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Education

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Abstract: Education is a key utopian category. Not only is it central to some of the most powerful articulations of utopian method and politics – most notably "the education of desire" – but it is also the principal institution within many visions of a utopian commonwealth. Education has two Latin roots (*educere* or "to lead out" and *educare* or "to mould") and these are both at play (and sometimes in conflict) in the relationship between education and utopia. The present chapter explores this relationship from three broad and contrasting perspectives. The first discusses the nature and role of schooling within classical utopian texts; the second explores education as a mechanism for opening up utopian possibilities within the present; and the third considers the utopian dynamics of deschooling and alternative educational spaces, relating these back to the educational ideas of key utopian thinkers. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the dialectical relationship between education and utopia; that the radical transformation of society requires a radically transformed educational practice but that a radically transformed educational practice requires a radically transformed society.

Introduction

Education is a key utopian category. Not only is it central to some of the most powerful articulations of utopian method and politics – most notably "the education of desire" – but it is also the principal institution within many visions of a utopian commonwealth. Education has two Latin roots (*educere* or "to lead out" and *educare* or "to mould") and these are both at play (and sometimes in conflict) in the relationship between education and utopia. The present chapter explores this relationship from three broad and contrasting perspectives. The first discusses the nature and role of schooling within classical utopian texts; the second explores education as a mechanism for opening up utopian possibilities within the present; and the third considers the utopian dynamics of deschooling and alternative educational spaces.

The educational ideas found within utopian literature vary considerably in both depth and detail. William Morris' *News from Nowhere* (1890) says almost nothing about "education" other than that learning in this epoch of rest occurs informally, through observation and imitation, without the mediation of schools or any other institutions (Morris, 1995, 33-4). In Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun* (1602) and Johann Valentin Andreae's *Christianopolis* (1619), on the other hand, children are handed over to state boarding schools at an early age to undertake a systematic and tightly prescribed curriculum, all under the governance of a single director of education, designed to produce virtuous citizens devoted to the common good. One might differentiate within the utopian tradition between visions in which education serves to draw out (*educere*) human potentialities – epitomised, perhaps, by the ideas of Charles Fourier – and those in which education serves to mould (*educare*) human character to render it fit for life in utopian society – one thinks here, for example, of Robert Owen (Leopold, 2011).

Scholarly focus on the educational ideas of utopian writers seems to have fallen out of favour. In the 1960s one found book-length surveys of utopian educational theory (Fisher, 1963; Ozmon, 1969) together with detailed studies of the educational ideas of specific utopians (Harrison, 1968; Zeldin, 1969). This aspect of the utopian tradition receives less attention today. This is partly because contemporary utopianism is less attached to "Education" conceived as a national system of state-controlled institutions cultivating good citizens and is more inclined to focus on the creation of alternative educational spaces or the processes of learning embedded within everyday life. It is also because energies have shifted from the literary to the political sphere, away from the imaginative reconstitution of societies within which educational structures play a principal role and towards the consideration of pedagogical strategies within, against and beyond education-as-such.

Schooling, Virtue and Utopia

Reading the classic Renaissance utopias today is an interesting exercise. In spite of often profound differences in political and religious outlook, there were commonalities when it came to the structure and functioning of education in More's *Utopia* (1516), Campanella's *City of the Sun* (1602) and Andreae's *Christianopolis* (1619). In terms of formal structure, much is recognisable today. The Renaissance utopians envisaged universal compulsory education as a state-controlled school system directed by a department within government and divided into elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Within schools, one found uniform dress, a standardised curriculum, learning organised around age groups, extrinsic systems of rewards, mechanisms of monitoring and surveillance and a focus on behaviour management. Learning was supplemented by physical education to train both body and mind and time was set aside for play. Alongside formal schooling, the citizens of utopia engaged in processes of lifelong learning (avid reading, attending public lectures, learning from audio-visual displays). Within these utopian commonweals there existed a professional strata of

educators devoted to studying and teaching, selected on the basis of their aptitude for learning.[1]

More interesting, perhaps, than the structure of schooling in these early utopian texts were its two key functions. The first of these is particularly interesting given widespread dissatisfaction among educators in the global North with the ways in which education is increasingly being tied to economic concerns (Ball, 2007).[2] The focus on employability, for example, is often regarded as a crass economistic distortion of the true purpose of education, which is to enhance human understanding and promote human flourishing (Collini, 2012). Tying education to considerations of individual future employment and national economic productivity was, however, an integral feature of utopian visions from the very outset. In both *City of the Sun* and *Christianopolis*, a key function of the educative process was the identification at an early age, through observation of manual training, of each child's natural occupational "inclination" (Andreae, 1916, 210; Campanella, 1981, 23). There was no issue at all with subordinating education to the economic needs of society. To serve the twin interests of individual fulfilment *and* economic productivity, children were assigned at school, at the very earliest age, a role in the division of labour to which they were best suited and for which they were duly trained.

