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History of the Spanish Pedagogical Renewal Through its Education Centers: 1876-1972

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Abstract

Promoted by some of the most critical sectors of the education community, the history of the Spanish pedagogical renewal (19th and 20th centuries) shows all kinds of experiences representing an innovative, committed and transformative way to understand both pedagogical processes and the school. This article shows the final results of the historical analysis of the Spanish pedagogical renewal from the late 19th century (1876) to the last years of Franco's dictatorship (1972), through the different primary education schools considered as references, both public and private. Different studies on the Spanish pedagogical renewal have been examined, as well as media from the period and the main education magazines which acted as tools of expression in each historical period. This analysis was completed with data obtained from the revision of education projects, the direct observation of several cases, and consultation with the most relevant stakeholders. In order to create an overview, this article allows for a gradual understanding of the historical development, and of the cultural, political, social and pedagogical nature of the changing processes experimented through those years.

Keywords: pedagogical renewal in Spain, school, history of education, alternative school.



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Introduction

The Spanish pedagogical renewal is a broad and flexible concept which has always been closely linked to historical, political and social context: an organized set of both theoretical and practical activities aimed at overcoming the dominating pedagogical reality. The pedagogical practices encompassed have boosted constant innovation in the improvement of the educational response to those challenges raised by society (ITE, 2012).

Historically, it has been promoted by some of the most critical sectors of the education community, crystalizing in a constant shared, reflexive, critical, committed and innovative attitude which considers education as the engine not only for personal but also for social transformation. Therefore, we can talk of a constant historical process that generates new ideas and proposals in order to improve education, making up a specific culture and a pedagogical attitude comprising the search for a school (simplifying its claims) that would be: integral in its aims, active in its methodology, democratic and participatory in its everyday life, critical, and open in its relationship with its environment.

The theoretical basis of the Spanish pedagogical renewal has been written thanks to the contribution of several thinkers. Some of the most relevant ideas can be found in the pedagogical legacy of the so-called *Movimiento de la Escuela Nueva* (New School Movement), disseminated by authors like Dewey, Fröbel, Montessori, Claparède, Luzuriaga, Giner de los Ríos, and Ferrière; in the pedagogical proposals developed by Ferrer i Guardia at “Modern School”; or in the personalist theories by Freire and Sujomlinski. These authors – and many others such as Makarenko, Decroly, Milani, Neill, Tosltói, Steiner, Rogers, Freinet, among others– have combined critical language with the language of possibility and have become the most significant theoretical points of reference. Their approaches have allowed throughout history both the approximation of many educators to new ideas and the regeneration of pedagogical discourse and practice.

From the end of the 19th century through to today, this permanent critical, reflective attitude towards the improvement and innovation of schools has generated a rich legacy of initiatives. The aim of this article is to show the results of a diachronic study of the pedagogical renewal developed in Spain from the late 19th century (1876) to the last years of Franco’s dictatorship (1972), touring around some of the most notorious primary education school centers (both public and private)¹. For that purpose, the current research is presented from a chronological perspective, in which some of the most representative cases are briefly exposed and the main identifying traits highlighted. In this sense, the pedagogical itinerary begins with the creation of the emblematic *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* (ILE – Free Learning Institution) in 1876 and ends with the “O Pelouro” experience in 1972.

This chronicle has been developed after a wide-ranging review of both contemporary newspapers and magazines which became the mainstream voice of each historical period. Moreover, a complete study of the scientific production on the pedagogical renewal developed in Spain in those years was conducted (Agulló & Payá, 2012; Canes, 1999; Dávila, 2005; Delgado, 2013; Doménech, 1995; Domínguez, 2016; Esteban, 2016; Fernández, 1984; Fernández & González, 2007; Hernández, 2011; Luzuriaga, 1923, 1957; Marín, 1990; Milito &

¹In order to wider its dissemination, this paper sums up, expands and improves in English its previous Spanish publication (see Pericacho, 2014).

Groves, 2013; Pericacho, 2014, 2015; Pozo, 1996, 2004, 2014; Ramos & Pericacho, 2015). Finally, regarding the current ongoing initiatives, the information is completed with data obtained from the revision of education projects, the direct observation of several cases and consultation with the most relevant stakeholders.

Due to the characteristics of the Spanish pedagogical renewal history and our effort for synthesis, the researchers and authors of this study are aware of the number of cases which have not been covered. Therefore, it is noted that the research focuses mainly (but not exclusively) on the geographical areas of Madrid and Catalonia, as being locations with the greatest possibilities for development.

