

DOSSIÊ: “Didática e formação de professores”

**Catharsis as a category in didactics from the perspective of historical-critical pedagogy<sup>1 2</sup>**

*A catarse na didática da pedagogia histórico-crítica*

*Catarsis como una categoría didáctica en la perspectiva de la pedagogía histórico-crítica*

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**Abstract:**

Analyzing the didactic method of historical-critical pedagogy, the Brazilian educator Dermeval Saviani, defines catharsis as the culmination of the educative process. This paper explores the importance of catharsis to Didactics in that pedagogical perspective, taking the studies of György Lukács (1885-1971) and Antônio Gramsci (1891-1937) in that category as theoretical references. Catharsis is understood here as a qualitative leap in the process of expansion and enrichment of relations between individual subjectivity and social-cultural objectivity. It is, at the same time, an intellectual, emotional, educational, political and ethical transformation, that changes the worldview of the individuals and their relations with their own life, society and humankind.

**Keywords:** catharsis, didactics, historical-critical pedagogy, György Lukács, Antonio Gramsci

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**Resumo:**

*Segundo Dermeval Saviani, no método didático da pedagogia histórico-crítica, a catarse é o momento culminante. Este artigo explora a importância dessa categoria para a didática nessa perspectiva pedagógica, tomando como referências os estudos de György Lukács (1885-1971) e Antônio Gramsci (1891-1937) sobre o processo catártico. É defendida a interpretação de que a catarse seria um salto qualitativo no processo de ampliação e enriquecimento das relações entre a subjetividade individual e a objetividade sociocultural. Trata-se de uma transformação, ao mesmo tempo, intelectual, emocional, educacional, política e ética, que modifica a visão de mundo do indivíduo e suas relações com sua própria vida, com a sociedade e com o gênero humano.*

**Palavras-chave:** *catarse, pedagogia histórico-crítica, didática, György Lukács, Antonio Gramsci*

**Resumen:**

*Analizando el método didáctico de la pedagogía histórico-crítica, el educador brasileño Dermeval Saviani define la catarsis como la culminación del proceso educativo. Este artículo explora la importancia de la catarsis para la Didáctica en esa perspectiva pedagógica tomando como referencias teóricas los estudios de György Lukács (1885-1971) y Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) sobre esta categoría. La catarsis se entiende aquí como un salto cualitativo en el proceso de ampliación y enriquecimiento de las relaciones entre la subjetividad individual y la objetividad sociocultural. Es, al mismo tiempo, una transformación intelectual, emocional, educativa, política y ética, que cambia la visión del mundo de los individuos y sus relaciones con su propia vida, la sociedad y la humanidad.*

**Palabras clave:** *catarsis, didáctica, pedagogía histórico-crítica, György Lukács, Antonio Gramsci*

## Introduction

The perspective adopted in this article is situated in the field of "counter-hegemonic pedagogies" (Saviani, 2007, pp. 411-422) and, more specifically, it is positioned within the collective process of construction of historical-critical pedagogy. This pedagogical perspective is connected to Marxism as a worldview and to the social and political analyses that put forward the necessity of overcoming the capitalist society (Harvey, 2016; Mészáros, 2003).

For this pedagogy, catharsis is the culminating moment of the educational process. The incorporation of the category of catharsis in this pedagogical theory was based on a paper

published originally in 1982, written by Dermeval Saviani, a Brazilian educator. In the following year, that paper was incorporated as a chapter into the book entitled “School and Democracy” (Saviani, 2008). The author defends a pedagogy committed to putting education at the service of overcoming the capitalist society. He argues that the teaching method of this pedagogy starts from social practice, raises questions on this practice and organizes students with the most developed knowledge that humankind has produced, in order to qualitatively modify their understanding of this social practice. This educative process produces catharsis, as a passage from social practice “in itself” to social practice “for itself”, which is the point of arrival of the entire educational process (Saviani, 2008, pp. 53-61).

In his interpretation of the category of catharsis, Saviani is explicitly based on Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), who, in this article, will be taken as a theoretical reference, alongside György Lukács (1885-1971), with the aim of exploring the importance of this category for didactics. The interpretation that the cathartic process is a qualitative transformation that expands and enriches the relations between individual subjectivity and socio-cultural objectivity will be defended in this paper. It is, at the same time, an intellectual, emotional, educational, political and ethical process that modifies the worldview of the individuals and their relations with their own life, with society and with humankind.

This definition of catharsis is very different to its common meaning as a process of emotional overflowing that provides relief and reassurance. It is not a matter of ignoring that catharsis involves feelings and emotions, but rather of emphasizing that the affections involved in the cathartic process do not dissociate themselves from the other aspects.

It will be argued here that, for both Lukács and Gramsci, catharsis is not limited to a phenomenon of the artistic sphere, being something broader, encompassing psychological, ethical, aesthetic, political and educational aspects.

