

Education in Latin America: Overlapping Structures of Consciousness

Bienvenido Argueta Hernandez

Ohio University

Introduction

There have been many attempts to understand and articulate the historical phenomena in Latin America. Despite their differences, those approaches have emphasized three common ideas. First, all phenomena must be rationalized and arranged in a continuous historical process, which is supposed to end with a desired emancipation. Second, the independence and the articulation of the national states have to be the foundation of a common identity. Third, the sovereign states should be inserted into the trend toward progress through a process of modernization and by the acceptance of the universal validity of scientific reason. This commonality among different theoretical and practical approaches not only constitute a rationale of understanding historical phenomena, but also a structure which shapes the legitimate way the world is perceived, knowledge is constructed, identity is constituted, power is articulated, rules of speaking and writing are posited, and even silence is interpreted.

In Gebser's logic, we may think that Latin America mutated from a mythical and unperspectival structure of awareness to a rational and perspectival one. Accordingly, we could say that Latin America reached equilibrium by the very shifting from one to another structure of consciousness. At least, it could be interpreted that finally a historical solution of the crisis caused by the collision between the native people of this continent and the European conqueror has been attained. The magic of Aztecs, Mayans, and Incas was defeated by the new magic of the technological and modern era, and the egoless (the "we" tribal oriented) and irrational (magical) trace evolved to the egocentric and rationally oriented one.

However, this particular phenomenon of clashing among structures of awareness is still present. Indeed, since the nineteenth century Latin America has been characterized by the attempt at becoming part of the "Western culture." The practical implications of this were the emergence in Latin America of an obsessive desire for constituting a mental structure (culture) at all costs. This constitution of the modern perspectival awareness as a way of approaching the world was regarded as a priority. This way, all the social institutions created or recreated by national states tried to magnify the mental structure of consciousness. Another aspect of this project has been the deliberate unfolding of a design, which would abolish the appearance of other structures of the consciousness, particularly the mythical for being considered as

primitive and an obstacle to the progressive development of the region. Thus, this logic has been equivalent not only to a deliberate policy of assimilation and acculturation, but also to a brutal and violent form meant to suppress all that challenged and resisted this instrumental (rational) way of dealing with the world. Any action of resistance or even the appearance of different forms of understanding were condemned to be repressed, enslaved, or eliminated. A recent example of the latter is the recent events in Chiapas, Mexico. The Mexican army immediately and violently acted against the Indigenous movement of resistance, arguing that they were reestablishing the order of law. The establishment could not accept that the Indigenous people intended to organize themselves in order to acquire the most basic conditions of life. This very fact was regarded as a direct action against the Mexican Constitution and all the Western values such as sovereignty, liberty, and equality.

There are manifold cases that we could mention from all across Latin American. This is to say that the realization of the mental structure, or more precisely, the awakening of the rational or perspectival consciousness in Latin American, resulted in a systematic process of suppression and destruction of other horizons and ways of understanding the world for the sake of constructing a homogenous (rational) structure of consciousness regarded as universal, superior, or global.

Within this context, one of the most important institutions which has functioned for constituting the mental structure has been the school. No doubt, formal education has been arranged in such a way that one of its essential functions is the creation of national identities through a process of homogenization (Ossenbach, 1993). This is to say that the search for a unique identity after the colonial period in Latin America concluded in the acceptance of a common design that overestimated those abilities and skills demanded by a global development of capitalism. Education was conceived as a tool for the elimination of cultural differences as Emile Durkheim (1975) pointed out: "Society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity, education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child, from the beginning, the essential similarities that collective life demands." (p. 70)

No doubt, education has been articulated as the primary means to unfold a modern consciousness portrayed by the political and scientific enlightenment. Unfortunately, the very claim of the universal legitimacy and validity of the mental consciousness structure of the modern West in the schools has obliterated the issue of human differences. In Latin America, however, this universalizing project of modern education has

created a cultural crisis, which is expressed by not recognizing different modes of awareness. The result has been the creation of a twofold structure of consciousness which manifests its predominance in accordance with the setting in which a person or group of people is interacting. In schools, courts, hospitals, or other private or public institutions, the mental structure is manifested. On the other hand, the mythical structure is predominant at home, in the neighborhood when the shaman, the midwife, the sorcerer, or the elder is present. This peculiar overlapping creates a manifest, and sometimes a latent conflict. This is to say that there is a systematic process of fragmentation of the consciousness structure of children. The fragmentation occurs in the context of the clashing of Indigenous and Western cultures and as a continuation, or even a new version, of the collision of the magical, mythical, and unperspectival culture of the native people in Latin America with the rational, technological, perspectival attitude of the Western societies. After all, as Gebser (1991) stated:

There are surely enough historical instances of the catastrophic downfall of entire peoples and cultures. Such declines were triggered by the collision of deficient and exhausted attitudes that were insufficient for continuance with those more recent, more intense, and, in some respects, superior. (p. 5)

However, the character of this problematic questions not only the legitimate interpretation of the collision among different manifestations of human approaches to the world, but also the very understanding from which one attempts to articulate, hierarchize, and judge different structures of human consciousness. In fact, Gebser's articulation of cultural awareness and consciousness already presupposes a Western, modern rationality from which other non-Western cultures are interpreted.