The second function of schooling was more significant still. This was moral/virtue/character education. As More said of the Utopians, "they use with very great endeavour and diligence to put into the heads of their children, whiles they be yet tender and pliant, good opinions and profitable for the conservation of their weal-public" (1994, 125). Virtuous citizens with good character were essential to the healthy functioning of Utopia, and moral training from the early years – when children were still pliable – was the best means of cultivating good character and countering the pull of vices such as pride. More was, of course, a close friend of Erasmus and the influence of Erasmian humanism can be found not only in More but also

in Campanella and Andreae. For Erasmus, moral education and the teaching of true virtue were necessary for cultivating human potential and promoting social harmony (Parrish, 2010). This last point was crucial. More emphasised that teaching "virtue and good manners" is "wondrous profitable to the defence and maintenance of the state of the commonwealth" (1994, 125) and Andreae stressed that cultivating "the best and most chaste morals" is essential "to preserve the safety of the republic" (1916, 210, 187).[3]

In contemporary sociological terms, these two functions of schooling – cultivating the virtues, manners, character and modes of behaviour needed to maintain the harmonious health of society and allocating individuals to the role in the social division of labour to which they are best suited – would be termed socialisation and stratification. From a simple functionalist perspective, these are indeed the two key roles played by education in society (Davis and Moore, 1945; Durkheim, 1956). Seen from this perspective, the early utopians got it right – they knew what education was for. Campenella says at one point that "it is necessary first of all to look at the life of the whole and to then look at that of the parts" (1981, 45). Durkheim would have agreed entirely, asking how the life of the whole body of society can best be served by that part of it called education.

Bemoaning the loss of such a holistic approach to education, and drawing inspiration from Erasmian humanism and More's *Utopia*, David Parrish calls for "an education policy which seeks more aggressively to cultivate from the earliest childhood the virtues necessary for citizenship and for individual flourishing within a good society" (2010, 602). This takes us away, then, from considerations of the role of education within the best state of a commonwealth and towards an exploration of the *utopian potentiality* of education within the existing order of things.

Schooling, Reproduction and Dystopia

Basing educational reform within contemporary society on the structures of educational provision found within utopian systems of the past is fraught with danger. Education cannot be abstracted from the wider social and economic relations in which it is embedded and of which it is expressive. The utopias of More, Campanella and Andreae were communist societies characterised by common ownership, the abolition of wage labour, production for communal use and distribution according to need. The systems of education embedded within these utopias served to conserve, maintain and preserve existing economic, social and political relations. This is, as Durkheim tells us, the functional role of state-maintained education: to reproduce the society of which it is part (1956, 123).

Virtue education, when transposed onto societies characterised by private ownership, wage labour and commodity production, will serve merely to reproduce existing relations of power, dominance, marginalisation and minoritisation. For evidence one need only ask "whose virtues?" and then look at the ways in which "Fundamental British Values" are being cultivated in the UK (Crawford, 2017). Similarly, while education for employability was central to early utopian designs, this serves a more insidious function in a society characterised by a growing surplus population. Here character education assumes importance in forming subjectivities able to endure patiently and with "resilience" as they struggle to sell their labour power and find a foothold amidst increasingly austere and precarious conditions (Webb, 2019).

Contemporary systems of education are, in fact, increasingly characterised as *dystopic*. In *Dystopia and Education* (Heybach and Sheffield, 2013), a succession of writers – with Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* serving as a common analytical frame – trace what they see as the dystopian aspects of schooling in the Anglophone world: constricted curricula, mechanised learning, standardised high-stakes assessments, invasive systems of surveillance

and discipline, institutionalised bullying, the dehumanisation of educational interactions, the stifling of emotional expression and the stunting of children's potential for human flourishing, all operating within physical environments that often resemble crumbling prisons. One of the contributors concludes that "the beauty of possibility has been taken from school" (Freedman, 2013, 10).