From 1876 to early 20th century

At the end of the 19th century, Spanish schooling was suffering a considerable impediment both materially and pedagogically when compared to other industrialized European countries, with underpaid teachers, shortages of schools to meet the school-age population, a lack of social and labor consideration for teachers, authoritarian and rote pedagogical practices, and a lack of school democratization, etc. Even though it went hand-in-hand with the political and religious judgements and sensitivities, it remained distant to the new pedagogical trends of Europe and the United States at that time.

The new educational psychological trends coming from Europe and the ideas of pedagogical modernity, change of methodologies, contents, the concept of childhood, and the relationship with nature only slowly reached Spain during the 19th century as related to the different political and religious sensitivities, which managed to crystalize in the creation of several innovative cases, mainly due to the interest of the private sector. Initial progress in this respect stemmed from three highly prestigious institutions: “Institución Libre de Enseñanza” in Madrid, “Escuelas del Ave María” in Granada, and “Escuela Moderna” in Barcelona.

The *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* (hereafter referred to as ILE), started in Madrid in 1876 and represents, as Molero (2000) stated, the most attractive, innovative and influential educational project within the pedagogy of the era. Among their founders were some of the most relevant thinkers of contemporary Spanish society: Francisco Giner de los Ríos, Gumersindo de Azcárate y Menéndez, Teodoro Sainz Rueda, and Nicolás Salmerón Alonso. Their goal, under the direct influence of contemporary liberal and Europeanist trends, focused on the modernization and improvement of Spanish education. Although the Spanish Civil War in 1936 interrupted its activities, its pioneering work set a milestone in the field of educational pedagogy as it introduced into the Spanish education paradigm the new pedagogical approaches being developed in Europe.

Its teaching methodology, clearly opposed to the contemporary approaches, promoted a student-centered educational concept, where students became the center of the education system and the teaching-learning process, authoritarian and rooted in the past, adapted to the students’ degree of psychological maturity by becoming focused on their interests and needs. This new education model was sustained by four pillars: moral, intellectual, artistic and physical. Their joint development allowed students to reach new horizons: with education for the artistic and intellectual pleasure, learning how to enjoy art and knowledge; a physical education focused on health, hygiene that was closer to the

esthetic and natural beauty of movement; and a moral formation based on universal ethics and principles, instead of those based on religious beliefs (Gómez, 1966).

The *Escuelas Ave María* (Hail Mary Schools) was another such project that started up in Spain at the end of the 19th century, and was considered to a pioneer of the New School. This initiative, of a strongly religious nature, was created in Granada in 1889 under the direction of a priest, Father Andrés Manjón y Manjón. From its beginning, its basic goal was the education and societal integration of the most humble social classes. Its pedagogical approach rejected rote learning and instead focused on the development of the intellectual capabilities of children within an environment where freedom, joy, play, handicraft and contact with nature were its core elements.

Andrés Manjón's project was always supported by a wide sector of society, allowing for its swift expansion throughout Spain and across Europe. Therefore, in only 20 years, the *Escuelas Ave María* grew from 12 schools in 1896 (Anonymous, 1896) to approximately 300 that were registered in 1920 (Canes, 1999).

The third project, *Escuela Moderna* (Modern School), was created in a turbulent Barcelona in 1901, under the direction of Francisco Ferrer Guardia. With a philosophy highly influenced by the educational theories of the French pedagogue Paul Robin, the free thinking movement and the positivist materialism of Auguste Comte (Delgado, 1981), *Escuela Moderna* broke away from dogmatic study and proposed a form of lay-rational education focused on free thinking and the coeducation of genders and social classes. Among its distinctive features were: the eradication of exams, grades and corporal punishment; the opening up of schools to social and labor life dynamics; and the elimination of any kind of knowledge that could not be demonstrated through scientific method (Ferrer, 1976).

Even though the project was supported by eminent figures of the period such as Odón de Buen and Santiago Ramón y Cajal, the attack committed in 1906 by the school's librarian, Mateo Morral Roca, against King Alfonso XIII and Queen Victoria Eugenia triggered the beginning of its decline. In 1909, Francisco Ferrer was accused of being one of the instigators of the events that took place during the "Semana Trágica" (Tragic Week) in Barcelona and was subsequently executed. This fact, together with the poor reputation that *Escuela Moderna* had acquired with the most conservative social sectors in Barcelona at the time (Llarena, 1919), triggered the gradual phasing out of schools of the lay-rational trend throughout Spain and South America, and authorization was withdrawn for those about to open (Sanmartí, 1907).