## On the relevance of the concept of catharsis

The concept of catharsis is traditionally remitted to Aristotle's *Poetics* from the following passage:

Tragedy is the mimesis of a serious and complete action of some magnitude; in language embellished in various ways in its different parts; in dramatic, not narrative form; achieving, through pity and fear, the catharsis of such passions. (Aristotle, *Poetics*, apud Pappas, 2010, p. 16)

However, the interpretation of what Aristotle would understand by catharsis is a very controversial question among the experts in the work of the Greek philosopher. Over the centuries, different and, sometimes, conflicting interpretations of this question have been put forward. Halliwell (1998, pp. 350-356), professor of Greek at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, schematically outlines six kinds of interpretation for the meaning of catharsis in Aristotle's work, explaining that this is not an exhaustive listing and, in some works, these interpretations are mixed. Halliwell (1998) explains that the specialists themselves have great deal of difficulty with the tangle of interpretations about what would be catharsis for Aristotle:

It is not altogether without reason that the debate over *katharsis* was been described as "a grotesque monument of sterility" and no one with even a marginal acquaintance with scholarship on the *Poetics* will either need or care to be reminded how many discrepant interpretations of the idea have been advanced since the Renaissance. (Halliwell, 1988, p. 184)

Nickolas Pappas (2010), professor of philosophy at the City College of New York, is even more compelling in the questioning of the meaning of catharsis in Aristotle, stating that "despite the word's fame, Aristotle gives nothing like a theory of catharsis" (p.16). The author even mentions an argument that would be "radical but very much worth considering" (p. 19). This argument is: "the definition's phrase about catharsis, pity and fear is not Aristotle's language at all but a later insertion that scholars should excise" (p. 19). Pappas himself acknowledges that this is an extreme and somewhat marginal hypothesis among scholars, but he does not entirely rule it out, since, according to him, the elements in Aristotle's work would be scarce in order to support the various interpretations of catharsis.

Among the supporters of the thesis that the debate about the tragic catharsis in Aristotle has no foundations at all, is the Brazilian expert of Aristotelian work, Cláudio William Veloso, a former professor of the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG). Veloso, in an interview given in 2008 to Miguel Conde, showed himself to be aligned with those who maintain that catharsis simply does not exist in Aristotle's Poetics<sup>3</sup>.

Not having carried out in-depth studies of the Aristotelian works, I do not feel authorized to interfere in this debate among specialists. However, it does not seem to me that so many debates on catharsis have fed exclusively on an interest in self-justifying controversy, and that the various interpretations have been constructed without being based on reality.

I will adopt another hypothesis, that catharsis exists as a phenomenon of individual life and human social history and that the various interpretations are attempts to grasp the meaning of this phenomenon. I am not adopting an eclectic and subjectivist position, which would attribute the same degree of trustworthiness in relation to the phenomenon in question to all interpretations. I am just saying that beyond the interpretation of the Aristotelian work, there is something in social practice that can be explained by means of the concept of catharsis, not ignoring the difficulties arising from the existence of very disparate and conflicting conceptualizations with one another.

This hypothesis that catharsis, beyond conceptual disputes, exists in human life, is based on Lukács (1966), who states: "important categories of aesthetics, it is also proved in catharsis that their primary origin is in life, not in art, to which it came from that"<sup>4</sup>(p.500). In turn, the idea that the categories of thought are expressions of existing processes in reality is found in Marx (2011), who states that "categories therefore express the forms of being, the characteristics of existence" (p. 39)<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://blogs.oglobo.globo.com/prosa/post/claudio-veloso-a-catarsa-na-poetica-de-aristoteles-120136.html>. Access in April 04, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Translation

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/grundrisse.pdf>

## Catharsis in its most developed forms

I will adopt the perspective formulated by Marx (2011) that “Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape” (Marx, 2015, p. 38)<sup>6</sup>, which means that the understanding of the more developed form of a phenomenon can be taken as a reference to the understanding of this same phenomenon in its simplest forms. The most developed kinds of catharsis, which could be called “classical” catharsis, are those in which there is a profound transformation of the relations between human beings and social reality.

A first example in this sense would be the worldview moving from a transcendental to an immanent understanding of human reality. In this transformation of consciousness, individuals begin to see the human being as an artifice of humanity itself and, therefore, of inhumanity itself, in the historical process of permanent production and reproduction of social-cultural reality. The formation of this immanent conception of the world implies the overcoming of the conceptions of human beings in which it is considered as a passive result of external determinations as a divine will, supernatural forces, a predetermined destiny or an unchanging human nature. To conceive the human being as creator of humanity and inhumanity is something necessary for individuals to take the task of taking their own destinies in their hands. This, however, does not imply the adoption of a naive vision of total freedom, a life free of determinations. Individuals can only really drive their own destinies, when they recognize the objective determinations that delimit the field of possibilities of action and make choices from these possibilities, take action, and deal with the consequences.

