberating the socio-political organisation, the community, from all responsibility. Emotional education is a key tool to manage this task because it channels students' malaise into managing their own emotions. Identifying, recognising and transforming anger or sadness into motivation and positivity not only creates a more suitable climate for learning, but it also creates the false sensation that the problem and its solution lie in the effective management of the "me". Based on neuroscience as the new, unquestionable epistemological paradigm, the upsurge in definitive, reductionist approaches to emotional education in the new pedagogical discourse has helped dissipate the fight for equality and the mistrust of power. The collective dimension is dissolved and individual freedom is imposed as ontological imperative, renewing the promise of happiness (Cuesta, 2005) with which schools seduced in times gone by.

And what is more, apart from being a hegemonic, pedagogic tool, the capitalist school seduces thanks to a radically new novelty: digital technology. The allure of technology acts as a mirage which once again conceals the real sense of this innovation. Beyond ease of use, the capacity to attract attention and the access it offers to all types of information (not to knowledge), the digitalisation of education could ultimately lead to all emancipating educational projects being definitively discarded for two reasons. First, because of the level of control it has over creating increasingly homogenised content. And second, because of the opportunity it affords for absolute control over the thoughts and desires of children through the large-scale collection of data under the auspice of personalising the learning process. In short, it is a case of alignment with just one way forward, one that obstructs analytical, critical, emancipatory thought.

## **5. The technologisation of education**

As we pointed out at the beginning of this paper, education – in the way we are defending it – does not allow for preconceived formulas alien to the cultural, social and economic context in which it is provided. In our opinion, the uncritical use of new technologies forces education in completely the opposite direction; in other words, towards mass remote-controlled indoctrination. We are obviously talking about the practice of psychopolitics applied to the area of education, made possible by the great world brain: Google. The current capacity for processing information is an unprecedented situation that cast suspicion on knowledge. This is how Nicolas Carr (2009) put it in his 2004 article published in *The Atlantic* “Is Google making us stupid?” based on an interview with Sergey Brin and Larry Page, the founders of the search engine, in which they stated: “For us, working on search is a way to work on artificial intelligence. [...] Certainly, if you had all the world’s information directly attached to your brain, you’d be better off”. As Page told a convention of scientists in 2008, Google is “really trying to build



artificial intelligence and to do it on a large scale”.<sup>17</sup> Because as the torrent of information on the net swells, information is selected, hierarchised and discarded based on how often websites are visited and the alleged impact it has. Impact, in this case, means monetary value. The yield of each visit is inversely proportional to the pausing, reflecting and contemplating that thought requires, in such a way that quantity, superficiality and confusion are imposed on the quality of the content.

The paradox and danger of this virtual reality is that it presents itself as a liberating revolution in terms of current knowledge. But it is evident that free access to information does not translate into knowledge – understood as structured, related information – but to the simple opportunity to accumulate data. This warning is pertinent to the area of education because faith in using ICTs as a paradigm of innovation seems to be substituting the real educational task of teachers when it comes to transmitting, questioning, creating and contrasting content and relating it to pupils’ reality, interests and conflicts. Identifying knowledge with the access to information controlled by Google is, in our opinion, creating a false impression of learning and perpetrating the transformative impotence of the contemporary individual.

Aside from the big data companies centralising, homogenising and controlling the production and reproduction of content, our reflection on knowing leads us to the matter of how knowledge is presented. In the digital age, the medium through which we access knowledge is characterised by immediacy, saturation, digital noise in the form of advertising and unwanted stimuli, speed and distraction. This has repercussions on pupils in the sense of knowing how to be in the classroom, at a conference or in any other educational setting. It changes our way of reading – and listening – and consequently our way of producing information:



distractedly, restlessly and hyperactively. A way of learning that contradicts thinking, an activity that calls for silence, slow preparation and effort. Selecting and analysing information, learning to read and narrating are the priority goals of current education faced with the contemporary world's existential crisis. But is this form of resistance to the all-encompassing rationale we have described enough?