It is not time, though, to analyse in detail the activity of such schools, especially the one in Barcelona, about many speak without really knowing it, some even attributing the education of all the young arsonist who attacked nunneries and churches in Barcelona in July, 1909. (Llarena, 1919, p. 779).

Despite the short time *Escuela Moderna* was actually open, it is important to acknowledge its work and presence in the national and international educational landscape of the beginning of the 20th century. The lay-rationalist features of its pedagogy ran deeply among the most progressive educational sectors of the period, spreading fast among educational centers linked to the trade unions; having become a hallmark among American socialist and anarcho-syndicalist educational movements.

Finally, although it can be considered as a direct allocation, during the 1960's Ferrer's ideas has their influence in Anglo-Saxon models like those of A.S. Neill and Paul Goodman.

From the first third of the 20th century to the Civil War (1936-1939)

Stemming from the 1898 crisis, the greatest cultural and intellectual exponents in the country boosted a regenerationist background for educational renewal which encouraged the creation of a new society and, at the same time, a new school to support it generation after generation. Thus, slowly but surely and through different organs of expression, the ideas and experiences of the New School Movement reached Spain. For example, in Catalonia in the early 20th century, broad sectors of the bourgeoisie linked to the nationalist movement became concerned about school renewal and the promotion of the Catalan language and culture. The traditional school model was questioned and there were first contacts seen with the innovative pedagogical ideas coming from Europe, which were adjoined to the New School principles.

Some experimental private schools were created as a result of that trend. Thus, in the first three decades of the 20th century, a wide variety of centers appeared which were looking to renew their school practices and modernize Catalonia. Therefore, once the deficiencies of the existing education system had been identified, and thanks to the creation of the so-called *Mancomunitat*, several schools supported by different areas of the Catalan bourgeoisie were opened, strongly influenced by the cultural movement *Renaixença* and the ideas of *Escuela Nueva*. Some of the most outstanding (linked to names like Rosa Sensat, Joan Bardina, Alexandre Galí, Pau Vila, Joan Palau Vera, Manuel Ainaud, Pere Vergés, Artur Martorell, and Jeroni Estrany) examples to be found included: "Sant Jordi" school (1898), "Mosén Cinto" schools (1904), "Mont d'Or" school (1905), "Escuela Horaciana" (1905), "Granja Escolar Catalana" (1905), "Escoles Catalanes del Districte VI" (1906), "Vallparadis" (1910), "Sagrada Familia" school (1910), "Nuevo Colegio de Mont d'Or" (1913), "Escola del Bosc" in Monjuïc (1914), "Galileo" rationalist school (1915), "Casa del Bambini" (1915), "Escola del Mar" (1922), "Mutua escolar Blanquerna" (1923), and the "Milá y Fontanals" school group (1931).

Regarding the center of Spain, especially Madrid as the capital city, the creation of the "*escuelas de ensayo y reforma*" (schools of testing and reform), which were implemented in some graduate schools² must be highlighted. Others worthy of mentioning are "Grupo escolar Cervantes" (1918), "Príncipe de Asturias" (1918), and "Instituto-Escuela" (1918). These schools became experimental centers funded by public authorities where innovative methodologies from *Escuela Nueva* were applied, in the hope that they would later spread to the rest of public schools once their suitability was proven (Pozo, 2004). The creation of these schools was achieved through the "*Patronatos escolares*" (school boards), legal organisms which mediated between the Ministry of Education and the schools, allowing for much needed freedom of such centers.

²"All our schools are unitary: a lot of children of different ages and culture degree in a single room and with just one teacher. Slowly, excessively slowly, unitary schools become graduate schools: homogeneous and relatively reduced groups of children, a room for each group, in each room a teacher, and a headmaster for all the rooms making up the school." (Llorca, 1922, p. 254)

Highlighting its privileged condition as the capital of Spain and because of its location at the center of the Iberian Peninsula, according to the centralist trend of the Government policies, it was the intention to set Madrid as the inspiration and model of the Spanish pedagogical renewal, and the epicenter of innovative ideas to the rest of the country (Pozo, 1996). These educational centers enjoyed a high level of autonomy in selecting teachers and starting experiments, as well as from administrative ministerial regulation. Moreover, the introduction of new contents was permitted (physical and artistic education, etc.), as well as the application of *Escuela Nueva* active methods in real schools. Therefore, they became the main icons of Spanish Regenerationism for society and soon became model schools, highly visited by teachers and school masters alike from all over the country.