This is the case, for example, of the philosophy of Epicurus, which, as Lukács (2012) explains, has broken with the worldview that separates reality into two dimensions, the terrestrial and the celestial. Lukács (2012) explains that in the philosophy of Epicurus:

an unscrupulously critical materialism destroys every ontology of two worlds. Epicurus also puts the meaning of human life, the problem of morality, at the center of his philosophy. But it differs from all that preceded it insofar as the natural cosmos confronts it with human aspirations as a non-teleological, completely indifferent, self-righteousness, and human beings can and must resolve their vital questions exclusively in the immanence of their physics existence. Only in this way death, how to die, is a purely moral, exclusively human issue. No entity of the cosmos is capable of giving any instruction in this sense, much less an impulse motivated by the promise of reward or punishment. Epicurus says: "Who does not know the nature of the whole, but feels a fear filled with doubts because of some myths, cannot shake off fear in extremely important

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/grundrisse.pdf>

matters. Therefore, without knowledge of nature it is not possible to enjoy pleasures in its purity." And in exactly the same way he talks about life and death: "Therefore, the most dreadful of evils, death, is nothing to us, for as long as we exist death is not present; but if death appears, we no longer exist." Because of this conception of the world, Lucretius extols Epicurus for having liberated human beings from fear, which is a necessary consequence of faith in the gods. (pp.34-35)

It is important to emphasize, in the passage quoted, the existence of a relation, in Epicurus, between the knowledge of nature, that is, objective knowledge, and the ethical attitude of individuals towards their own life. Considering that I am dealing here with the theme of catharsis related to education, the comment that Lukács (2012) makes following his explanation is important. As Lukács explains, the radical rupture that the philosophy of Epicurus made with the ontology of the two worlds, did not find objective social conditions for its wide diffusion among the population:

Evidently epicurean philosophy was not able to have a general and long-lasting effect. The ideal of the sages, for whom this ethic was equally directed, already circumscribes its effect to a spiritual and moral elite, whereas the Stoic moral, in many particular aspects analogous to the Epicurean, is supported by an ontology much more compatible with the "need for redemption"<sup>7</sup> of late Ancient than the radically earthly ontology of Epicurus. Thus, the world-image of this period, even at the time when the mysticism of Neoplatonism prevailed, is always ready to accept elements of Aristotle's philosophy and Stoicism, although it usually does so only after a profound reinterpretation, while Epicurean remains completely isolated and is continually defamed as vulgar hedonism. This is always the fate of a radically earthly ontology in times of domination of fervent religious necessity. (p.35)

This type of catharsis, as performed by the philosophy of Epicurus, is not limited, however, to a mere negation of the existence of the gods. This denial is in reality a consequence of the affirmation of human beings as the architect of their world and of themselves. In fact, the denial of the existence of the gods can happen gradually, starting from the process by which individuals change their socio-cultural reality and their lives. An example in this sense is the central character of the novel *Mother*, written by Maksim Gorki (1868-1936). At the beginning of the novel, what is seen is an oppressed woman, married to a worker, in tsarist Russia at the beginning of the 20th century. The husband, alcoholic and violent, reproduces, through violence against women, all the frustrations and humiliations he suffers as a worker. In these extremely oppressive conditions of life, what remains for this woman is the solace of prayers in which she asks her god for help. Her husband dies and her son, though also a proletarian, does not follow

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<sup>7</sup> Translation

the same path as his father. He engages in his mother's life. When he is arrested during a protest march of workers, his mother's odyssey starts. In search of her son's liberation, the woman joined the same workers movement as her son, although initially she did not have a clear understanding of the whole meaning of the struggle in which her son was engaged. Gradually she radically changes her view of society, of people, of life and of herself, that is, she goes through a process of catharsis. And this catharsis means, among other things, that, little by little, she no longer needs to pray for help, because she no longer feels surrendered to a fate of suffering:

The mother looked out the window, outside the day was cold and vibrant, the sensation in her chest was luminous but she felt warm. She wanted to talk about everything, to talk a lot, with joy, as a vague sense of gratitude, to an unknown person, for everything that accumulated in her chest and burned with the light of the sunset. She had long been worried about her unwillingness to pray. She remembered someone's young face, and the sounding voice shouted in her memory: "This is the mother of Pavel Vlassov! ..." Sasha's eyes flashed tenderly and contentedly; stands the imposing figure of Rybin; the hard and bronze face of her son smiled; Nicolai blinked, embarrassed. Suddenly everything shuddered in a deep, light sigh, melted and mixed, forming a transparent and multicolored cloud that enveloped all thoughts with peace.<sup>8</sup> (Gorki, 1979, p.525)

She felt the transformation she was going through with all intensity, which all those people who had become part of her individuality, of her deeper being, were participating of. She wanted to thank and maybe her previous impulse was to pray to thank, but this impulse was being replaced by another one, one that addresses human beings, the relationships that enhance the inner and outer life.