While conceding its dystopian nature, David Bell characterises the present juncture as a *critical* dystopia, "a configuration of place (re)produced through relations of domination" but "in which utopian modes of resistance have not been entirely foreclosed" (2017, 66, 10). For Bell, radical experiments in education constitute one of the utopian modes of resistance which "seek to realize alternative ways of organizing life" (66). In fact, utopian experiments in education offer a two-pronged attack. On the one hand they seek to re-vision the common school, retrieving collective memories of past radical educational practice (Hope, 2019) and offering detailed proposals for the schools of the future (e.g. Fielding and Moss, 2011; Robinson and Aronica, 2016). On the other they offer strategies for working within mainstream educational institutions in order to help realise these visions. The US teacher-led movement Rethinking Schools, for example, strives to transform classrooms into "places of hope, where students and teachers gain glimpses of the kind of society we could live in and where students learn the academic and critical skills needed to make that vision a reality" (Rethinking Schools, 2017).Two complementary utopian projects are thus at work: the project of *imaginatively* reconstituting the structure of schooling and the formation of utopian subjectivities capable of *materially* transforming both schooling and society.

Utopian Pedagogy

The first of these projects – re-visioning the common, public, state-maintained school as a *singular* institution – faces certain difficulties (Webb, 2016). How does one abstract "schooling" from the social totality and isolate it as the site for the operation of the utopian

imagination? The results will tend towards recuperated visions barely discernible from the present (Halpin, 2003) or will elide questions of how the "utopian" school articulates with a state-maintained education sector complicit in reproducing inequalities, exclusion and marginalisation (Fielding and Moss, 2011). Ahlberg and Brighouse (2014) remark that any utopian design confined to a specific sector or institution will be limited in its effect on the overall social structure and relations of power. Like others (e.g. Papastephanou, 2009), they argue that any utopian vision for education needs to be embedded within a wider vision of the social totality.

The second project – the project of utopian pedagogy – attempts to forge a link between vision and reality. In answer to the age-old question of "can education change society?" Michael Apple says "it depends. And it depends on a lot of hard and continued efforts by many people" (Apple, 2013, 2). The figure of Paulo Freire looms large here. Not only did he coin the term "utopian pedagogy" (Freire, 1972a) but his seminal *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1972b) is the touchstone for those engaged in the concerted utopian efforts to which Apple refers (Kirylo, 2020). Freire's educational praxis has given rise to an industry of exegesis and analysis which space precludes from summarising here (see Webb, 2012). The important thing to stress is that Freirean pedagogy, and its refraction through the critical lens of feminist educators such as bell hooks and Antonia Darder (hooks, 1994; Darder, 2001), locates transgressive and transformative utopian possibilities within the sphere of education even in its current dystopic state (Giroux, 2020).

In very broad terms, utopian pedagogy is a counter-hegemonic project that strives to shatter contemporary common sense and challenge the ideology of "there is no alternative." It is concerned with creating spaces for the exploration of desires, longings, and hopes, and for drawing out utopian possibilities within concrete experience. It is a pedagogy of transformative hope; a pedagogy aimed at liberating the imagination as to the possibilities for

systemic change. Utopian pedagogy is underpinned by a profound confidence in the capacity of human beings to construct (both imaginatively and materially) new ways of organising life. It seeks to cultivate an awareness that human beings are self-organising and self-determining historical agents and a confident belief in the transformative power of collective action (Webb, 2013).

The (re)education of desire is one of the fundamental aims of utopian pedagogy (Papastephanou, 2009). Some of the seminal texts in the field define utopia in terms of desire – "the desire for a better way of being" in Levitas' oft-cited words (Levitas, 1990, 8) – and the role of utopian pedagogy is "to teach desire to desire, to desire better, to desire more, and above all to desire in a different way," to borrow Abensour's famous characterisation of William Morris' project (Thompson, 1977, 791). Not content merely with stimulating the desire *for* a new society, utopian pedagogy – utopia as a pedagogical project – is concerned with developing subjects equipped to *create* and *inhabit* this new world. The overall aim is nothing less than "human emancipation" through "a transformation in the ways in which subjectivities are created and desires are produced" (Giroux, 2014, 81).