Faced with this panorama, it must be pointed out that the culminating stage of the neoliberal offensive against any emancipatory attempt on the part of education and its insistence on steering educational change in the direction of full affiliation to global mobilization, has not yet taken place. But it is not far off. According to Williamson (2018, p. 218) “major global technology companies and venture capital investment firms have begun to concentrate significant technical and financial resources in education in recent years. Though Silicon Valley is routinely for its discourse of “radically disruptive” technology entrepreneurship (Rabin, 2015), the Silicon Valley vocabulary is becoming part of the language of education, and is galvanizing significant financial and research and development practices in educational technology (‘ed-tech’). In fact, Silicon Valley entrepreneurs have already started to create prototypes of schools such as the AltSchool, which uses funding from Facebook, the KhanLab School, promoted by the founder of the Khan Academy, and the P-TECH school, promoted by IBM, where the values and practices of the corporative technological culture are opposed to the principles of the public school system (Williamson, 2018). As American professor and activist Alison McDowell points out, thanks to the neoliberal governments leaving future education to the mercy of the markets, these educational models promoted by the technological corporations are based on the philosophy of augmented reality and consumption on demand (symbolised by Netflix, Uber and Pokémon go). To this effect, the educational process is

understood as an algorithm where “school decentralises and the children start to be data processed by this algorithm, which creates a type of personalized educational playlist.” In this scenario the teacher disappears and what materialises is what McDowell describes as the equation of the education system; in other words, a preestablished formula mediated by technology. “The students themselves become part of an ever-improving algorithm that ‘learns the students’ and by doing so learns itself (learning analytics). In addition, the learning child comes to know about itself by relying on the knowledgeable algorithm. It is not through social interaction [...] that students learn [...] but rather a black-boxed, almighty algorithm learns about them and ‘knows’ them since their early childhood” (Breiter; Jarke, 2016, p. 11). What this means is that the large technological companies collect and accumulate data through these algorithms, which is then analysed to measure the effectiveness of schools (Williamson, 2018) – converted into businesses – enabling them to be ranked in the global educational market, compared with the others and their practices changed to achieve the desired economic benefits. An example of the commercial use of educational datafication is the online service provided by a local newspaper in Los Angeles, which enables you to “to search for schools and teachers to check for their added value per grade level and subject” (Breiter; Jarke, 2016, p. 9). As we can see, this educational data has an incalculable value in the global market, such that “Educational technology (de-tech) has become an important part of this through the major business opportunities it represents. The ed-tech market is today a multibillion-dollar global market in which education, technology and entrepreneurship are mutually dependent and has, in this way, become an increasingly structured space that condenses and regulates the principles of schooling” (Player-Koro, 2019, p. 130). To this we will add that, beyond the school governing body and its orientation, the data collected is yet another weapon of global psycho-political control given that it is collected in real time,

enabling omnipotent intervention in attitudes and behaviours (Williamson, 2018, p. 232). Information -now more than ever before- is the key to power. It is no longer a matter of educating to select and analyse information but, as Bauman (2007) said, it is about fighting to stop this task becoming the monopoly of the big technological corporations whose only interest is the objectification/reification and commercialisation of the learning processes of future entrepreneurs.

And so, as we have seen, on the one hand the neoliberal educational project is about disconnecting the student from their surroundings. Alienation and dissociation from one's immediate reality decontextualizes the educational task, undervaluing the community as the most important educational stakeholder in the socialization and learning process. And on the other hand, it is about individualising the learning process, reducing the social dimension to long-distance contact through social networks. Contrary to personalisation, this individualisation means making a person's performance their sole responsibility (aside from the influence of family and their economic and social situation, which as we know are determinant factors in learning). In our opinion, these two attacks against education are facilitated by some of the technological devices placed at the service of current forms of power, because "[the] digitalization and technology use in education are not value free. They are an integral part of educational governance and, hence, highly political" (Player-Koro, 2019, p. 131). In other words, the insistence on introducing ICT in schools as the definitive argument to justify innovation is an indication of the direction current educational change is taking: "Through venture philanthropy, the technology sector is becoming a 'supply side' provider of education, directly inserting itself into the organization of schooling through prototype projects and technologies, and simultaneously a 'demand side' campaigning platform for educational reform"