Gorky's novel refers to another example of a highly developed type of catharsis that is social revolution, as a process in which individuals, collectively organized, change themselves in the struggle for the transformation of society. In the third of his theses on Feuerbach, Marx (2007) states that "The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of the human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice"(Marx, 1998, p. 570). Gramsci (1999) expresses the same idea in other words:

To transform the external world, the general system of relations, is to potentiate oneself and to develop oneself. That ethical "improvement" is purely individual is an illusion and an error: the synthesis of the elements constituting individuality is "individual", but it cannot be realised and developed without an activity directed outward, modifying external relations both with nature and, in varying degrees, with other men, in the various social circles in which one lives, up to the greatest relationship of all, which embraces the whole human species. For this reason, one

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<sup>8</sup> Translation

can say that man is essentially “political” since it is through the activity of transforming and consciously directing other men that man realises his “humanity”, his “human nature”. (p. 682)

Some observations are necessary in relation to this presentation of two examples of developed forms of catharsis. The first is that they are just examples, that is, there may be other equally developed forms of catharsis. The second observation is that not only in relation to catharsis, but to any other social phenomena, the existence of more developed and complex types of catharsis does not necessarily imply the elimination of the simpler forms, which may be of great importance for certain human activities. A third observation is that despite the fact that I have presented two examples with well-defined ideological connotations, catharsis does not always have a clear and unambiguous ideological vector. When an individual learns, for example, how to play a musical instrument, a catharsis that qualitatively changes their relation to cultural productions occurs, but this is not necessarily linked directly and unequivocally to ideological positions.

## Catharsis and the worldview

However important these observations are in relation to the two examples presented in the previous item, I understand that they are illustrative of Lukács' (2013) thesis that catharsis has an ontological-social existence: ‘Ontologically, it is the mediating link between the merely private person and the person who aspires to be, inseparably, simultaneously individuality and universality’ (p. 546)<sup>9</sup>.

The individual is limited by alienation to the condition of a merely private human being which, explained in a somewhat simplifying way, can be understood as the individual whose life is limited to adaptation to the status quo. This adaptation, when it comes to a capitalist society, is shown to have distinct characteristics for the individuals of the ruling class and those of the dominated class. What for the former presents itself as bliss or as a just reward for their supposed talents and efforts, to the latter it presents itself as a permanent struggle against the adversities that insistently place obstacles in the search for a place in the sun.

<sup>9</sup> In the original German version, Lukács (1986) uses the expression “partikularen Menschen” (p. 474) that as far as I know would be well translated as “particular human being”, without a connotation of the masculine gender, which is translated as “particular man”.

Catharsis is, for Lukács, a mediating process between that condition of a merely private human being and the condition of a human being who seeks to develop themselves more and more as an individual and, at the same time, a representative of humankind. This process of development of individuality is therefore opposed to the cultivation of individualism (Duarte, 2013), since it is about strengthening a conscious link between the individual's actions, their choices, etc., and the essential questions that historically arise to humankind as a whole.

In his work *Aesthetics: the peculiarity of aesthetics*, Lukács (1965) analyzes catharsis in art as a process in which the individual is faced with human life, portrayed in a way that goes beyond the limits of everyday life. This artistic reflection of human life leads one to feel dissatisfied with the fragmentary character of everyday life limited to adapting to status quo, when this life is contrasted with the potential for universal and free objectification developed in human history. In the author's words:

In its most general sense, catharsis thus means that a phenomenon or group of figurative phenomena, while preserving their intimate vital unity, grow above the level attained in everyday life. This elevation, facilitated by the aesthetic mimesis, is connected with the awareness that it is, after all, only an extreme realization of perfectly determined human possibilities and not the ludicrous play of "salvation" in any transcendence. Catharsis is precisely that the human beings confirm the essentials of their own life, precisely because they see it in a mirror that moves and shames for its greatness, which shows the fragmentary character of their normal existence, its insufficiency and incapacity for accomplishment. Catharsis is the experience of the reality proper to human life, whose comparison with everyday reality in the effect of the work produces a purification of passions that becomes ethics in the "after" of the work. (p. 76)<sup>10</sup>

It is, therefore, a way found by the human being to represent the possibilities that exist in reality itself, but which are not so clearly shown and not so fully effective in everyday life, especially in such restrictive conditions as those which the unilaterality of capitalist society imposes on human activities and relations. The individual's enjoyment of the artwork contrasts with their daily life and produces dissatisfaction – which is not always clearly conscious – as a result of the perception in varying degrees and ways that life may or may have been richer (not financially), plenty of content and meaningfulness. It is not, however, the cultivation of a kind of melancholy for the lost paradise or some kind of existential boredom produced by a supposedly insurmountable inner emptiness. Rather, it is the recognition that humanity has

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<sup>10</sup> Translation

managed to produce, albeit in contradictory ways, real possibilities for the lives of all people to reach very high levels of free and universal objectification.