A number of texts explore the theory and practice of utopian pedagogy from varying political, disciplinary and national perspectives (e.g. Coté, Day and de Peuter, 2007; Hammond, 2017; Rodriguez, 2015; Rodriguez and Magill, 2017; Webb, 2017a). In terms of daily classroom practice, Rethinking Schools publishes a vast array of resources designed *by* teachers *for* teachers seeking to work within, against and beyond: *within* the constraints of managerial structures and prescribed curricula but *against* the oppressive, alienating, degrading, exploitative social system within which education is embedded and pointing *beyond* society-as-it-is towards society as-it-could-be.[4] An important point to note – and here we link back to the history of utopian literature and forward toward a different utopian

approach – is that an effective utopian pedagogy cannot operate within the confines of formal education alone (Webb, 2017a; 2018).[5]

De-schooling, Anarchism and Prefiguration

The discussion thus far has focused primarily on education understood as a system of schooling funded by the state – its structure and function within classical utopian literature and the possibilities of a utopian pedagogy operating within the dystopian realities of the sector today. Of course, schools and colleges are not society's only educational spaces; trade unions, political parties, community groups and faith organisations are all important educational institutions. Growing attention too is being paid to "public pedagogy" (the ways in which film, literature, museums, galleries, art, the media and cultural practices more generally perform key pedagogical functions) and to "social movement learning" (the informal learning that takes place through movement participation and in particular the counter-hegemonic understandings that emerge as actors learn in and through struggle) (Choudry, 2015; Sandlin *et al*, 2010). Any effective utopian pedagogy needs to operate in, through and across all these different educational sites. The focus of this section of the chapter, however, is on schooling *beyond* the remit of the state and on *de*-schooling as a utopian project.

Schools outside and beyond the sphere of the state have a history long pre-dating state provision and have regularly served as sites for utopian experimentation. Robert Owen's school at New Lanark, the Institute for the Formation of Character (established 1816), was presented as the platform for engineering a race of "superior beings" fit to create and inhabit the "new moral world" (Owen, 1970, 146). Given the perfect plasticity of children, Owen declared, with the correct educational methods they could be "moulded" to the shape of "any human character" (Owen, 1970, 110). All it took was for a man such as he to understand the significance of this truth and to put it into practice. A century later in Barcelona, Francisco

Ferrer founded the *Escuela Moderna* (established 1901), a school explicitly aimed at prefiguring a new world to come, realising in its practices alternative ways of being, relating and learning (Bray and Haworth, 2019; Suissa, 2006, 78-82). Ferrer's example has subsequently inspired countless anarchist free schools, instances of what Ruth Kinna (2016) terms here-and-now utopianism.

Freed from the restrictions and controls imposed by public funding regimes, anarchist free schools are heralded as sites for the education of desire and the formation of utopian subjectivities. Shantz (2012) sees them as liminal spaces which offer glimpses of the new world in the shell of the old. One interesting feature of anarchist free schools, and a theme which runs through most of this chapter, is the focus on moral education. As Suissa puts it, "an implicit or explicit form of moral education underpins all aspects of the anarchist educational process and curriculum" (2006, 81). Anarchist schooling seeks to promote a particular set of values (co-operation, solidarity, mutual aid, care, autonomy) which enable the schools to act, here and now, as microcosms of the new society (Shantz, 2012; Suissa, 2001). Indeed, A.S. Neil's Summerhill school – a school that has attained almost legendary status as a utopian space that makes it possible for children to find themselves, to realise the kind of person they were becoming (Cooper, 2014) – has been widely criticised for its laissez-faire pedagogy and *lack* of moral directiveness (e.g. Mueller, 2012; Suissa, 2006).

Approaching the question of education and utopia from a slightly different angle, Ivan Illich (1970) took issue with those who located emancipatory hope in the institution of the school. Rather than establishing *alternative* schools, the key to a here-and-now utopianism for Illich lay in *de*-schooling society. Offering a dystopian reading of schooling as a system of servitude, Illich envisaged a society in which learning and teaching took place without schools or teachers as both children and adults learnt casually, incidentally, informally, in the workplace and through participation in all spheres of community life, or purposefully, with

intent, through a network of learning exchanges. Channelling the messianic spirit of the nineteenth-century utopian socialists, Illich proclaimed an educational revolution that would free humanity from the enslavement in which schooling places it and facilitate the rebirth of Epimethean Man.