In this sense, the historical construction of different (rational) cultural, symbolic designs might not be appropriate for other cultures, such as those native groups in Latin America. This is to say that both theoretically and methodologically one faces a difficulty to describe and understand the interrelationship among different cultures and different forms in which human consciousness is manifested.

This article shows different aspects of this problematic by describing how formal and informal educational institutions are constituting a twofold structure of consciousness. In addition, this paper demonstrates how this situation is leading to a constant collision between these two predominant structures of consciousness in Latin America by showing the multiplicity and multi-layered composition of human and cultural interrelationships.

Methodologically speaking, this paper must also be critically aware of several concepts such as the notion of mutation, which has been misinterpreted as being commensurable with the notion of progressive evolution. In fact, the very notion of progressive evolution already assumes a historical construction that favors all that is new. The process of mutation, for example, cannot be regarded necessarily as a continuous process; instead it can be accessed as a discontinuous unfolding of the consciousness that in several cases is given in leaps. This means, generally, we must hold in abeyance any previous judgment or preconceived articulation of the structures of consciousness.

Education and the Twofold Structure of Consciousness

Having achieved independence from Spain, the Latin American oligarchy embraced the ideals of scientific enlightenment for building a modern, independent, and sovereign nation. The postcolonial project in Latin America consisted of the effort to achieve progress and to join the universal development of history. The political discourse was concerned with trying to rationalize and arrange all socio-economic phenomena in a continuous historical process which was supposed to achieve in every moment a desired project of humanity based on scientific and technological reason. In fact, the political project of building a modern nation was based on the acceptance of Western universal claims in favor of progress and development that required the establishment of new functions assigned to education for civilizing and homogenizing people. In short, education was seen as the process of articulating the perspectival (rational) structure of consciousness.

Thus, the Latin American postcolonial consciousness posits a double standard in relation to Europe. On the one hand, Latin Americans must be proud and grateful for their independence from Spain. On the other hand, there was a recognition that the construction of a modern nation necessitated the submission to those universal ideals posited by Europeans. This was the political paradox of postcolonialism: to achieve freedom meant to become submitted over and over to Western culture. And this new submission demanded the institutionalization and universalization of schooling as one of the most important policies of the modern Latin American States. This also meant a new rational and technical awareness which suppressed all other forms of perceiving the world. In this way, after colonialism, several attempts were made to articulate the Latin American educational system as one based on the Western, modern life-world. Educational laws were already articulated within the logic of a modern Western life-world which considered

schooling, or formal education, as the most important way of arranging educational institutions in Latin America.

However, underlying the educational legislation was a broader horizon, which regarded other forms of education as non-systematic and, therefore, less valuable than the education received at school. In fact, schooling became the legitimate way of arranging educational experiences. This meant that the awareness that reduced the scope of education to formal education constituted a sedimented perception that was grounded in scientific and technical discourses. The very conditions established for considering educational practices as modern requires that the educational practices should be scientifically founded in order to establish the "rational structure of consciousness" as the common ground among the population.

The practical consequences consisted on an expansion of schools all around Latin America, particularly in urban areas, and the modification of the process of arranging the phenomena of education (curricula and educational experiences). Thus, schools were conceived as one of the principal institutions to transmit the scientific knowledge rather than other cultural practices and traditions. According to the new rationale, the same process of education must be constructed following scientific and technological processes. In 1876, there was a Latin American Conference of Education which declared that schools should introduce the natural sciences and they must be the core of the curriculum with Spanish and Math. In the same conference, the participants stated that pedagogy should evolve to a new stage called the age of science and technology in the field of education (Gonzalez, 1970).

The practical domain of this new scientific pedagogy has sustained three main premises: a) to understand learning as changes produced in human behaviors which can be observable by empirical means and controlled by the arrangement of the environment; b) to introduce statistical and mathematical techniques to measure different educational phenomena; and c) to specify and create the type of behaviors required to create a new society. The practical domain of this scientific education made schools factories which produced desirable human beings based on technical tools provided by sciences such as psychology. Thus, this scientific and technological perspective of education was articulated as the magic expression (the power to make) of the mental structure of consciousness. In this sense, educators have been more concerned with methodologies, techniques or means rather than discussing the goals of education and the legitimate conditions for their pursuit in a context of cultural diversity. Thus, the latter exhibits how instrumental reason pervaded the educational institutions, discourses, and practices.