As I have already shown, quoting Lukács, catharsis arises in life and becomes the effect of works of art. Similarly, catharsis can also be triggered by productions in the fields of science and philosophy. Karl Marx's theory (1818-1883), for example, is a scientific explanation of the contradictions produced by capital and the consequences of these contradictions for society and human life. If this theory is studied in depth and without prejudice, it inevitably produces changes in the worldview of individuals, that is, it produces catharses. It is for this reason that supporters of capitalism spread so much slander and so much prejudice against Marx and Marxism. Keeping the proper proportions and specificities, there are also transformations in the worldview when the individual appropriates scientific knowledge about the evolution of life on our planet, about the history of planet Earth itself and, more broadly, the evolution of the universe. It is no coincidence that overcoming the geocentric worldview has cost some people their lives, and it is no coincidence that Charles Darwin's theory of species evolution continues to be attacked to this day. These are examples of scientific theories that were cathartic because they generated profound transformations in worldviews.

In the field of Philosophy, the examples are many as was the case of the already mentioned philosophy of Epicurus. I will also present another example, somewhat related to the above, which is the dialectical conception of the relationship between determination and freedom in human social activity. Common sense constantly oscillates between two extremes: on the one hand the idea that human life is predetermined (“no one dies before the time”, “each one with their fate”, “their destiny was already set”, “it was the will of God”, etc.) and on the other hand, the absolute freedom (“if you believe in your dream, everything will work out”, “to want is to be able”, “I’m totally in charge of my life”, etc.). But it is not only common sense that fluctuates between absolute determination and absolute freedom. Philosophical thought and scientific theories also oscillate between those two extreme conceptions. Among the conceptions of human nature, there are many ideas based on the conception of unilateral determination. One example is the idea that human beings are naturally egoistic and competitive. In fact, this idea is just an ideological expression of the capitalistic worldview. At the same time, there are conceptions about absolute freedom of the “human soul” which could exist under conditions of total independence of the human body as a living organism.

In the history of philosophical thought, as well as in scientific discussions, there are also conceptions that defend a unilateral determinism, as is the case, for example, with many conceptions about human nature. Just as there are conceptions that attribute a freedom as a quality as opposed to material limitations, to the human being, beginning with the very limitations of the human body as a living organism. However, in the history of human thought, dialectical analyses of the relationship between determination and freedom have been developed, as Hegel's conception of relations between freedom and necessity:

Hegel was the first to state correctly the relation between freedom and necessity. To him, freedom is the insight into necessity. "Necessity is *blind* only *in so far as it is not understood*." Freedom does not consist in any dream of independence from natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws, and in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends. This holds good in relation both to the laws of external nature and to those which govern the bodily and mental existence of men themselves — two classes of laws which we can separate from each other at most only in thought but not in reality. Freedom of the will therefore means nothing but the capacity to make decisions with knowledge of the subject. Therefore the *freer* a man's judgment is in relation to a definite question, the greater is the *necessity* with which the content of this judgment will be determined; while the uncertainty, founded on ignorance, which seems to make an arbitrary choice among many different and conflicting possible decisions, shows precisely by this that it is not free, that it is controlled by the very object it should itself control. Freedom therefore consists in the control over ourselves and over external nature, a control founded on knowledge of natural necessity; it is therefore necessarily a product of historical development. (Engels, 1947, online)

The philosophical discussion of freedom should not dissociate itself from its historical analysis. With this, we may question the widespread conception that capitalism is the society that guarantees freedom to human beings.

The dialectic between objectivity and subjectivity and between necessity and freedom is also present in the Gramscian sense of catharsis:

The term "catharsis" can be employed to indicate the passage from the purely economic (or egoistic-passional) to the ethico-political moment, that is the superior elaboration of the structure into superstructure in the minds of men. This also means the passage from "objective to subjective" and from "necessity to freedom". Structure ceases to be an external force which crushes man, assimilates him to itself and makes him passive; and is transformed into a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethico-political form and a source of new initiatives. To establish the "cathartic" moment becomes therefore, it seems to me, the starting-point for all the philosophy of praxis, and the cathartic process coincides with the chain of syntheses which have resulted from the evolution of the dialectic. (Gramsci, 1999, pp. 691-692)

In this way, I agree with Martins (2011) and Cardoso (2014), when they claim that Gramsci's catharsis is inextricably linked with his view of the importance of the struggle for

hegemony in the clashes between the working class and the bourgeoisie. Catharsis would then be, for Gramsci, a process by which human beings move from being subjugated to external forces to being individually and collectively subjects who place these forces at the service of liberation. It is a process of social transformation towards a "new ethical-political form", that is, a non-alienated society. This process of transformation of consciousness is therefore linked to the revolutionary social transformation, that is, the overcoming of capitalist society.