(Williamson, 2018, p. 220). As such we are, consciously or unconsciously, heading towards limiting free educational relationships among equals (as an essential element for emancipation) and imposing technological mediation as the unquestionable educational paradigm.

In this paper, we have pondered the matter of what concept of education there is behind change. In many cases current innovation means reducing pedagogical discourse to discussions about methodologies, which implies increasing individual subjection to the rationale of performance, self-exploitation and productivity. Beyond abandoning education to the clutches of the market, psychologising education and digitalising learning methods also form part of the neoliberal offensive against education. However, as we have already pointed out, we are at a crossroads. Educational change can have other ends and the history of pedagogical renewal in our country illustrates just that. Although references to this history have nowadays mysteriously disappeared, there are still some pedagogical changes spearheaded by the social aspect, which have not forgotten that all education is political and are unenticed by miraculous solutions in the form of technological applications. In our opinion, education urgently needs to be changed but not to adapt itself to new market requirements, but to once again put the purpose of all education, both formal and informal, its historical function of social reproduction and the direction the change that has already started to happen is going in, on the table. And so we have come full circle in our questioning of the educational community. It is true that talk of renewal sounds rather antiquated nowadays, while innovation hints of the new, the seductive promise of a better future, but we have to remember that in education there is nothing *new* that is fundamental, so whether we innovate or we renew the question remain as to what for?

**4. By way of conclusion: to politicise education or to innovate politically, the only possible renewal as a radical, emancipatory act.**

And so we are living in times of educational change. The social, political, economic and ecological transformations we are currently witnessing, both locally and globally, are reflected in the new pedagogical approaches. Changes in school culture, for their part, will drive these transformations in one general direction or another depending on the educational practices developed. Faced with this situation, we suggest politicising education as both antidote and resistance to accepting the neoliberal values offered as the only possible existential paradigm.

Politicising is not ideologizing; politicising is not affiliation to a political party or a political trend. This would be bringing the political- as a determinant condition of human beings – down to the level of politics, a specific way of channelling the political. Politicising education is laying bare the fact that all education is politics instead of concealing this fact under the auspices of neutrality or objectivity. Politicising education is questioning the world, asking about its (our) problems, injustices, inequalities and trying to understand their causes; it is talking about different possible and impossible solutions and exposing the lies and the fallacies; it is putting the history of the excluded and those who fight for a fairer society on the table. Politicising is letting ourselves be affected by the world around us and talking about what is concealed beneath the facade of the dominant ideology, and then taking a stance on it. This positioning means manifesting our differences while respecting others, and with rational, reasonable arguments. And once we have taken up our positions – having appraised our situation and the privileges that go with it – we can then undertake the task of educating. Educating in and for what is political is learning to live collectively based on common problems, but always with our own criteria. In other words, it does not renounce the ongoing process of seeking collective emancipation as a condition for individual liberty.

This learning means that our positioning enters into dialogue with the others and accepts that this educating ourselves as a practice of freedom has no point of arrival, while never ceasing to try to reach one. This dialogue is transformative given that it is necessarily contemplated as practice and not simply as discourse. In other words, it takes risks and dares to modify methods, spaces and times as tools that define educational practices and determine the types of educational relationships. But it is not a question of modifying these tools simply to make school more competitive or to ensure that its students keep their privileges. Politicising education is making these changes with all children in mind for the purpose of eradicating individual and collective inequalities and achieving justice and fairness for all of society. And in times of the commercialisation of education this means denouncing individual solutions that always favour the most privileged.

