

## **José Martí and popular education: a return to the sources\***

Danilo R. Streck

*University of the Vale do Rio dos Sinos*

### **Abstract**

*This article presents José Martí as a historical source of popular education in Latin America. It starts from the assumption that there can be no true re-foundation without the return to those founding moments, ideas or principles of popular education. After giving a brief account of Martí's work and thought, we characterize the concept of popular education as education of the people, in the sense of a universal education. On a different level, we seek to identify in Martí's work elements of popular education as a political-pedagogical movement that takes shape especially since the latter half of the 20th century. The premise here is that at some given point people's education and popular education cease to be equivalent terms, and that in José Martí we find elements to think about these two terms dialectically, in a movement of re-creation of a practice that, albeit cleaved by historical contingencies, is whole. Four pillars of popular education are identified in his work: valuing the plurality of knowledges; the interpersonal relationship as the milieu for teaching-learning, and basis of social transformation; the knowledge of reality from an emancipative perspective as a political act; and education as self-formative process of society.*

### **Contact:**

**Danilo R. Streck**

**Rua Pastor Rodolfo Saenger, 144**

**93035-110 – São Leopoldo – RS**

**e-mail: dstreck@unisinos.br**

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Education needs to go where life goes. It is foolish that education takes up the only time man has for preparation without actually preparing him. Education needs to give the means to solve the problems that life may present. The great human problems are: the preservation of existence and the conquest of the means to make it amenable and peaceful. (Martí, 2001, p. 308)<sup>1</sup>

### **The return to the sources**

Moments of crisis tend to be accompanied by a return to what is regarded as original or founding. In personal life, it can mean long years of therapy to make one's peace with one's real or imagined parents, and the marks they left in childhood. In history, it is the attempt to go back to the sources wherein lie the facts and ideas that at a given moment represented rupture or innovation. Thus, the Protestant Reformation (Lutero, 1995) sought in the biblical text, now available to be printed in large numbers, the basis to guarantee a new relationship with God and between people, contributing to the universalization of school education; at the height of Enlightenment, Rousseau (1995) declares Plato's Republic to be the best book ever written on education; currently, political scientists and sociologists, concerned with representative democracy going astray, turn to authors that gave substance to this form of govern in their texts and institutions<sup>2</sup>.

Popular education went through a period of re-grounding (Vargas, 1996) or, as some would have it, of re-founding, in which a return to the sources was staged in two senses. First, in a horizontal sense, there was the incorporation of different and new references about central themes of education, such as subject, knowledge, history, and power. There was also a search in the vertical sense, especially in the connection with autochthonous cultures. The Zapatista movement in Mexico, the CONAIE

(Confederation of the Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador), and the manifestations of indigenous peoples in Bolivia have brought to light distinct and forsaken realities and readings of the world. The Black and women's movements, among other obscured segments of society, have invited new actors to the scene. Popular culture was no longer read under a strictly classicist bias, and opened up to embrace the plurality of manifestations and forms of expression that comprise the realities felt and lived. Today, the concept of popular classes combines forms of domination from the past with oppressive effects of the contemporary capitalist logic. The diversity of social movements and popular manifestations has to do with the concrete forms of confrontation required by this "curious whirlpool" (Mouterde, 2003, p. 86) that is the daily life in our times.

We should remember that the need for re-grounding emerged from the sensation that practice had been emptied, with little condition to contribute to real advancement of society. Perhaps the immediateness of the exigencies of educative practice, coupled to the always-pressing demands of people's lives, such as housing and employment, contributed to the loss not only of horizons, but also of radicalness. Going to the roots requires the redoubled effort of peering back over one's practice, and is incompatible with spontaneities. As part of this picture, little attention is given to theory sources for popular education, the latter being often treated as a pedagogical movement created in the second half of the

**1.** The volume *Educação em Nossa América* [Education in Our America] (Martí, 2007) brings together many of José Martí's texts about education cited in this article, although our references are to the texts of the *Obras Completas* [Complete Oeuvres]. The volume is composed of four parts: a) texts about education, amongst which "Mestres itinerantes" [Itinerant masters], "Educação popular" [Popular education], and "Nossa América" [Our America]; b) texts from *A idade de ouro* [The golden age], a magazine for children; c) a selection of poems and fragments; d) a brief chronology, web sites about Martí, and an index.

**2.** Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2000) seeks the origins of the social contract in Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau to identify what might become a new social contract. Robert Castel (2004) finds in Hobbes the bases to understand the current sense of insecurity and the search for protection.