The social relations between men, in other words, are bound up with the way they produce their material life. Certain 'productive forces' - say, the organization of labor in the middle ages - involve the social relations of vassal to lord we know as feudalism. At a later stage, the development of new modes of productive organisation is based on a changed set of social relations - this time between the capitalist class who owns those means of production, and the proletarian class whose labor-power the capitalist buys for profit. Taken together, these 'forces' and 'relations' of production form what Marx calls the 'economic structure of society', or what is commonly known by Marxism as the economic "base" or 'infrastructure'. From this economic base, in every period, emerges a "superstructure" - certain forms of law and politics, a certain kind of state, whose essential function is to legitimate the power of the social class which owns the means of economic production. But the superstructure contains more than this: it also consists of certain "definite forms of social consciousness" (political, religious, ethical, aesthetic and so on), which is what Marxism designates as ideology. (Eagleton, 2002, pp. 4-5)

From this perspective, it seems to us that, in Gramsci's quoted passage on catharsis, the elaboration of the infrastructure in superstructure can be understood in two directions. The first is that overcoming capitalism would place economic forces at the service of an organized collective will, reversing the current situation in which capital, as an economic force, dominates the entire institutional political framework. Another sense would be that human beings, in order to develop themselves toward freedom, need the social forces, objectively existing and resulting from the accumulation of historical experience, to incorporate into their individuality. These two meanings - of the transformation process of infrastructure in the superstructure elaboration process - do not exclude each other. On the contrary, they are inseparable aspects of the same collective and individual dynamics.

Gramsci's catharsis is therefore a political, ethical and transformative process of the relations between individual subjectivity and sociocultural objectivity.

Regarding this relationship between catharsis and ethical attitudes, the following passage by Lukács (1966) seems to be quite enlightening to me, even though the author is focusing at this moment just on the relationship between aesthetic catharsis and ethical attitudes:

First of all, it is necessary to start from the fact that each aesthetic catharsis is a concentrated and consciously produced reflection of emotions whose original can always be found in one's own life, even if in it, of course, in a spontaneous birth in the course of actions and events. It is therefore necessary to note that the cathartic crisis unleashed on the receiver by art reflects the most essential traits of these vital constellations. In life it is always an ethical problem, which therefore must also constitute the central content of the aesthetic experience. But of course, in the regulation of life by ethics, cathartic conversion is only a specific boundary case in the system of possible ethical decisions. Together with it are possible resolutions without emotion that produce ethical attitudes as strong, lasting and firm as cathartic commotion and in many cases more than it. In ethical terms it is essential that the consequent tenacity be hierarchically superior to all enthusiasm, however passionate, sincere and deeply felt it may be. (pp. 509-510)

The first point to highlight in this passage is the linking of catharsis to processes that occur in people's lives, involving ethical decisions. Such decisions interrupt, at least momentarily, the routine and the pragmatism, requiring the individual to elevate themselves to a more conscious level in their relations with other people, with life, and with society. Another point to note is that Lukács (1966) draws attention to the fact that ethical decisions, for the most part, do not take the form of a profound break with the previous worldview (cathartic conversions coated with strong emotions). Often, changes occur with a lower emotional charge, but they are not of less decisive value to the subject's life. From my point of view, what makes it possible to call a change cathartic is not its emotional intensity, but the fact that there is a qualitative change in the relationship between individual subjectivity and sociocultural objectivity. A broad and profound cathartic transformation can be generated by a process consisting of small and almost imperceptible changes, as is often the case with the catharses produced by school education.

## Catharsis as a category for Didactics and Teachers' Education

Drawing explicitly on Gramsci, Saviani (2008), in contrasting the method of a Marxist pedagogy to the method of the traditional school of Herbart and the progressive school of Dewey, considered catharsis as the “moment of elaborated expression of the new achieved form of understanding social practice” (p. 57). Catharsis is therefore understood by this educator as a moment in which consciousness raises the participation of individuals in social practice to a higher level of understanding. The knowledge that is systematically taught to the pupils through school education does not mechanically add to their consciousness, but transforms their consciousness by many degrees. The pupils are able to understand the world and their lives in a relatively more elaborate way, partially overcoming the level of everyday thought or, in Gramscian terms, the level of common sense. For Saviani (2008): “It is the effective incorporation of cultural instruments, now transformed into active elements of social transformation” (p. 57).

Two clarifications are needed. The first concerns the relationship between knowledge acquisition and education. Gramsci and Saviani support neither the reduction of education to teaching nor the opposition between them. The acquisition of knowledge in school education is seen by these two thinkers as an important part of the process of education, but such acquisition is not an end in itself. Its justification is ultimately in social practice. The second point that requires clarification is that the ethical formation of individuals is not separated from the development of their worldview and, as part of it, their political position, which in the case of capitalism, means a position in relation to the class struggle.

In this sense, catharsis is an individual and collective process because the ethical-political position necessarily involves the collective organization of individuals to face struggles and to concretize changes towards a profound transformation of society and human life.