In fact, Illich's ideas have a long history, stretching at least as far back as Fourier. In what he termed "associative education," Fourier tells us that there would be no schools or teachers (Fourier, 1971, 74). Each individual's manifold dispositions would freely develop through learning taking place in the wider community – in the orchards, the gardens, the workshops and through self-motivated book-learning and the exchange of ideas. This Fourierist vision has had widespread influence, not only on Illich but also on Morris' description of education in *News from Nowhere* (1890), on John Dewey's brief utopian excursus on education (1933), on Marge Piercy's vision of Mattapoisett in *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) and on David Harvey's depiction of education in *Edilia* (2000). As Dewey put it: 'The most utopian thing in Utopia is that there are no schools" (Dewey, 1933).

Conclusion

The relationship between education and utopia is a dialectical one. The radical transformation of society requires a radically transformed educational practice but a radically transformed educational practice requires a radically transformed society. This presents certain problems but also highlights two significant points. The first is that any utopian vision of "education" must be embedded within a vision of an imaginatively reconstituted social totality. The second is that the utopian potentiality of educational practice depends on the extent to which it is linked to wider social and political struggles. A key question, of course, to paraphrase Marx, is who is to educate the educator? We cannot (surely) appeal to a Utopos figure to establish the best state of a commonwealth and an education system befitting it. The dialectic

of education and utopia must be a collective process. It must also be a dialectic of both/and: working both within schools and against schools, both within the state and beyond it.

Utopian and dystopian literature has an invaluable pedagogical role to play in the project of transformative education. Critical dystopias serve as a forewarning underpinned by critical hope, extrapolating from society's darkest tendencies (Baccolini and Moylan, 2013). Utopian visions inspire, mobilise and give direction to struggle. They provide a critical viewpoint from which the inadequacies of the present become starkly visible. They call into question the existing order of things and render the present mutable and open to change. They liberate the imagination and make it clear that alternatives can be thought of and fought for. They provide a goal and a spur to action and act as a catalyst for change in a way that social criticism on its own cannot. They are powerful pedagogical tools (Webb, 2017b).

By way of conclusion, and returning to its double Latin roots, I quote Papastephanou's suggestion that:

> To cast education in a transformative rather than apologetic-reproductive role regarding social life we may need to synchronize educare and educere. Possibly, as educere, education can bring out precisely what educare in its modern historical specification has moulded us to overlook: that we are, at least anthropologically, free and able to demand the impossible (Papastephanou, 2014, 14).

Endnotes

1. One notable feature of the classical utopias, which resonates powerfully still, is the profound disjuncture between nominal equality of opportunity for men and women founded on equal access to compulsory education and the subjugation of women within patriarchal economic, social and political structures. Although women could in theory attain the highest offices in these utopias, few in fact did and the primary role of women was childbirth and cooking. Within Campanella's eugenic mating regime, for example, a woman who, after having been "mated" with several men, was unable to conceive, was "made available for communal use."

2. I make reference here to the global North because I am acutely aware of the whiteness of the literature discussed in the chapter together with its focus on the western utopian tradition and (largely) on education as experienced in the global North.

3. Campanella lists the virtues to be cultivated in children as, *inter alia*, generosity, magnanimity, chastity, fortitude, justice, diligence, truth, beneficence, gratitude and compassion (1981, 22). Within these utopias one can see the tense interplay of both educere *and* educare – drawing out each individual's particular inclinations while *also* moulding them with good character and virtue. The primary function of education, however, was the preservation of the state.

4. For the full list of publications, see www.rethinkingschools.org. As a concrete example, Cervantes-Soon (2017) offers a powerful account of the experiences of working-class girls in Preparatoria Altavista, a school in Cuidad Juárez utilising Freirean pedagogy with truly transformative effects.

5. Savannah Shange (2019) offers an important corrective to the exalted claims sometimes made on behalf of "teachers as transformative intellectuals" (a phrase coined by Giroux,

1985, which often serves as Freirean pedagogy's rallying cry), tracing the carceral logics at play in even the most well-intentioned utopian endeavours of radical educators working in progressive schools.

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