

Hannah Arendt: Thinking the crisis in education in the contemporary world

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Abstract

The present essay, which is divided into three complementary stages, discusses Hannah Arendt's ideas about the crisis in education in the contemporary world. In the first stage some general theoretical analogies are established between Arendt's thesis regarding the crisis in education and her philosophical-political ideas about the political crisis of modernity. In the second stage of the essay, it is discussed Arendt's hypothesis that the crisis in education is also related to the introduction of educational approaches of psycho-pedagogical nature, which instead of contributing to educate the youth so that they assume responsibility for the world and take political action, are keeping them in an infantile condition until they reach adulthood, creating, thus, new political issues. Lastly, in the third stage of the essay, it is proposed the hypothesis that the main contribution of Arendt's ideas to thinking the contemporary crisis in education is found in her interesting discussion about the binomial "criticism" and "crisis", which put in question the traditional binomial "crisis/reform". Arendt, as well as Foucault and Deleuze, tells us that criticism and crisis are indissociable modern phenomena and she invites us to behold the crisis as a privileged moment to exercise critical thinking. In Arendt's opinion, the crisis in education must be understood as a crucial opportunity to make critical reflections on the educational process itself.

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The crisis in education in the context of the political crisis of modernity

The main reflection of Hannah Arendt (2005) on education is found in the essay "The crisis in education", written in the late fifties, which was included in the selected writings entitled *Between Past and Future*. Arendt's diagnostic in regard to the contemporary crisis of the teaching and learning processes are inserted in the theoretical context of her debate over the human condition and the political crisis of modernity, which are the central themes of her philosophical-political reflection. Let's see an outline of how these connections are usually established.

Firstly, it calls our attention the unusual fact that Arendt (2005) approaches the education issue by referring it to the human condition of natality: "natality is the essence of education, the fact that we have all come into the world by being born" (p. 223). In *The Human Condition*, her most important theoretical work, the author asserts that each human birth represents a new beginning, distinguishing it, thus, from the appearance of a human being according to the way of repetition of an occurrence previously given. Being born does not mean to merely appear into the world, but it represents a new beginning in the world. Natality cannot be confused, therefore, with the mere event of being born, but it constitutes the beginning, the new for the human being. It is the human condition of natality that assures that one has the possibility to act as an agent in the world, initiating new unpredictable relationships. Natality is the main category in political thinking because it is the ontological source of action and, therefore, of freedom and of newness, which are intrinsic to the origin of men on Earth.

Then, although Arendt's concept on natality maintains connection with the fact of generating mere life (in Greek, *zoe*, the common condition of all alive), the really important aspect to be emphasized is the relationship between human life and world. In a sense, plants and animals are also "sprung" in a determined *habitat*, but one cannot say they *come into the world*, or, as Heidegger (2003) has declared it does not come into the world to renew it (p. 400). For Arendt (1995), the world is a peculiar creation of humans, comprised of a set of durable artefacts and institutions, which are meant for allowing men to be continually connected to one another and letting them be disconnected at the same time. The world is not mistaken for the ground where they move or for the nature from which the material to produce their artefacts

are extracted, but it has relation to the multiple artificial, institutional and cultural bounds that humans interpose one another, themselves and their own nature. According to Arendt's ideas (1995), the world also refers to those subjects that are *between* men, that is, those subjects that are of their *interest* when they get into political affiliation with one another. In this more restricted sense, the world also determines the set of institutions and laws that are common and appear to all. It concerns that institutional place that must survive to the natural life and death cycle of generations in order to secure some stability to a life that is under constant change, in a cycle without beginning or end, in which consecutive living and dying are embodied.

By understanding the world in these complementary senses, Arendt believes that only men keep a privileged relationship with it, falling to education the critical task of undertaking the proper inclusion of the newcomers in a world that foregoes them, that is strange to them, and that, moreover, must remain after their death. For Arendt (2005), what describes education in relation to other ways of living beings insertion in a pre-existent environment is exactly the privileged relationship that human life (*bios*) maintains with the world:

If a child weren't a newcomer to this world, but only an unfinished live creature, education would be merely a life duty and it wouldn't have to be consisted of nothing that goes beyond the concern with life preservation and training and the practice of living that all animals take on in relation to their children. (p. 235)