This requires exposing the fallacy of pedagogical neutrality while demonstrating in every educational action that power trespasses on our existence. Paying heed to the pairing ‘know-can’ that materialises in every look, gesture and word that passes between educator and those being educated is the essential condition to implement emancipatory educational practices. It is a matter of providing tools of reflection, criticism and resistance that serve to oppose practices of submission and adaption to authoritarianisms of any kind. To do so, there must be room in the educational space for all voices – teachers’, pupils’ and families’ – and the question of the purpose of education must be addressed. This way the matter of the complexity of the world can be explored in greater depth rather than simply skimming its surface which leads to limiting the debate exclusively to methodological change. Obviously, the desire to learn finds an ally in impressive, attractive, fun educational practices – and we must continue to insist that these be

improved – but it would be erroneous to stop theorizing about how to transform society (in the direction we have suggested) when we pledge for change.

Learning to look at the world critically and being able to transform it requires reflecting on the role of the educator, experimenting with new ways of taking decisions in schools, fostering students' responsibility for their daily lives, and reaffirming the commitment that everybody makes with their community. To renounce this is to rubber stamp the translucent confinement of the gelified world where, inserted into diaphanous cells with windows on all four sides, we keep our distance from others and from reality. The stage that is reality makes us impotent. To release the transformative potential of education we must break out of this confinement and put more horizontal relationships which do not normalise discrimination, indifference or cynicism - values characteristic of capitalist societies- into practice in our schools.

To reduce change to the debate about converting learning into digital applications that entertain those being educated and facilitate the task of teaching is to juvenilise and overprotect pupils, depriving them even further of practical knowledge. Recovering the communal, collective sense of education by fostering dialogue, assembly (or any other form of participation/implication) and, ultimately, the appropriation of the education process by those being educated, is the basis of the educational renewal and political innovation we are defending here. Understanding ourselves as social beings who share joys and sorrows, emphasising that we are the product of a social and political context and that we have a history that has shaped us is what gives us the strength to decide our present and direct our future. This must be one of the goals of schooling in the post-political times we have described: we must understand and create schools, or any other educational space, as a political space where we learn to co-exist and



recognize ourselves in others, instead of accepting it as simply another space of consumption. Only by recovering the collective dimension of existence can we rid ourselves of the impotence that psychopolitics imposes on us.

Two brief points by way of inconclusion to finish. In some cases, educational change is moving in a direction where competitiveness and productivity are the dominant values. In response to the eagerness to accumulate information, which only serves to pass a university degree, get a qualification and prepare students to be employable, we suggest paying attention to the learning processes in relation to the times we are living in and the roles we are fostering. The student's position at the centre of the learning process must serve to connect knowledge with their experience, opening them up to the world and filling learning with meaning, a process that has more to do with craftsmanship than with the compulsive, focused consumption typical of methodological digitalization. Touching the world with all the senses is fundamental during the first stages of infancy, while insistence on ICT simply manages to reduce the human experience to the realm of the sense of sight. While we will not attempt to analyse the consequences of this phenomenon for pupils, it must be kept in mind for future reflections because we cannot deny the fact that the effects of the technological paradigm are starting to be felt on our bodies, behaviour, attitudes and values.

However – and here is the second point – we would like to take a few lines to talk about the use of new technologies in support of an essential, as much as problematic, educational renewal. We have previously denounced the homogenisation and control brought about by placing education in the hands of the big technological corporations and their capacity to collect mass data. We have also warned about the way our capacity to read and understand the world is modified through screens, but fortunately there is also resistance in the virtual



world. If we wish to establish school as a political community, one of the requirements is that we seek out the applications, programs and digital practices that fight back against cyber-control and the monopoly of Microsoft, Apple and the like. If our students are offspring of the digital age, education must also take place in the virtual space. This translates into putting to use all the educational experiences that using free software has managed to contribute to the process of independent, free learning.<sup>18</sup> The decentralising, counter-power potential that knowing how to choose and use digital tools involves is one of the issues to be explored in the coming years. But this involves understanding that using a tool requires attentive vigilance, in addition to learning how to use it in line with the set objectives; in other words, knowing what, when, why and for what we are using it.