20th century, dissociated from the history of society in general, and from the history of education in particular, contradicting the popular education premise about the historicity of the educative act.

On the one hand, it is indeed recent the construction of a practical-theoretical body referred to as popular education in a strict sense. In Brazil, the popular culture movements, the Paulo Freire method, and the clandestine struggles during the period of the military dictatorship are without a doubt factors that mark the emergence of a field that subscribes to certain principles and by a distinct methodological perspective from which it starts a dialogue with other ideas of education<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, there are voices in history that have been silenced, and practices that have remained outside the hegemonic parameters of analysis, and which can be rescued as a kind of backdrop against which the more recent practices develop. Within a general situation of unawareness of the history of Latin American education, this fact is not surprising. We know little before Paulo Freire and, if we do not make an effort to recover the memory of this political-pedagogical process, we run the risk of not knowing much after him, and even of losing what we know about him.

The argument presented here is that there can be no true re-founding without the return to those founding or structuring moments, ideas or principles of popular education. We do not speak of principles as of something static or eternal. We mention here the observation by Balduino Andreola defending that – still – it makes sense to speak of ethical principles: “We can agree that it would make no sense if the principles were priorities established at Plato’s idealist Olympus. I believe, however, that principles should be understood as demands that appear, emerge, and are born out of existence.” (Andreola, 2003, p. 21). He then relates the principle with the etymological sense found in the Greek

“arché” (first, original). The call is then for an archeology of the popular education in the continent.

This article will consider the thought of one of the thinkers that are part of the trajectory of popular education. In José Martí we find a very lucid expression of what education in Latin America should be, and sketches of a Latin America pedagogy. His dedication to the cause of the revolution in Cuba throughout the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century includes education as a central factor for the conquest of independence and for the realization of life in this part of the world.

The text of this article is divided into three parts: a) a brief introduction to Martí’s thinking, putting it in perspective and reflecting upon the broad meaning of his work as a source for popular education; b) the concept of popular education as education of the people in a broad sense; c) reversing the terms as a question, the education of the people as popular education. The premise is that at a given moment the education of the people and popular education stopped being equivalent, and that in José Martí we have elements to think these two terms in a dialectical form, in a movement of re-creation of a practice which, although split up by historical contingencies, is single.

### **José Martí: life and work**

José Martí lived in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1853-1895), a period marked by the consolidation of the independence of the young Latin American republics and, in the case of Cuba and Puerto Rico, still by the conquest of independence from Spain. His whole life and work have as their background the struggle for

**3.** Conceição Palulo (2001, p. 91) appropriately synthesizes the emergence of this new understanding of the popular in education: “It is in the 1960s, with Paulo Freire, that we have in Brazil, for the first time and in a consistent manner, a declared pedagogy of the popular classes. For the first time we begin to conceive a pedagogy in Brazilian (and Latin American) education that takes into account the Brazilian reality with a view to its transformation, and in which the popular classes assume a central role.”

the self-determination of his country, Cuba, and the constitution of a group of sovereign nations, mindful of their rich cultural inheritance in the South of America. This dedication to the emancipationist cause meant that he spent most of his life in exile, living in several countries (Spain, Mexico, Guatemala, Venezuela and the USA), where he worked as a journalist, teacher, writer, and political activist.

In the political scene, the fight against Spain is followed with a keen eye on the “giant with the seven-league boot” that emerged in the North. The fact that he lived most of his exile in New York allowed him to observe at close quarters the growth of this neighboring country with a mixture of admiration and apprehension. Admiration for the progresses in farming the land and in the incorporation of new technologies, and for the public education that was being set up in many places of North America. Apprehension for the imminent danger of trading one form of domination for another, running the risk of exhausting the forces in a pointless struggle.

Martí realized that Cuba’s true liberation could not happen without the union of the people, of all sectors of society. The Cuban Revolutionary Party, founded in 1892, adopted this flag and, because of his ideals of unity, Martí was its soul. The Party had a decisive role in the fight for independence that erupted in 1895, and Martí left New York to join the troops under the command of General Máximo Gómez. On March 19 of that year, he died in battle against the Spanish Army in Dos Rios, without seeing realized the great dream of his life.