The human relationship with the world, mediated by education, is also a privileged relationship in the sense that it is never given beforehand, but it has to be entangled over again at each new birth, when comes to the world an entirely new being that is distinct from the other beings (Arendt, 1995). Therefore, education can never be understood as something given, done and finished, but it has to be continually rethought due to the changes in the world, in which come to life new human beings. It is precisely because the world is continually subject to the new and to the instability caused by the action of newcomers, assuming responsibility for the world – that what Arendt called *amor mundi* – means contributing in a way that the whole set of political and legal institutions bequeathed to us are not unremittingly changed or destroyed according to the will of circumstances and of private and immediate interests of a few. The one who educates does not only take responsibility for the “child's

development”, but also for the own “continuity of the world” (Arendt, 2005, p. 235). Taking responsibility for the world is, thus, taking responsibility for its continuity and conservation, an aspect that cannot be confused with the *tout court* conservativeness, since Arendt (2005) emphasizes that only something stable can undergo change. For the author, education plays a decisive role in the sense of conserving the world, as it is a question of introducing to the youth the set of rational, scientific, political, historical, linguistic, social and economical structures that comprise the world they live in. If one day, when they are grown-ups, it is their duty to change and radically modify this world through political action, then it means they will have learned to understand the complexity of the world they live in. Without being intrinsically political, education has an essential political role: what is at stake is the development to acquire culture and the future care for the common world, which in order to be transformed, must also be subject to conservation:

It seems to me that conservativeness, in the sense of conservation, is part of the essence of educational activity, of which task is always to shelter and protect something – the child against the world, the world against the child, the new against the old, the old against the new. (p. 242)

In a general sense, therefore, if the education of the contemporary world is going through a serious and unprecedented crisis, then it is necessary to understand such occurrence by placing it in the context of the political crisis of the modern world. For Arendt (2005), we live in a "mass society" that prioritises the activities related to work and consumption; that eagerly desires the new for being new, that orients itself only by the immediate future; and that wants to preserve nothing from the past, completing therein the disappearance of authority and tradition. For the author, we live in a world in which qualities such as distinction and excellence gave way to homogenization and to the refusal of any hierarchy, aspects which are immediately manifested in the contemporary educational projects. At first view, these considerations seem to take on an elitist character, if not reactionary. But this is not the case. The aspect for which Arendt draws the attention in her reflection about the contemporary educational crisis is concerned with the fact that the boundaries between adults and children are becoming more and more tenuous, a problem which, on the other hand, highlights the adults' lack of responsibility and unpreparedness to introduce the newcomers into the world. After all, how to carefully

proceed in this educational introduction into the world when the speed of the changes is of such size that it remains unknown and unfamiliar even for the adults that live in it and for that reason should know it?

It is as if parents were saying every day: - In this world, even we aren't much safe at home; how to go about in it, what to know, which skills to master, and all that is also a mystery to us. You must try to understand it the way you can. (p. 243)

In her philosophical-political reflection, Arendt (1995) assumed the theoretical perspective of care towards the world, in clear confront with the intellectual attitude she had judged predominant in modernity, that is, "man's alienation" towards the shared world, the origin of the modern philosophical subjectivism and of the psychological tendencies of the contemporary social and educational thinking. It was from that anti-humanist and anti-subjectivist perspective that Arendt detected the unpredictable and inhospitable character of a world almost entirely ruled by the logic of labor and consumption, by way of explanation, ruled by the logic of production and destruction in global scale and at an ever-accelerating pace. Due to the predominance of those two connected activities in the contemporary world, man begins to understand himself and to behave almost exclusively like *animal laborans*, a living being attached to the uninterrupted cycle of work and consumption, having his survival and immediate happiness as his main interest. In *The Human Condition*, the author questioned the prevailing mentality in the mass societies, whereby any human activity is considered in terms of the reproduction of the vital cycle of society and human species. For her, in the modern societies of labor and consumption, the barriers that protect the world in respect to the great cycles of nature are constantly being overthrown in the name of the ideal of abundance, which brings with it, as a consequence, a high institutional instability and the loss of the sense of reality. Not by chance, she points to the loss of common sense and the capacity to judge as endemic maladies of our era:

The disappearance of common sense nowadays is the most confident evidence of the current crisis. Part of the world is destroyed in every crisis, something which is common to all of us. (p. 227)