Esteve (2016) calls on commitment to pedagogical renewal and the need to remain connected to reflection and experience to prevent definitive false solutions. We agree with this view, but we also believe that right now when commercialization is being dangerously imposed on education this renewal is absolutely unavoidable. Renew implies thinking deeply about education; in other words, about taking all the dimensions of education into account when developing learning processes that help to construct a fair, free society. Having said that, not losing sight of the root of the problem is, for the authors of this paper, the indispensable goal to ensure that the multiple and varied pedagogical renewal initiatives do not lose the transformative capacity that has characterised them in the past.

### **Last words**

We are immersed in a process of educational change with a worldwide reach, characterised by the new technologies and access to knowledge and globalisation

within a gelified context in which a confused, depoliticised reality is being imposed in the form of global mobilisation. This all-encompassing movement of capital invades the world of education, driving reforms based on the instrumental reason that governs the technological world, the rationale of which emerges as the desirable and inevitable future. The solutionism of complex logarithms is being applied to the education of human beings, making the learning processes calculable and comparable. The way this is done is to isolate the individual from their community and the end result is the neoliberal individualisation of subjects and the me brand. This global educational reform movement manifest itself in local systems in different ways. In the case of Spain, and especially in Catalonia where there have been two previous periods of renewal that have influenced current educational perspectives, this change started gathering momentum from around the turn of the millennium. However, analysis of its antecedents – which occurred in the era of modernity- demonstrates that in general terms the current change movement has minimised the political dimension of the educational environment, while prioritising matters of methodology. This fact is embodied in the tech invasion of the world of education and succumbs to the trends of global reform which promote an adaptive education that serves the manpower needs of the fourth industrial revolution. Faced with this phenomenon, what we propose is a politicisation which gives educational change back the transformative and emancipatory force that has historically characterised pedagogical renewal movements.

## Notes

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1 “Gelification is to the global era as reification was to modernity. Reification was based on the distinction between what is alive and what is dead. Gelification, on the other hand, requires a triad: alive-dead-inert. [...] Gelification allows us to become aware of a complex reality that expresses itself by concealing itself, making itself abstract, transparent...A reality that is simultaneously alive and dead, a reality that is, in the last instance, multireality”. López Petit, 2009, p.48.

2 “What happens is that the metaphor of the liquid state is too simple. Initially, it appears to resolve the problem of how to think nowadays, but what it really does is nullify it. Saying that reality has become liquid indicates an essential transformation; that the solid, the structures have dissolved. This truth becomes a falsification, however, when the liquid state is claimed to be the result of this dissolution”. López Petit, 2009, p. 49.

3 Author’s own translation.

4 “[...] it appears to be no secret that services like Facebook also work as attention interpretation traps and an incentive to egocentrism. This aspect is one part of a general picture that reaffirms the capacity of cognitive capitalism to globally and lastingly use technological mediations in the birth of new subjectivities. The implicit aim is structural integration in the subjectivities of the economic form of the free market as the only and all-embracing one in which not only are social, economic and political relations established, but also individual behaviour”. Giorgio Griziotti, 2017, p. 129.

5 “The destructive character knows only one watchword: make room. And only one activity: clearing away. His need for fresh air and open space is stronger than any hatred. The destructive character is young and cheerful. For destroying rejuvenates, because it clears away the traces of our own age; it cheers, because everything cleared away means to the destroyer a complete reduction, indeed a rooting out, out of his own condition”. [...] “Therefore, the destructive character is reliability itself. The destructive character sees nothing permanent. But for this reason he sees ways everywhere. Where others encounter walls or mountains, there too he sees a way. But because he sees a way everywhere, he has to clear things from it everywhere. Not always by brute force; sometimes by the most refined violence. Because he sees ways everywhere, he always stands at a crossroads”. Benjamin, 2010, p. 346-347.