Martí’s thought is of unquestionable universality. We understand universality as the twin sister of radicalness. The radical, non-sectarian thinking, is that which delves into the roots of the conditions and situations analyzed, thereby succeeding in encompassing diversity. It is like a pebble thrown in a lake: as it sinks, it produces concentric circles that enlarge at the same time that the pebble seeks its place at

the bottom of the lake. This type of universality explains why so many thinkers from different fields of knowledge – scientists, politicians, philosophers, theologians, pedagogues, literates, communicators, amongst others – find themselves in Martí’s thinking. Each one of them finds in his work threads that help them to weave new narratives in new times and places.

In Brazil, as pointed out by Reck (2005) on the basis of documentation and testimonies, the MST (Movement of Landless Rural Workers) has in Martí an important source of inspiration to compose its pedagogical set of ideas. The very phrase *escola itinerante* (itinerant school) recalls the well-known text *Maestros Ambulantes* (Ambulant Teachers), in which Martí states the need for willing teachers to go afield and deliver technical knowledge and tenderness, both essential to life.

Florestan Fernandes (1995, p. 32) saw in Martí a “humanist and intrepid combatant” for whom revolution represented a continual process of perfecting the human being and society. The Cuban Revolution in search of its political autonomy should be seen as an expression of the great struggle for equality between the richer and the poorer nations of the world.

In philosophy, Raúl Fonet-Betancourt (1998) recognizes in Martí the inaugurator of what could be identified as a Latin American philosophical thinking, which would have as its features the polyphony, giving voice to the mulatto, the Indian, and the Afro-American. It is also a thinking made from the margin, in the perspective and interest of the oppressed. Martí’s inspiration, according to Fonet-Betancourt, rids philosophy of dogmatism and of the pedantic repetition, accepting the risk of thinking reality from the concrete circumstances.

Reinerio Arce (1996) sees in Martí the basis for a Latin American theological thinking. His writings are steeped in the critic to religion as an ally of the powerful, while prophetically

recognizing Christianity as essentially a religion of the poor and for the poor. The new religion in the new society could only rest upon the liberty founded on reason. It is not the case, in Martí, of a cold and calculated rationality. The true religion would be no less than the “poetry of the world to come”.

To Roberto Fernández Retamar (2006), José Martí represents the first modern thinker of our America, the founder of a new social thinking uniting the will of emancipation with the search for social justice. For this reason, the great Latin American revolutionaries of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, like Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, just like the social movements, have in him one of their main sources of inspiration.

It is not difficult to see Martí as a spring for other areas: in literature, both as an author and writer as a critic; in journalism, as a perceptive, critical, and committed observer; in politics as a revolutionary activist and thinker of his reality; in science as a promoter of the creative spirit. At the same time, there is no reason to fall prey of idealizations contrary to his own sense of reality, Martí (2001). He was a man who lived his time intensely, which means that he was not free from the contradictions of that time, nor above them. One can apply to him the comprehension with which one approaches men as Bolívar, Hidalgo, or San Martín:

At times they wanted what they should not want, but what would a son not forgive in his father? The heart fills with tenderness when we think about these gigantic founders. They are heroes: those who fight to turn the people free, or those who suffer in poverty and disgrace for defending a great truth. Those who fight for ambition, for making slaves of other peoples, for having more power, for taking from other people their land; they are not heroes, but criminals. (p. 308)

The university also reveals its use of

sources that will merge into an authorship of extreme originality. We just have to read a few paragraphs to feel that we stand before a thinker capable of translating complexity into simple words. The essential truths, says Martí, fit on a hummingbird’s wings. The eloquence and simplicity of his style, however, have nothing to do with empty wordiness: “Language has to be mathematical, geometrical, sculptural. The idea has to fit exactly in the sentence; so tightly that we cannot remove anything from it without removing the same thing from the Idea” (p. 255). This sentence summarizes well his vigorous and vibrant style.

It is also very difficult to analyze the influences that marked José Martí’s thinking. As a journalist, intellectual, and political activist, he followed as few the movements of the society of his time. Apart from that, the fact that he lived in New York, at that time already an important economic and cultural center, and worked in several countries in Latin America and Europe, puts him in a privileged position to understand his world under the perspective that he defines as our America.

We should also note Martí’s conscious effort to maintain his intellectual independence. According to Reinerio Arce (1996), he cannot be placed under any school of philosophy. Martí himself defines the intellectual as someone characterized by his ability to pass judgment with autonomy, Martí (2001). Some of those who call themselves intellectuals are, for him, mere imitators, and if take from them their authors, they become like mannequins without arms and legs. “Others read to know, but bring their own mark to where the master, as if over light, does not dare to place his hand. And, be they artisan or princes, these are the creators. What do we have to do in order to know? To examine with our criterion the examination conducted by the criterion of others, or, what is even safer, to examine with our own criterion”.