In that stated context, politics is restricted to the control of things in the name of a supposed common good, in other words, the happiness of *animal laborans*, and any consideration for the preservation and stability of the world is neglected in the name of that ideal. When ruled exclusively by the logic of labour and consumption, the politics stops being engaged with the freedom and spontaneity involved in the action and in the collective discourse that aims at the renewing and maintenance of the stability of the shared public world, seeing itself being hurled in an everlasting movement analogous to the great natural cycles (Arendt, 1995; Duarte, 2004; 2006). The contemporary crisis in education is, therefore, the correlate of a stability crisis of all political and social institutions of our era. For Arendt (2005), the school is the "institution placed between the private domains of the household and the world, with a view to make the transition possible, somehow, from the family to the world" (p. 238). Thus, its contemporary crisis has to do with the inability of school and education to fulfill its mediatory role between those places, relating itself directly to the inability of the contemporary man to care, preserve and change the world. For Arendt (1995),

the educational task is intrinsically complex, educating is at the same time protecting a child from the pressures of the world and protecting the world against the pressures and changes that result from the human ability towards the action and towards the discourse usually characteristic of the newcomers. (p. 190)

For that reason, she understands that education occupies a difficult, unstable and even paradoxical place. After all, education must be responsible for the humane ability to preserve *and* change the world, protecting the child's development against the pressures of the world, while it should prepare the child to preserve and change his own world in the future. In a discerning way, Arendt (2005) observes that

[...] those two responsibilities do not overlap in any way; in fact, they can come in mutual conflict. The responsibility for the development of the child turns in a sense against the world: the child requires special care and protection so that nothing hurtful can happen to him on the world's part. However, the world also needs protection, so that it cannot be demolished and destroyed by the harassment of the new, which arises upon it with each new generation. (p. 235)

Thereby, on one hand, education should not be completely exposed to the light and pressures of the public sphere, saving a room for independency and autonomy in

relation to the world as it already exists. On the other hand, it is necessary that education does not limit itself to the private sphere and thus, exclude the children from the public world of the adults, which they should gradually become responsible for as they are the ones who will preserve and innovate it. And this is where Arendt's conclusion comes in: In the name of the preservation of the possibility that men may bring newness to the world, it is necessary that education does not intend to constitute and create such newness, that is, it is necessary that it does not turn itself into an authoritarian tool of anticipation and control of all possible renewal of the world. In other words, it is not the responsibility of education to bring newness to the world, for it should focus on the knowledge that already exists, to wit, from the present and the past. As Arendt (2005) has not stopped declaring in her works, the new only comes to the world through collective political activity, mediated by the discussion among adults who accept the requirement of persuasion and opinion exchange. Such political activity predicates education and is not, therefore, something intended for youth and children:

Education cannot play any role in politics, because in politics we deal with people who have already been educated. [...] However, even the children we wish to educate to be citizens of an utopic morrow, are denied their own future role in the body politic, since, from the new ones point of view, whatever new the adult world may propose it is necessarily older than they themselves. [...] It belongs to the human condition the fact that each generation transforms in an old world, so that to prepare a new generation for a new world can only mean the desire to strike from the newcomers' hands their own opportunity at the new. (p. 225-226).

Not being able to grasp this difference between education and political activity means to infantilize education and politics. The reason why Arendt (2005) is critical regarding the progressive educational projects, which excessively politicizes education, is because she considers them to be authoritarians and contradictory, since all attempt to "create the new as a *fait accompli*, that is, as if the new already existed" (p. 225), dictatorially hinder its effective advent. That is the main theme for a review of the contemporary projects of education politicization, as it has been recently suggested by the National Curriculum Parameters, which end up, in fact, depoliticizing the political speech while intending to politicize all spheres of the educational program: when all the aspects of life and education are subject to the idea of citizenship, it is the own political active exercise of citizenship that loses its purpose and it is almost no longer exercised, defining then something similar to a

depoliticizing politicization (César, 2004). Adversely, however, an excessively psychologised education focused on the "child's inwardness and necessities" (Arendt, 2005, p. 237), that is to say, an education secluded from the adult world, results in the students' infantilization and in the consequent loss of responsibility for the world. The function of education is, therefore, difficult and critical. In sum, Arendt believes that education is continuously subject to the crisis and requirements of rethinking, a field in constant tension, a subject that we will resume in the third section of this essay.

