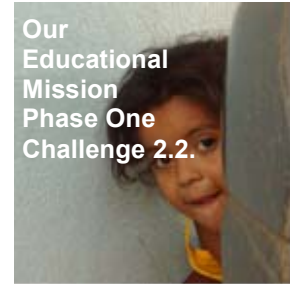


# **HOLISTIC EDUCATION: Making possible the existence of another kind of world**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

One cannot be neutral about the future, so thought, Paulo Freire, the most notable Brazilian educator of the XX century.

With this in mind, Freire teaches us that there is not much space between thinking and acting. When thinking takes place with a mixture of conscience, emotion and commitment, it becomes acting. One of the interesting aspects, aside from his permanent ethical attitude, is his epistemological curiosity and permanent intellectual boldness, ingredients which are scarce at the present moment in the history of humanity. The XX century greatly misses Paulo Freire. Neutrality does not exist. Being neutral leads us to confirm, accept and allow the domination of the status quo. And, what is worse, all this happens with a passivity which does not allow us to participate in the building of a future important to us. The first way of increasing control in something that interests us is to understand it. (See De Souza 2002)

During the past seven years, life has offered me the great opportunity of working as a facilitator for leadership formation in the whole of Nicaragua with micro-companies, community leaders, teachers, promoters of development projects, youth, etc. This work has allowed me to know the dreams, losses, sorrows, joys, infirmities, frustrations, obstacles and the efforts that these persons go through to improve their lives, those of their families and those of their communities.

This work has enriched me personally and professionally. The reflections I am going to share with you are inspired by this experience and by a series of authors as Willigs Jager, Tomas Berry, Cristiane Northrup and Paul Freire, who have accompanied and enlightened us with their ideas, above all those of Jose De Souza.

## **II. AN AGE OF CHANGES OR THE CHANGE OF AN AGE?**

*“When we had all the answers, then the questions were changed”*

Any analysis on the future of education ought to acknowledge the fact that humanity is experiencing the change of an age. This is due to the turbulence, uncertainty, instability, disorientation, discontinuation, insecurity,

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fragmentation, and perplexity and vulnerability that worry the societies throughout the world.

Humanity is experiencing the change of an era, not an era of changes. The global changes that are taking place do not belong to a historical period of industrialism, but a new age is coming into being. A world totally different, but not necessarily better, is being created. The computer now replaces the chimney as a symbol of postmodernism. We have the historical privilege of witnessing the closing of the age of industrialism and the dawning of a new age that is, as yet, like an blurred photo with characteristics and implications barely coming into focus. The majority of human beings do not understand the origins of their vulnerability, nor how it manifests itself.

In the change of an era, various visions compete with one another in replacing the dominant vision of the declining age, each one attempts to prevail as a dominant vision in the emerging epoch. At the present moment, all the themes are shaped by the values, premises and commitments entailed in a vision of a world in conflict. At present, three visions of the world confront one another in the phenomenon of encounter between a dying age and another that struggles to establish itself.

A world vision is a *conceptual window* through which we interpret the world in order to understand and transform it. This window serves as type of *cultural glasses*, where the ingredients for its construction include certain values, beliefs, principles, premises, concepts, focuses, etc. These shape our perception of reality, as well as our decisions and actions in all aspects of our human experience in the universe. In the change of an age, all are pressured to change glasses, since the glasses of a declining age reveal an out-of-focus landscape, the interpretation of which seems impossible. Taking on the status of a social paradigm, (Capra, 1982) a vision of the world is the most powerful *cultural* reference available to any social group, a community or a society, helping it to re-interpret its past, comprehend its present and build its future. When we understand that *reality is what our method of observation permits us to perceive*, then we are able to acknowledge that our vision of the world shapes the mental models through which we observe, systematize, interpret and provide a sense of meaning according to our own experience in the world, (De Souza Silva *et al.* 2001a.)

### **III. THREE VSIONS OF THE WORLD, THREE DIFFERENT PEDAGOGIES**

Each historic epoch shares a metaphor of reality that serves as a cultural window through which we see it and thus interpret it. We act upon this interpretation in order to transform it. This signifies that there is not one, but multiple visions of the world that shape the mental models of various social groups.

Therefore, we must reflect on the “Pedagogies that better contribute to the building of a different and better future for our people.”

Each historical age establishes a dominant pedagogy over other pedagogies. To each vision of the world corresponds a type of education. Let us see the characteristics of each one of these visions:

**a) SCENARIO 1:** The world seen as a machine: the paradigm that emerges promotes certain values, interests and commitments associated with this vision.

- The world is a machine—*a self-regulated system of information,*
- The “surroundings” are “something” that exists in and of itself; thus, it can be known, described, predicted and controlled.
- Knowledge is “something” that can be produced, transferred, transmitted and absorbed.
- The future is a projection of the present, and can be known if there is a historic series of accumulated data to project.
- The university is a machine to produce professionals, information and technology.
- Development results from the increase of efficient productivity.
- Existence is an eternal search for efficiency, prediction, precision and control.
- Scientists define what should be done because they know how to do it.
- The excluded are the inefficient members of society
- Because reality can be studied and researched, it is objective and independent of our perception.
- It is of great importance to know the natural laws and the immutable mechanisms that govern the functioning of reality.
- For each question on development, there exists a correct response.

With this kind of vision, education is transformed into an education that makes non-thinking, non-critical robots of the citizens in a society. They are “taught,” to function as “human resources,” where there is only room for the use of human reasoning as an instrument, and there is no space for human emotion, nor for the ecological and social dimensions of life.