Martí was an avid reader, and any attempt to identify sources in his thinking must

be prefaced by words of caution recognizing its precariousness. An important exercise was made by Reinerio Arce who, based on Martí's references, identifies three especially relevant authors in the formation of his ideas. To those we add the autochthon sources, which shall give shape to what he calls our America.

The first of these is José de la Luz y Caballero (1800-1862) who, along with Agustín Caballero (1762-1835) and Félix Varela (1783-1853), are the main figures of Cuban philosophy in the first half of the 19th century. José de la Luz's thought had three components that also show in Martí: a religious strand based on a wide knowledge of the Bible and Patristics; a scientific strand based on knowledge of Physics and Chemistry; and a philosophical strand. This eclecticism, mixing a profound spirituality with the faith in science as an instrument for the betterment of individual and society, will also be of the hallmarks of Martí's thinking.

The exile in Spain put Martí in contact with a movement called Spanish Krausism. Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781-1832) was a German philosopher to whom life should be governed by a rational principle derived from the seed placed in the human being by the Creator himself. The world is a finite being that develops in the bosom of an infinite being, which is God. "Perfection consists in the unity of men through love, knowledge, and the realization of good in God, to which science and reason shall contribute decisively, since man, a synthesis of nature and spirit, cannot forego the sensible world" (Urbina, 1966, p. 825). Besides influencing philosophy and theology, this movement championed by the Spanish bourgeois liberal left promoted a wide movement of public education. Its exponents in Spain were Julián Sanz Del Río<sup>4</sup> (1814-1869), Fernando de Castro (1814-1874) and Giner de los Ríos (1839-1915), the latter one of the founders of the association for public schooling and of the conferences for the education of women.

Another influence was Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), a member of the movement known as New England transcendentalism, which opposed both the scientific materialism and the religious dogmatism. There is, according to Emerson, a correspondence between the deeper human being and the universe. "In fact, there is nothing external, so I need to weave the threads from inside my guts ... the purpose of life seems to be to acquaint a man with himself ... and the highest revelation is that God is in every man" (*apud* Arce, 1996, p. 37). Everything the human being needs he finds inside himself.

In the years he lived in Mexico (1875-1876) and Guatemala (1877-1878), there grew in him the idea of a Latin American autochthony, no doubt due to his acquaintance with the living indigenous cultures of those countries, Martí (2001). In Guatemala, he published in 1877 a text entitled *The new codes*, in which he expressed his confidence that a new people was emerging in that part of the world.

Interrupted by the conquest of the natural and majestic work of the American civilization, a strange people was created with the coming of the Europeans, for the new sap rejects the old body; not indigenous, for it suffered the interference of a devastating civilization, two words that, being antagonistic, constitute a process; a people was created mixed in form, which with the reconquest of its freedom develops and restores its own soul. It is an extraordinary truth: the great universal spirit shows a particular face in each continent. Thus, we, with all the frailty of a child seriously injured in its cradle, have the generous fervency, the valiant restlessness and intrepid flight of a fierce

**4.** In 1864, the Syllabus published by Pope Pius IX included Julián Sanz Del Río's *Ideal de la Humanidad para la vida* (Ideal of Mankind for life) among the forbidden books.

and artistic original race (p. 98).

This citation includes many of the meanings attributed by José Martí to the concept of Our America<sup>5</sup>. It recognizes that the Iberian conquest represented an interruption in the history that the peoples of this continent were building. With the conquest, he says, a leaf was torn from the great book of the universe. Contrary to the imaginarity of the colonizers, Martí recognizes that there was no clean slate here, an empty world to be filled by a superior civilization. There was a very rich history, as witnessed by the buildings, the astronomical observatories, and the achievements in agriculture. For this reason, he recommends in the article *Nossa América* (2001, v. 6) that we should study the history of the Inca and the Maya, even if we did not study the history of the Greeks, because our Greece is preferable to a Greece that is not ours. "Engraft in our republics the world, but the trunk has to be ours."

To these formative influences were added others throughout his life, resulting in a thinking that articulates science and spirituality, ideas and action, reason and emotion, critical rigor and tenderness, classical sources of the Western tradition with the beliefs of autochthonous peoples. They give form, as a whole, to an author that defies classification, and which for this very reason constitutes and indispensable source for Latin American thinking in general and for pedagogical reflection in particular.