Admitting catharsis as a qualitative change in the relationship between individual subjectivity and sociocultural objectivity, towards the overcoming of fetishized everyday life<sup>11</sup> and the formation of class consciousness for itself, it is necessary to recognize that the concept

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<sup>11</sup> In the lyrics of his song “Cotidiano” (1971), that is, “Everyday”, Brazilian singer-songwriter Chico Buarque constructed a poetic representation of fetishized daily life. In this kind of daily life, people have an alienated relationship with their own life and do not question the reasons why things are the way they are. Another example from literature is Franz Kafka's novel *The Metamorphosis* (1997), where the traveling salesman Gregor Samsa wakes up one morning as a huge insect and yet retains his daily concerns, such as going to work.

of catharsis will not have the same importance for all pedagogical currents. It will be a concept of little value or even totally irrelevant to the educational conceptions that adopt the adaptation to the status quo as the great objective of the formative processes. Saviani made a distinction between concept and category, that is, “if every category is a concept, not every concept is a category, because category is that concept that occupies a central place in the context of a given theory or area of knowledge”. (Martins and Cardoso, 2015, p. 171). Adopting this distinction, my understanding that for historical-critical pedagogy, catharsis is a category, whereas in other pedagogies it may be a concept of little or no importance.

Even in the case of historical-critical pedagogy, in which catharsis is recognized as the turning point in the educational process, the fertility of this category may not be adequately explored if it is not understood from the perspective of Marxism and the struggle for socialism. It is important to highlight the connection that this category establishes between work with school content and the formation / transformation of the worldview, that is, the political and ethical positioning within the class struggle (Duarte, 2016; Saviani & Duarte, 2012). Thus, the relations between content and form, means and ends are highlighted. More than that, it is necessary not to dissociate school contents from the ways of teaching these contents, as well as not to dissociate the ethical-political ends of education from the means adopted in order to achieve those ends. In other words, the classic questions “what to teach”, “how to teach”, “why to teach” and “whom to teach”, need to be answered as interconnected parts from the same pedagogical, political, scientific and philosophical perspective.

Is catharsis, however, an identifiable category in children's education? In other words, does it make sense to talk about changing the worldview in early childhood education and elementary school? I regard this kind of doubt as unfounded by the simple fact that every conception of the world has its genesis and development, both in the case of human history and in the case of each individual's life. When a child masters, for example, the spoken language, his or her worldview takes a giant leap, and this can surely be considered a cathartic process. The same can be said about literacy and the consequent entry of children into the universe of systematized knowledge in written form. The relations between these catharses and the conception of the world are not direct, on the contrary, they are established by a set of mediations placed by the social practice of individuals.

Gramsci (1999) addressed the theme of relationships between school content and worldview by analyzing the teaching of Latin grammar in traditional schools. This teaching was widely criticized by progressive educators as being mechanical, removed from the pupils' lives and, therefore, limited to a transmission of content without really educational value. It would therefore be a teaching of something external and foreign to the individuality and life of the students. Gramsci argues that, while the fight against the old school was fair, especially against Jesuit methods, the criticism of teaching Latin in the traditional school established a separation between instruction and education. Gramsci historicizes the traditional school and shows that the teaching of Latin was part of a broader pedagogical project in which the pupil was led to study classical Greco-Latin culture, that is, to study the origins of modern European culture. Considering that Italian pupils were part of modern European culture, Gramsci concludes that teaching Latin had at least three positive educational attributes. The first would be that the pupil was led to know themselves better as they learned to see themselves as part of a historically constituted culture. The second would be the pupil developed a “historicist intuition”, that is, the beginning of a historicizing perspective of culture. Finally, the very mechanical character of the study of Latin grammar had, contradictorily, an educational function, which was to form the physical and psychic self-control necessary for the study activity. But one could say that this example refers to teenagers rather than children. It turns out that Gramsci (1999) also gives an example of the elementary school:

The idea and the fact of work (of theoretical and practical activity) was the educational principle latent in the primary school, since it is by means of work that the social and State order (rights and duties) is introduced and identified within the natural order. The discovery that the relations between the social and natural orders are mediated by work, by man's theoretical and practical activity, creates the first elements of an intuition of the world free from all magic and superstition. It provides a basis for the subsequent development of an historical, dialectical conception of the world, which understands movement and change, which appreciates the sum of effort and sacrifice which the present has cost the past and which the future is costing the present, and which conceives the contemporary world as a synthesis of the past, of all past generations, which projects itself into the future. (p. 178)

Gramsci (1999) sees the relations between school education and the formation of the world conception as indirect and as a process. In that passage he says that school contents, when they initiate children in the scientific understanding of nature and the relations between society and nature through human transformative activity, that is, work, create “the first elements of an intuition of the world free from all magic and superstition” providing “a basis for the subsequent development of an historical, dialectical conception of the world”. Although he does not refer in this text to catharsis, that is an essentially cathartic process.