**b) SCENARIO 2.** An economic vision of the world; with this emerges a paradigm promoting values, interests and commitments associated with such a vision. Let see some of the principles on which it is based:

- The world is a market—*a grouping of commercial and technological arenas.*

- Knowledge is “something” that can be produced, provided, sold and bought.
- The future is uncertain, but it can be understood through the signs arising from the market forces, evolving according to the laws of supply and demand.
- The university is the provider of “intellectual capital,” information and technology.
- Education is a system reproducing the logic of the market creating greater competitiveness in the economy and in a technological development of greater quality.
- The economy is an entity independent of the political entity.
- A greater economic growth results in a better state of well-being for the majority.
- The global market is the new factor in the progress of nations.
- Social inequality is natural and functional in all societies.
- Development is the result of economic growth and of technological development.
- Existence is an eternal struggle for survival through competency.
- The market dictates the nature, course and priorities of scientific-technological development.
- Those who finance science determine what has to be done.
- The self-supported university is the competitive university.
- The indications of the market are the source of inspiration for innovation.
- The excluded are those who are not competitive in a society.
- It is of utmost importance to understand the laws that govern the market system—supply and demand. These determine what takes place in the world.
- The market is the main source of answers for questions pertaining to development.
- The problems of development are resolved by what the market contributes and scientific-technological development.
- The objective of scientific-technological development is to promote economic growth.

With this vision of the world education brings about the domestication of citizens who are “capable” of acting in their respective economic roles of providers, producers, vendors, competitors, investors, consumers, clients, etc. They are mere “human” or “intellectual” capital, managing commercial transactions over and above social relationships.

c) **SCENARIO 3.** A holistic or contextual vision of the world

Beginning with the decade of the 60's, innumerable social-cultural movements in all the world challenged the pillars of western civilizations and questioned the values of an industrialized consumer society. These were, for example, feminist movements, environmentalist, those dedicated to the promotion of human rights, ethnic justice, social equality, democratic participation, the rights of children, conservation of natural resources, human development, networks of solidarity and sustainable development projects in general. These groups do not belong to the age of industrialism; they hold a system-based vision of the world that has the following values and characteristics:

- “Our” *relevant environment* is a changing one, because it is the result of a process of permanent negotiations among us and the actors of our changing context.
- The *data* are symbols lacking in meaning, the *information* is derived from joining together pieces of data which give them some kind of meaning; the *knowledge* is a changing state of comprehension, and the *wisdom* is what we do (decisions that we make and actions that we carry out) based on our understanding.
- The university and the school are spaces (not places,) for critical and creative interaction in the formulation of interpretations, proposals, capacities, etc., and towards the formation of citizens prepared to actively, critically and creatively contribute to the transformation of society in general and of their material and social realities.
- Education is a complex process of interaction that intervenes in the formation of citizens for the transformation of society.
- Development emerges with the encounter of society, culture and nature.
- The problems of development are changing problems that cannot be resolved but should be re-interpreted and re-managed in an innovative form on long-range basis.
- One cannot overcome a development problem with the same perception and with the same methods that brought it about.
- Life is an eternal search for consistency (what internally holds together a set of rules) and correspondence (what externally brings together two sets of rules.)
- Civil society prevails over the State and the forces of the market by the definition given to nature, course of action and priorities of scientific-technological development.

- What should be done is not only defined by those who know how to do it, but also by those who finance scientific-technological development.
- The self-supported university is the changing university.
- Innovation emerges from the processes of social interaction.
- By the fact that reality is studied and researched it consists of concrete dimensions and subjects from the social context. These includes, and transcends, the market together with its clients and its demands.
- Over and above the laws of the physical-chemical-biological reality, it relevant to understand the social interaction processes by which the different social groups create their different perceptions of reality.
- Questions regarding the problems of development have multiple responses, depending on the different perceptions of the interpreters.
- The problems of development are changing problems that require interpretations and innovative solutions on a long-range basis.
- The objective of the scientific-technological development is to promote better living conditions for all forms of life on the planet.

According to this vision of the world, an education that prepares people in critical thinking is synonymous with an education which promotes the transformation of citizens. Persons are formed as “human talents,” autonomous thinkers, capable of imagining and creating beyond their previous knowledge, with the right to have rights and with the responsibility of socio-historical beings.

With this holistic vision the education system in our countries should be profoundly transformed by a pedagogy that forms “trail blazers”, not followers of already existing paths. The educated should be seen and formed as human talent, citizens with the right to have rights, professors developing the talent to form talent. The pedagogy of autonomy (Freire, 1997) is a specie of **meta-pedagogy critical** of the ambience in which it exists, the achievement of which requires communication, the combination and practice of various and specific types pedagogies, such as: pedagogy for solidarity, pedagogy for hope, pedagogy for sustainability, pedagogy for interaction, pedagogy for possibility, pedagogy for creating together, pedagogy for ownership, pedagogy for contraries, pedagogy for inequality, pedagogy for uncertainty, pedagogy for caring, pedagogy for altruism, pedagogy for the future, pedagogy for the imagination, pedagogy for history, pedagogy for commitment, pedagogy for pro-activity, pedagogy for the

*Agora*<sup>1</sup>, pedagogy for peace, (not for war, as has historically been the case,) pedagogy for ethics, pedagogy for the body, etc.

Fortunately, we are not alone in this search; there are thousands of people in the world who are enthusiastically working in this area.

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<sup>1</sup> El Agora (ancient Greek assembly to discuss and negotiate in a democratic fashion the interests of the group) is a space where the strength of argument prevails.. not argument by force , and which victory arises from the practice of principles and the application of criteria for negotiation on the part of all the participants