### **Popular education as education of the people**

José Martí identifies popular education with education of the people within the classical tradition of modernity. Just as in the vision of the Protestant Reformation, in which the church and the world needed Christians educated on the principle of the universal priesthood of all believers, Condorcet and his

revolutionary contemporaries struggled for the education of citizens for free and sovereign nations. Martí (2001) assumes this premise:

Popular education does not mean exclusively education of the poorer class; but that all classes of the nation, which is the same of the people, be well educated. Just like there is no reason for education the rich and not the poor, what reason there is to educate the poor and not the rich? All are equal (p. 375).

The implementation of this education of the people goes through a reformation of the laws that govern education. The school for all must be the goal and its compulsoriness is unquestionable. It is worth even punishing parents to guarantee this right to every child from Our America. Freedom and compulsoriness of schooling are complementary expressions for the emancipation of the people, as he comments on a teaching law draft in Mexico in 1875:

(The law) establishes two big principles: even if the draft as a whole is not acceptable, it would be saved by these two principles that sustained it and engendered it: freedom of schooling and mandatory schooling. That is, mandatory schooling and freedom of schooling; because that healthy tyranny is better than this freedom (Martí, 2001, p. 353)

Martí (2001) does not conceal his admiration for the schools from various parts of the world, and for various reasons. Of Germany, he is especially fond of the humanistic

<sup>5</sup> The article *Nuestra América* (Our America) was published on 30 January 1891 in the Mexican newspaper *El Partido Liberal*, and reflects the author's intellectual and political maturity. The phrase, however, was coined well before and became one of the main concepts in José Martí's thinking. According to the survey made by Pedro Pablo Rodríguez (2006, p. 39), the expression "Our America" was first used in 1875, when Martí (2001) was in Mexico. He then said: "If Europe was the brain, our America would be the heart" (p. 423).

formation associated to technical education. The electricity school in Darmstadt would have an exemplary syllabus for the education of electricians, teaching disciplines as “Magnetism and electrodynamics, telephone machines, potential theory with special applications to the science of electricity, electric signals for railways” (p.284).

From the United States, he admires also the technical education, but particularly its direct linking with the industry. He sees in these schools the possibility of overcoming the century-old tradition of seeing manual work as something inferior, for slaves. From manual work come physical, mental, and moral advantages that could help the growth of each man of the Hispanic-American societies. Above all, he says, “this habit of the method, a healthy counterweight that imagination has in us, with its golden spurs, particularly in our lands of vehemence, restlessness and misdirection” (p.284). Why not uniting, he insists elsewhere, the creative impetus of the peoples from this part of the world with the methodic work demanded by the new times.

He sees with enthusiasm that in several countries in Latin America “schools of Arts and Crafts” are being set up to bring education up to date, that is, up to the scientific times.

The Schools of Arts and Crafts help to solve the human problem that emerges now with new data, since those old trees, Monarchy and Church, beneath whose branches some many man led comfortable lives, begin to wither. Now, neither courtiers nor friars. The times are agitated; men are awake, and each one has to carve with his own hands the chair in which he will seat at Fortune’s feast. Those stable and fixed classes through which lives entered as through open channels no longer exist; there are no more legions of barefoot beggars; nor swarms of pretenders, - although they still exist!- Nor regiments of gentlemen to kill, ladies to steal and serve; nor herds of

lackeys (Martí, 2001, p.284).

In England Martí sees how women begin to vie for positions at the university in equality of conditions. In the United States he does not fail to observe how the exclusion of women from schools is sheer discrimination, having no relation to intelligence or capacity. This is also true of Hispanic descendants in the United States. Even under adverse conditions, the *Gusmáns*, *Arellanos* and *Villas* stand out in their classes for their creativity and performance, showing that inferiority is historical and produced by bad social conditions.

Along with the enthusiasm with science within the positivist spirit of the time, which fed many revolutionary and republican forces, Martí equally values the cultivation of the spirit. His poetry is the best witness to that. The scientific spirit is not antithetic to intellectual and spiritual development. On the contrary, both must be useful to the development of life<sup>6</sup>.

It is not enough to create schools and to have laws. The inefficacy of many educational reforms can be illustrated by the metaphor of the dry sand sliding over tilted rocks with nothing to stop it. This tilted rock that remains unaltered with the passage of the sand, is the public soul taken by egotism and rudeness, and which for this reason resists “to the improving influx of the practices which it accepts only in form and name” (Martí, 2001, p. 285).