All those educational proposals put into practice during the early 20th century, the education innovations that ran deep in Spain due to the *Escuela Nueva* pedagogical trend, the institutions –like the *Junta de Ampliación de Estudios* (Committee for Extension of Studies)– encouraged the introduction of new European educational approaches and the political commitment of certain sectors proposing a pedagogical change in the education policy of the country; all those elements contributed to the start of a pedagogical revolution in Spain that culminated in the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939).

From a pedagogical perspective, the Second Spanish Republic became a sort of golden age. This period has been deeply studied by pedagogues and historians such as Barrios (1999), Fernández (1984), Lozano (1980), Millán (1983), Molero (1977), Moreno (2003), Puelles (2002), and Ruiz (1993). It meant the development of a public educational model which wanted to support schools on the three fundamental pillars of a democratic State: free and compulsory education, and laicism. An effort was made in order to build a state, rational, integral, autonomous school framed in the principles of co-education. Besides, the measures of the Ministry of Public Instruction affected not only schools, but also reached those most marginalized areas from a cultural and social point of view. Luzuriaga (2001), one of the key names of the educational renewal process that took place in Spain between 1914 and 1936, considered that phase as a new period “in which public and lay school became the ideal instrument to start theoretical and practical projects of a unique and active school” (p. 36).

The Spanish Civil War started in 1936 and ended on April 1, 1939. It began with an uprising of part of the Spanish army in Morocco (led by General Francisco Franco) against the democratically elected republican government (with Manuel Azaña as president). Despite the different political interpretations of this tragic historical event, a common statement arose: that the end of the war did not finish with repression and violence, nor was it made possible for national pacification and reconciliation. Instead, a new political system began in 1939 from a radical division between winners and losers. Thus, the post-war period was characterized by a long economic autarky, with great deficiencies, hunger, international isolation, the suppression of individual freedom, a hard political repression, illiteracy, and a lack of social services.

The dictatorship era (1939-1975)

Following the end of the Civil War in 1939, Franco’s regime lasted a further 36 years. The regime brought about changes to the education environment that materialized through a counterrevolution regarding the pedagogical principles of the Second Republic, giving way

to an educational model based on an anti-liberal traditionalism, an outstanding military-fascist authoritarianism, and a catholic fundamentalism aimed at a deeply conservative society (Morente, 1997).

Virtually all institutions and organisms responsible for the political and educational ideas of the Second Republic were accused of setting interests against the nation and, therefore, obliged to hide or transform their identity features according to the new models of citizen, society and State imposed by the regime.

Up until the mid-1960's, there was a setback or stagnation regarding teaching methodologies. Nevertheless, and in spite of the regime's political and pedagogical aversion to any pedagogical proposal with innovative or critical features, some attempts at pedagogical renewal were not completely thwarted; mostly coming through private initiatives in Catalonia and Madrid. In Catalonia, the most significant examples were "San Gregorio" (1955), "Talitha" (1956), "Instituto Costa i Llobera" (1957-1958), "Thau" (1963), and "Ton i Guida" (1963). In Madrid, some school centers appeared which managed to avoid the authoritarian control of the time; and some of the most relevant initiatives are still active today: "Estudio" (1940), and "Estilo" school (1959) centers.

"Estudio" (1940) adopted the pedagogical and methodological principles of both *ILE* and *Instituto Escuela*. It was a school founded by Jimena Menéndez-Pidal, Carmen García del Diestro, and Ángeles Gasset, former teachers of *Instituto Escuela*. Some had been related to the laboratories of the Committee for the Extension of Studies (JAE) or pensioned from it.

The pedagogical renewal of this school is somewhat historical due to the particularly difficult moment from when it was founded. These absolutely enlightened women, and gathered all ILE's achievements materialized at *Instituto Escuela* and carried on with these ideas within an extremely difficult social and political moment in Spain; in other words, to educate children and not follow, in my opinion, a superficial kind of education. I think that is the magic of a school, one that transmits an interest in culture³.

"Estilo" school (1959) is a private center created by Josefina Aldecoa in order to modernize the then existing pedagogical model. At first it received many intellectuals, artists and, in general, anyone who was looking for a different type of education for their children, starting a model that brought together both the Krausism principles and ILE's pedagogical model.

By the last years of the regime, some experiences were created from different perspectives, which aimed to consolidate an alternative to the official pedagogical model. In Madrid, two schools were started that are still active today: the public schools of "Palomeras Bajas" (1969) and "Trabenco" (1972).