6 Francisco Ferrer Guardia (1859, Alella (España)- 1909, Barcelona) was an anarchist educator and advocate of free thinking from Catalonia. He was the founder of the Escola Moderna (a libertarian type school that would pave the way for the rationalist schools in Catalonia). He was condemned to death by a drumhead court-martial who accused him of being one of the instigators of the events of the Tragic Week in Barcelona in June 1909. His condemnation and subsequent execution sparked a wave of protests throughout Europe and America and also in Spain, which would lead to the fall of the Spanish government presided over by Maura.

7 Author’s own translation.

8 CENU: New Unified School Council created in July 1936 with the aim of planning and managing education in Catalonia during the Civil War and the social revolution between 1936 and 1939. Although it was comprised of 12 members of different political factions the president of the Council, J. M<sup>a</sup> Puig Elias, was a high profile anarchist who went into exile after the civil war (1939).

9 Escola Nova 21 is an education platform founded in Catalonia in 2016, which groups together 21 schools and organisations “to promote an education system that responds to UNESCOs call for all sectors to participate in an inclusive process to improve education. It was created by an agreement between the UNESCO Centre of Catalonia, the Jaume Bofill Foundation and the Open University of Catalonia, and joined by the la Caixa social project and the Barcelona Provincial Council. The programme is also supported by the FemCAT Foundation and the puntCAT Foundation to develop, among other aspects, the Digital strategy.

10 From the website: Escola Nova 21, “L’horitzó de canvi”. <http://www.escolanova21.cat/horitzo-comu/> (accessed June 7, 2018).

11 The *Jesuits Foundation* was set up the company of Jesus in Catalonia. Their goal is to rise to the challenges in the field of education that arise in the schools of this congregation. It is considered as an apostolic project that affects eight schools totaling more than 10,000 pupils.

12 From the website: Jesuïtes Educació, “Horitzó 2020: la persona que cerquem” <http://www.fje.edu/ca/l-educacio-que-oferim/formacio-de-persones-integrals> (accessed 24 May, 2018).

13 XELL, founded in 2009, is defined as a non-profit organisation formed by projects and people who advocate a free education. The main aim of the association is “to help set up and develop free education projects and facilitate interaction between them”. This association, whose main area of action is Catalonia, brings together more than twenty projects.

14 From the website: Xarxa d’educació lliure, “L’educació lliure”, <https://educaciolliure.org/leducacio-lliure/> (accessed 25 May, 2018).

15 From the website: CRAEV, “L’educació viva”, <http://www.educacionviva.com/educacionviva.htm> (accessed May 5, 2018) .

16 *Ibid.*

17 “For us, working on search is a way to work on artificial intelligence”. In a 2004 interview with Newsweek, Brin said, “Certainly if you had all the world’s information directly attached to your brain, or an artificial brain that was smarter than your brain, you’d be better off”. Last year, Page told a convention of scientists that Google is “really trying to build artificial intelligence and to do it on a large scale”.

18 Griziotti (2017, p.250) cites four examples of educational and self-learning projects which, thanks to free access technologies with open formats, can generate knowledge that does not serve the interests of the large corporations from an egalitarian, democratic point of view. He talks about Sujonomo University in South Korea, Les Maïres Ignorants in Paris (experience within Occupy Paris in 2012), Unipop and Commonware, both in Italy. This is how the latter defines its proposal: “Commonware is an apparently cryptic, allegedly ironic name. We have selected it to illustrate the ridiculousness of the didactic packages in university companies, the so-called coursewares, playing on meaning through free social collaboration. We have chosen this one in particular to name a challenge: ‘to construct, here and now, a common education; an education that is up to the task of the new composition of live work, immersed in struggles and the material nature of collective behaviour’”.

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