These brief comments and samples of José Martí’s educational thinking let us perceive his concern with what today we would call a quality education for everyone. It is about opening the access to all, indiscriminately, but also about having a planning capable of coping with the needs of society at the time.

**6.** Martí certainly does not share the narrow view of utility as personal benefit or as utilitarianism. Utility has to do with the conditions for the promotion of the life of each and everyone, according to the possibilities of the time in which one lives.

## **The education of the people as popular education?**

The belief that the education of the people is popular education was deconstructed as generations of rulers and managers employed the power of institutionalized education to keep themselves in power and, paradoxically to keep the people ignorant. The persistent illiteracy, school dropout, and students' low performance cannot be attributed to chance nor to teacher incompetence or to the lack of capacity of the individuals. Popular education, which Martí (Cuba), Sarmiento (Argentina) and Varela (Uruguay), among other thinkers of the time, saw as being equal to the education of the people, began to be understood as an alternative to this education of the people associated to the school.

In the brief history of popular education, there is a consensus that it was in the latter half of the 20th century that it was constituted as a pedagogical proposal with its own body of principles and methodologies. Apart from the reaction to school education highly deficient and conservative<sup>7</sup>, the change in the productive system and in the relationships between the agents of this system contributed to the constitution of popular education, as well as initiatives for adult education promoted by national and international agencies.

There is, however, throughout Latin America history (Streck, 2006) a set of pedagogical practices that were covered up by the ideology of the hegemonic classes, and which in a clandestine manner manifested as pedagogy of survival, of resistance, and of relation. There were also reflections that can hardly be found in textbooks for teacher education courses. It is in this sense that we can identify in José Martí's work features that later gave form to the political-pedagogical assumptions of popular education.

## **The sharing of knowledge**

A feature of popular education as we know it today is that it breaks free from the formal spaces of education and seeks approximations between knowledges from different places of societies and culture. The school is now seen as one among many spaces where people are educated. As previously seen, Martí is a vehement defender of mandatory public schooling for all children, but his pedagogical utopia goes beyond that.

His description of the Chantaqua experience illustrates his dream of seeing education as a place for the coming together of people and of different knowledges, from the practical knowledge of how to bake potatoes to the latest novelties of physics. Chantaqua was a system of popular education that began with a teacher assembly on a Sunday School in 1874, which met in the town of Fair Point by Lake Chantaqua, western New York State. The school was organized by John Heyl Vicent (1832-1920), a bishop of the Methodist Church, and it quickly became a place for conferences and studies.

In Chantaqua, Martí watches the realization of his dream of an open school that welcomes all those who have something to teach and are willing to learn. "Cooking, teaches to cook. Walking, teaches to walk. Drawing teaches to draw. Teaches to bake potatoes and to measure light waves". This "university of the people" has no enrollment, nor does it issue diplomas, but in it, one finds food for curiosity and practical teachings for the daily well living. Let us observe this moving scene: "A husband, fully happy, kisses his wife on the cheek, bringing happiness to her eyes: 'woman, we are worth more than before!' The garments are percale or poor wool. The hands are hardened "(Martí, 2001, p. 433). There, the best of Art and Science are placed within the

<sup>7</sup>. "As a reaction to the elitist and conservative education that was shaped in the institutional way, there emerged group actions by the late 1950s moving counter to the incapacity and political paralysis of the State in fulfilling the rights to accessing, remaining and learning of the popular classes" (Brandão, 2001, p. 51).

reach of the common citizen.

A similar experience can be found in the descriptions of the meetings of “The League”. It was founded in 1889 by José Martí and Rafael Serra to train Cuban exiles for the revolutionary task. We would be mistaken to think that war strategies and the art of handling weapons were taught there. There we would find people who, in exile, prepared for citizenship by teaching and learning. “Some learn to read and write around a desk, while others studying and correcting one another’s dissertation, swim in the deepest of the human heart and seek for the light of judgment and for the good of the country the hidden and the true that can be barely seen in the pages of history” (Martí, 2001, p. 252).

We have here one of the great utopias of popular education: learning as exchange and sharing. Even if the pedagogical relationships are steeped in power and therefore involve always a cultural negotiation (Mejía; Awad, 2001, p. 119), Martí emphasizes in his observations and in his practice the dimension of willingness, which will turn popular education into an important space for the training of leaders who have an ethical-political commitment that privileges solidarity (Adams, 2007). So, in popular education we find, side by side, the negotiation of position and ideas because the people involved are immersed in power relationships; the exchange between people conscious of the fact of having something to give and who recognize their interdependence; and the sharing as an expression of the gift.