"Palomeras Bajas" (1969) stemmed from a project seeking to be a public school with the following basic principles: stress placed on individual teaching, teamwork and a direct relationship with the neighborhood and parents in order to achieve their gradual participation in school life (Palomeras Bajas, 2013). In this sense, competence acquisition and development were especially considered, as they enable students to operate in the best way possible within different contexts. The assembly is one of the main educational

³Interview with a teacher at Colegio Estudio and Delegate of 3rd, 4th, and 5th primary sections, January 21, 2013.

resources of the center, where “Every Monday there is a meeting for the first hour, and we try to make it coincide at the same hour in every classroom.”⁴

“Trabenco” public school (1972) was created as a result of an agreement with the Ministry of Education and Science and a group of cooperative members who gave up their establishments in exchange for the power of selecting teachers, provided that they were official or interim staff. The center put into practice an active, democratic and dynamic methodology⁵. As its headmaster stated: “Trabenco has an organizational structure that allows for direct participation, where families and teachers –from different responsibility levels– share and take responsibility for the project.”⁶

In other areas of Spain, such as the Basque Country and the Community of Valencia, concern was shown about the introduction of the pedagogical renewal’s methodological basis, and the recovery of the Basque and Valencian languages, respectively. The cases of “La Tramuntana” (1968) in Valencia, and the *Ikastola* “Langile” (1970) in the Basque Country are particularly noteworthy examples.⁷

“La Tramuntana” (1968) taught having Freinet’s work as a referent. Shortly after its opening, the regime rejected its recognition as a private center, and attempted to overcome the problem by reconverting it to the “Mistral” school. After several internal conflicts, in 1975 the parents cooperative was dissolved which gave way to a teacher cooperative named “La Masía,” and is currently a subsidized private center.

The *Ikastola* “Langile” (1970), in Guipúzcoa (País Vasco), is an initiative that “started as an application of a Freinetian methodology” (Dávila, 2005, p. 97). Initially it only had a kindergarten, then later, in 1972, preschool classrooms were unified and in 1976 it was legalized as a cooperative. Finally, in 1993, it was integrated to the school public network of the Basque Country.

Lastly, in other areas of Spain, there were other significant cases. During the 1972-1973 academic year, the “O Pelouro” school was opened in Pontevedra (Galicia), founded by Teresa Ubeira and Juan Rodríguez de Llauder. It was a subsidized center focused on a pedagogical renewal and current integration with a great number of students having special educational needs. From its beginning, the school had a critical attitude towards the rigid, competitive model, building a school for everyday life without excessive timetables, subjects or fixed activities.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to publish the results of a diachronic study of the pedagogical renewal developed in Spain from the late 19th century (1876) to the last years of Franco’s dictatorship (1972), through a historical analysis of some of the most well-known primary education school centers. As has been seen, the pedagogical renewal constituted an innovative engine and a constant pedagogical transformation in the history of Spanish education, becoming an example of social-educational teaching commitment, a shared

⁴Interview with Headmaster of CEIP Palomeras Bajas, April 8, 2013.

⁵Visit to the centre during the 2010-2011 academic year.

⁶Interview with Headmaster of CEIP Trabenco, April, 2013.

⁷Excellent and useful analysis can be found in Dávila (2005).

methodological thinking, and the search for schools that were not only configured in an academic context, but as a driver for personal, cultural, and social improvement. Each of the cases which limits its outline reflects a unique educational singularity. All of them, however, promote both discourse regeneration and pedagogical practice, and perform in their classrooms a relatively common series of educational principles such as a more active school in its methodology, more integral in its purpose, and participatory and open in its relationship with its environment.

Taking into account the different historic and geographical realities where these initiatives were started and the different influences which inspired them, from the late 19th century until the last years of Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975), it highlights a non-stop trend in the opening of heterogeneous school centers which experimented with and boosted the pedagogical renewal processes in Spain. The history which, although constant in time, took place during periods of considerable growth during the Second Republic and from the 1970's onwards, and also at a time of significant decline during the dictatorship era.

To conclude, and as stated in this article, the history of the Spanish pedagogical renewal is a heterogeneous, eclectic history which has been evolving since 1860 without interruption, but at different speeds according to the political moment and the different sociocultural concerns pertaining to specific contexts and periods. In other words, it constitutes a pedagogical engine of criticism, commitment, innovation, and constant transformation of both discourse and pedagogical practice, essential to understanding the evolution and educational regeneration processes taking place in contemporary Spain.

Having solid knowledge about the nature and development of these historical processes in Spain allows for a broadening of the theoretical and practical framework for discussion within the educational community, to enlarge the pedagogical imaginary on which the meaning and aim of schools must be based and, finally, to strengthen a critical perspective on the dialectic relationships set between schools and the sociocultural context of each historical era.

Notes

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