Nevertheless, the logic of the technical and instrumental mode of awareness is not able to accept other manifestations or perspectives of educational phenomena. In fact, the way Indigenous peoples and peasants transmit their customs and their understanding of the world cannot be grasped or even recognized by the science of education. With the rational perspective of behavioral changes and measurement, the very essence of Indigenous education, which is transmitted through the elders and shamans, vanishes. The rituals, gods, myths, symbols, and their structure of constituency are misunderstood and judged as primitive and decadent cultural manifestations which must be taken away.

Indeed, the science of education is incapable of understanding and describing these manifestations which constitute not only a pre-given field that is required to be considered as one form of pedagogical constituency, but also a fundamental part of the phenomena of education. After all, education is a process of reflecting about the immediacy of our lives and giving sense to the everyday life, and those cultural practices give sense and meaning to Indigenous lives and their world.

Indeed, the intention of giving emphasis to this instrumental and technological rationality has been strongly supported in the field by expanding schools in Latin America and by making the enrollment in formal education obligatory. All these efforts have contributed to articulating a twofold structure of consciousness. On the one hand, children are able to master and to develop a set of skills demanded by the instrumental rationality. This is to say, children become competent in applying the scientific process efficiently and in using technology. They are expected to be objective, as proposed by the natural sciences in order to explain the problems they face. And they must detach each problem from their life-world. In addition, the skills developed in schools are evaluated by teachers to be sure they perform according to what was expected.

The rational structure of consciousness is present and emphasized when children are in schools. Once they go home, children leave the mental awareness and recover their mythical structure. They remember what shamans have been teaching about medicine, magic, witchcraft, and divination. Mayan children remember what they observed from farmers, and how time is related to life when they learned to divide time in 13 months of 20 days each. These ways of structuring the consciousness are different from the technological ways of awareness of Western society. However, in the view of scientism there is no possibility of other responses to those pre-established techniques recommended by the instrumental mode of awareness.

This situation seems to suggest a new collision between these two structures of consciousness. Indigenous peoples and peasants, whose mythical structure of consciousness has not been recognized in schools and in other social institutions, have decided to challenge and confront those who have been promoting modernity and technological rationality. Indigenous peoples and peasants are working to develop schools, which promote the mythical consciousness. Despite the legitimacy of this struggle, the very fragmentation of consciousness has forced Indigenous peoples and peasants to use the same strategies and technical devices as those utilized by the magical expression of the mental-rational structure. They are ready to maintain and enhance their mythical "rationality" in their neighborhoods and villages. Indigenous peoples and peasants want to universalize their way of experiencing the world, as it is expressed in their proposals for creating new schools that include mythic ways of knowing.

At this point several questions came up. Is this situation a reinvention of the collision between Aztecs and Spanish? Or is it the revenge of the mythical over the mental-rational structure? Is this particular overlapping of structures of consciousness a clash between structures or does it reveal a particular mutation (some sort of new "synthesis") among the structures described by Gebser? Whatever answers we may suggest, the invariant is to find a way through which those structures can co-exist as an integral expression of individuals and cultures.

Dialogue: A Way of Articulating an Integral Structure of Consciousness

The phenomenon of education is primarily related to techniques or methods given in connection with the lived world and cultural traditions; education is related to symbolic systems in which people understand their actions and their relationships with others. In this sense, education detached from life-world, or the human experiences and their interconnections, is empty of sense. Only a dialogical, process education can articulate a poly-centric way of signifying the world, and open the possibility of different modes of awareness of the educational phenomena as legitimate. As Landgrebe (1984) pointed out about the problem of life-world:

Natural life is a 'life of interests', interested in its specific goals and guided by considerations of the manner in which the things of this world can serve or hinder its projects. It knows that others have other projects and goals which under certain circumstances can collide with its own, and it knows that the others act according to other intentions which may be unknown or unintelligible to it: 'That is beyond my horizon'. It thus knows that it has its own limited perspectives on the world, whose limits

can, however be changed and broadened by communication and learning. (p. 185)

Therefore, the very existence of individual and cultural differences in the way we perceive, understand, and interplay with the world, open up the possibility of a dialogical education. In this sense, education refers to the continuous process of learning and constructing the world through mutual sharing of perspectives among people who belong to diverse cultures or among people who experience a mode of awareness. Students, teachers, and other members of the community participate in a dialogue in which they express their natural and/or theoretical attitude toward the world, which is considered as given. Then they ask questions, give answers, discuss, negotiate, and propound educational solutions to the problems and needs of the society and nature by means of mutual understanding or by means of admitting differences. Therefore, through dialogue it is possible to be aware and to reflect about our own structure of consciousness as well as, the structure of consciousness of the other.

In fact, schools can be an open space of dialogue in which children and people from different cultures come to share the way they articulate the world of particular phenomena. Education, then, is a process of giving and taking multiple perspectives of constituting the world. This is to say that we are not dealing with a static entity, rather we are dealing with a phenomena in mutation which integrates all different structures. Maybe, this cultural crisis, the clash of mental-rational and mythical can bring an opportunity to unfold the integral structure of consciousness and open up the field of education to a broader horizon able to incorporate different manifestations of being-in-the-world.

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