### **Scientific knowledge and tenderness**

Technical and scientific knowledge are not for José Martí an end in itself. No matter how relevant scientific knowledge is, it is still a means created by humankind to face the difficulties of life that, by their turn, are not exhausted by what science is capable of

providing. Therefore, “here is (...) what teachers have to take to the fields. Not just agricultural explanations and mechanical instruments, but the tenderness that man misses so much and that makes them so much good” (Martí, 2001, p.289).

A century later, Paulo Freire (1996) emphasizes again the wishing well as a requirement of the act of teaching, also in the context of a pedagogy that proposes to be revolutionary. There is in both the tacit recognition that true changes are only possible when they involve the human being integrally. “Men, says Martí in the same text, are still eating machines and depositories of worries. We have to make of each man a torch” (p. 159). For this, it is necessary, first, to unfreeze the congealed veins of the peoples of our America.

Popular education makes of affective relationships one of the pillars of its practice and finds its best success when it manages to integrate reason and emotion. For example, the movement of the CEBs (Ecclesiastical Base Communities) was charged with an impressive liturgical wealth. The music, from Chico Buarque and Geraldo Vandré to today’s hip-hop, mobilizes resistance and protest practices. The mystic integrates the pedagogical and social practices of the MST (Movement of Rural Landless Workers). We also know that when youth and adult education turns into school EJA (Education of Youths and Adults), it runs the risk of losing this aesthetic-affective dimension, and tends to fit into the institutional logic, with the same prerogatives, but also with the same difficulties (Godinho, 2007).

### **Education as a political act**

One of the hallmarks of popular education is its self-awareness as a political-pedagogical practice. In a reality of conflicting interests, neutrality implies compliance with those who have the instruments and the means

to exercise control. From this premise, however, there are major differences in interpretation and in facing these conflicts.

In Martí's thinking, the conflicting interests are not resolved through class struggle, as in the Marxist theory. On the occasion of Marx's death, Martí (2001) wrote an article in which he pays homage to him for having taking the side of the weaker. He recognizes Marx's merit for having grounded the world upon new bases, and awakened the European working class. However, he considers the class struggle inadequate to resolve the conflict because it pits man against man. Revolution has at this moment a trans-classism character by calling all Cubans to fight for independence.

According to Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (1998) Martí's perception inaugurates in Latin America a traditional reception of Marx that sees in his work above all the option for the poor. Liberation theology and important segments of popular education can be included in this tradition, by not making an immediate distinction between the popular and the social class in a more strict Marxist sense. With his sharp sense of reality, Martí was aware of the difference in development between the Latin American and European societies, with little industrialization and an almost inexistent working class. According to Antônio Cândido (1995, p. 29) "his radicalness resides first of all in a popular conception of democracy", understanding the popular as a privileging of the perspective of the oppressed and the poor<sup>8</sup>.

Martí's political thinking is at the same time challenging and anti-dogmatic. His indignation is turned against each and every form of oppression, from the black slavery (Cuba's emancipation included the liberation of slaves) to the submission to ecclesiastical hierarchy or to empire, both the old represented by Spain and the new in the figure of the "giant with the seven-league boots" that was forming in North America. Hence the value of freedom as he explains for the children in A

Idade de Ouro (The Golden Age):

Freedom is the right every man has of being honorable and of thinking and speaking without hypocrisy. In America, one could not be honored, nor think, nor speak. A man that hides what he thinks or dares not to say what he thinks, is not an honorable man. A man who obeys a bad government, without working for the government to be good, is not an honorable man. A man who complies with unjust laws and allows the country in which he was born to be trodden by men who mistreat it, is not an honorable man. The boy, when he starts to think, must think about everything he sees, must suffer for all those who cannot live honorably, must work so that all man can be honorable, and must himself be an honorable man (Martí, 1995, p. 4).

### **Education as self-education of society**

Although Martí admired the educational systems set up in Europe and in the United States, as well as the scientific and technical nature of education in these countries, he is totally against the transplanted laws, practices, and theories. "Engraft the world in our republics; but the trunk has to be of our republic. And be quiet the defeated pedantic; for there is no land in which a man can be more proud than in our pained American republics" (Martí, 2001, p. 15).