In this sense, it is also relevant to establish relationships between catharsis and the intentional production of new needs. In a way, catharsis is a production of needs that point to the expansion of the universe of social relations in which the individual is inserted, as well as to a new positioning of the individual before the reality of which he is part. This is one reason why a child looks strangely at someone a little younger than themselves, someone who acts and reacts in ways similar to the ways that he/she used to act and react a short time ago. It is very difficult for the child who has already broadened his worldview to put themselves back into the position of those who deal with reality more narrowly. It is, of course, a momentary difficulty that can be overcome as the individual continues to develop toward individuality for itself (Duarte, 2013). In this case, the individual can become able to take the process of development as an object of knowledge and to understand the moments he/she has been through and the ways in which he/she has been related to the world in these various moments. I would say that the irreversibility of cathartic leaps can become conscious for the individual.

However, if in a historical-critical pedagogical perspective catharsis becomes a vital category for didactics, its importance for teacher education is something that has yet to be explored more intensely and deeply. Mazzeu (1998) presented an analysis that, as far as I know, was pioneer in upholding the application of Saviani's proposed method to continuing teacher education. However, to date, there remains a lack of more detailed and in-depth studies on the importance of catharsis in the initial and continuing teachers' education. At the same time, I am not neglecting in any way the fact that teachers' education courses have been subjected to a process of emptying, either by overvaluing tacit knowledge (Duarte, 2003; Martins, 2010; Teixeira, 2011), or by the proliferation of distance courses for teachers education (Carvalho, 2014; Malanchen, 2015). In this context, the proposition that teacher education is a cathartic process sounds like almost a romantic utopia, that is, a profound transformation of the worldview.

Nevertheless, the necessary recognition of the hegemony of forces contrary to a teacher education project committed to the full socialization of science, art and philosophy in their richest expressions, should not be an impediment to the equally necessary recognition of the possibilities of counter-hegemonic struggle. Taking this project as possible and necessary is already an initial way to face this struggle. The current hegemonic forces in the educational field invest heavily in the strategy of diffusing conceptions about education and teacher education that deny the value of the richer forms of knowledge and, as a result, give the school the role of institution in which people merely exercise adaptation to the status quo.

In this context of ideological struggle, to take catharsis a central category of teacher education courses, is equivalent to adopting an attitude of active resistance to the naturalization of alienation. In this way, teacher education would be understood as a process in which individuals are led to master the school contents and forms of teaching, aiming to transform the worldview of their future pupils.

At another moment (Duarte, 2016), I defended the thesis that educational work sets in motion the activity that is at rest in the classics of science, art and philosophy. I used the metaphor of the resurrection of the dead, drawing on Karl Marx's analysis of the relationship between living labor and dead labor, that is, between labor activity and the means that subjects employ to carry out this activity. These means are, in turn, the result of work activity already performed, i.e., "dead work". When they are employed, the social activity that is deposited in them is set in motion. But in order for the individual to set in motion the activity potentially contained in the means of work, they must develop the physical and mental operations required by the very characteristics of the means employed.

The same happens with the complex systems of signs that humans have historically developed to act on their own psyche (Duarte, 2017; Martins, 2013). We thus evidence the inadequacy of the often-repeated accusation that schoolwork with the classics of science, art and philosophy would generate passivity and a lack of creativity. On the contrary, as shown by the study by Saccomani (2016), based on Marx, Vigotski and Lukács, the mastery of the existing reality is the indispensable basis of the process of creating the not yet existing one. This is because the creation of something new is, in reality, a transformation consisting in re-directing the existing processes to new goals. Thus, the richness of human experience accumulated in scientific, artistic, and philosophical productions takes hold of individuals in the same process

by which they appropriate this wealth. Here it is clear the Gramscian sense of catharsis as a passage from objective to subjective or, using Saviani's words (2011), as a formation of "a second nature" (p. 19).

It is necessary, however, to avoid a static view of catharsis, which would be that of a moment, when the movement ends. While catharsis is a qualitative leap as a result of a process, on the other hand, this marks the beginning of new developments that will occur in a different condition from the previous one. What the individual has incorporated into their "second nature" sets in motion new objective and subjective processes.

Finally, a question that deserves attention: if there is catharsis when the individual appropriates human content and experiences, that is, when he learns, would the act of teaching produce catharsis also in those who teach? To be consistent with what I have upheld throughout this text, I need to rephrase the question as follows: can teaching be an activity that transforms the relationship between the subjectivity of the teacher and the socio-cultural objectivity? My answer is positive, but not unrestricted, that is, it is not teaching in any way that catharsis will occur in the one who teaches. The richness of the content taught and of the way in which it is taught is necessary for the production of catharsis in both the pupils and the teacher. For the teacher, catharsis can begin to take effect in the very process in which he/she works with knowledge in preparation for the teaching activity he/she will undertake. It has often happened to me, and I have heard similar reports from several fellow teachers that as we study certain material to teach it, our view of that content changes qualitatively. This can also happen at the very moment when this content is being taught to students. And it is not only our view of content that can change, but also our view of the meaning of that knowledge for social practice. It is a subject that has yet to be explored more widely.

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