The European university, he says in *Our America*, shall give place to the American university. In the same way, it is just or even more important to study our history from the Incas forwards than it is to study a history of a Greece that is not ours. It would be a mistake, however, to see in Martí a xenophobic denial of

<sup>8</sup>. "With the poor of the earth, My fortune I want to throw: The brook of the hill. Pleases me more than the sea." (Versos Sensillos III, Martí, 1985, p. 98)

the philosophical and literary western tradition. What he defends in this and in other writings is the potential of this America that combines different races and traditions to create its own culture. In reality, we have already missed an opportunity: "(The) reward would have been in congregating, with the charity of the heart and the daring of the founders, the handkerchief and the toga; in mobilizing the Indian; in adjusting freedom to the body of those who rose and won it" (p. 15). But, Martí believes, the time is ripe for a new attempt. The Cuban revolution, in which Martí engaged completely, displayed these expectations and possibilities of the new society.

José Martí foresaw as few the emergence of a new center of imperial power in the north of America. This does not make of him an enemy of the North American people or a blind critic of this society. Living in the "monster's guts", he recognizes virtues in North American society that he wished to see also in the south. As previously indicated, scientific education, the room for women at school and in public administration, and the valuation of manual work are among the positive aspects that Martí recognizes in the country where he carried out the major part of his work as a writer, politician, and poet. At the same time, there shall never be a truly free society until men and women are able to think for themselves.

Education is, therefore, a process of self-education of society based on the forces that exist in it, with the contribution of other peoples offer. For Martí, there is no question about the peoples of Latin America integrating into to the modern world of machine and science, or remaining at the margin of this process. There is a sense of universality heightened by the current conditions of our peoples to meet and promote interchanges of various kinds. This is a reason for the valuation of diversity, as we see in the *História dos homens contada através de suas casas* (History of men told through their houses), where Martí (1995) shows to the children how each type of

house has its reason in its context, and that finally the time had come when the peoples could live as brothers, knowing and visiting each other<sup>9</sup>.

### **Final remarks**

This study does not make justice to the amplitude and density of José Martí's thought. It is above all an exercise in a more systematic incorporation of one of the sources of our past. Besides, it is always risky to incorporate the ideas of an author from whom we are separated by more than a century, and by countless transformations in society and culture. There are, however, also some constants that make Martí a man of remarkable modernity. His ideas allow pressing themes of the present to take on clearer forms, and to be more easily transformed into objects of our reflection today.

One of these recurrent themes in education is the feeling of eternally lagging behind the other peoples ahead of us. Martí (2001) denounces as a monstrous attack the divorce that sets in between the education of his time and his time, but recognizes also the pointlessness of transplantations to fill this gap. The way out for him is in linking education with the concrete life of individuals and peoples. There is no magic, but we are not faced with a historical fatality either. All we have to do is to make use of the creative potential of each people.

As a revolutionary in which many of Rousseau's ideals pulsate (Streck, 2004), Martí believes in the possibility of eliciting the best from each human being. The ruptures with the past of oppression are possible because history is open to human creativity. This utopian

<sup>9</sup>. "Now all peoples of the world know each other better and visit each other: and in every people there is a way of building, according to cold or heat, or according to whether they belong to one race or another; but what seems new in the cities is not their way of building houses, but in each city there are Moorish houses, and Greek and Gothic, and Byzantine and Japanese, as if the happy time had started when men treat each other as friends and get together" (Martí, 1995, p. 70).

thinking, free from determinisms, has been another fundamental ingredient of popular education throughout its history.

This is also reflected in the way of doing pedagogy, in the sense that there can be no pedagogy for freedom if the pedagogy itself is not

free from dogmas that bind it to fixed schemes or limit the possible to what circumstances allow. Martí's thinking appears as the inspiration for a radical pedagogy, firmly founded in the social and cultural reality where it happens, but equally committed to the transformation of this reality.

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**Danilo R. Streck** is a lecturer and researcher in the Graduate Program in Education at UNISINOS. He has a PhD in Education from Rutgers University (New Jersey, USA). He conducted post-doctorate studies at the University of California, LA, and worked as a visiting professor in the International Doctorate in Education at the University of Siegen (Germany) and University of Toronto (Canada). Among his recent publications are Educação para um novo contrato social (Vozes, 2003), Rousseau & a Educação (Autêntica, 2004), Pesquisa Participante: a partilha do saber (Idéias e Letras, 2006, organized with Carlos R. Brandão) and Educação em nossa América (Unijuí, 2007, Introduction and a compilation of José Martí's texts).