Arendt was absolutely perspicacious in detecting the ills that afflict the relationship between parents and children and between teachers and students nowadays: in both cases, what we observe is the loss of responsibility for the world, as much in the sense of losing the assurance of its conservation as in the sense of losing the conditions required for its effective political change. Such responsibility for the world becomes problematic when there is absence of authority relationship, like it happens nowadays, so that nobody seems to be ready to assume responsibility for the world before the children. For Arendt, hence it follows that the educational issue is a political issue of the first magnitude and not a merely pedagogical issue. She refers to the problem of losing the public sphere in the contemporary world, which brings with it a loss of responsibility towards the world and, consequently, a generalized crisis in education.

The crisis in education in the context of the "psy" pedagogies

Even though they were written half century ago, "What is authority?" In both essays, Arendt provides important clues that help us think the crisis in contemporary education and, especially the crisis in the educational institutions. After reading the essays together, we understand that the crisis in education has a deep relationship with the disappearance of authority in the modern world, a political issue that has spread to the pre-political areas like the upbringing of children and education itself. Arendt (2005) emphasizes that the most significant symptom of the authority crisis in the modern world is the fact that this crisis has

[...] spread itself to pre-political areas such as the upbringing of children and education, where authority in the most broad sense has always been accepted as a natural necessity, clearly requested as much by natural necessities and child abandonment as by a political necessity, the continuity of an established civilization that can only be assured if the ones who are newcomers by birth are guided through a pre-established world in which they were born into as foreigners (p. 128).

After considering that genuine authority would have disappeared from our modern and contemporary world, Arendt (2005) asks herself for that in which authority would have changed itself into in our era. In other words, it endeavours a genealogy of the notion of authority, when it distinguishes itself between the legitimate authority, which would have disappeared from our political world, and authoritarianism, that is, the absence of authority in its legitimate character. Regarding that aspect, the essays “The crisis in education” and “What is authority?” converge and allow us to think that the crisis in education is also a crisis in the legitimate authority, that is, a crisis of the loss of stability, as much of the knowledge as of the teachers and adults' own sense of responsibility for the world in which they live:

The authority was rejected by adults and this can only mean one thing: that the adults refuse to take responsibility for the world in which the children were brought. (p. 240)

However, the problem of the crisis in contemporary education also comprehends the consideration of aspects which are more specifically educational. Written in 1958, “The crisis in education” is the essay in which Arendt (2005) calls the attention to the generalized crisis that strikes not only the North American education, but also the western world education:

The general crisis that struck the modern world in every sphere and in almost all life spheres is manifested in each country diversely, involving areas and taking on diverse forms. In America, one of its most characteristics and suggestive aspects is the recurring crisis in education that has become in the course of the last decade at least, a political issue of the first magnitude, reported on almost daily in the news. Undoubtedly it is not necessary to have great imagination to detect the dangers of an ever increasing decline of elementary standards throughout the entire school system, and the seriousness of the trouble has been properly underlined by the countless unavailing efforts of the educational authorities to stem the tide. (p. 221-222).

If the crisis in education is part of the political issue of modernity, understood as a crisis of the public world, of authority and tradition amid the “mass society” and its uninterrupted demands, on the other hand is also necessary to observe that this educational crisis has been aggravated with the association between education and psychology, which gave rise to numerous “progressive education” projects, promoting a “radical revolution in the entire educational system” (p. 227). Let see how those two problems are related.

Throughout her essay, Arendt argues that the failure of the mediative function that school and education should carry out between the familiar environment and the adult world has been aggravating due to certain pedagogical choices that have oriented the educational projects in the western world during the 20th century, especially since the early fifties. Instead of establishing itself as an elemental place of development and formation of the youth and children for the public world of adults, the educational field saw the emerging of pedagogical and psychological methods focused on the child and the youth, who were seen as natural psychic substratum instead of historical, saw themselves alienated in the world they live in, which they need to understand in order to be able to preserve and transform it in the future. Not by chance, it was in the midst of the psycho-pedagogical speech that the own historical figure of adolescence was created and it was understood as a “trouble age” that must be continuously watched, analysed and disciplined (César, 2008). Arendt is critical when she refers to the pedagogies and pedagogical methods originated from the psychology of the development, which is focused on the idea of the individual and individuality, for she believes these “psy” educational approaches leave aside the indissociable bonds between the man and the world and, therefore, disregard the educational principle of care and responsibility for the world. For the author, the narrow communion between psychology and education tends to be pernicious for education and its purpose, that is, to provide the youth and children with an adequate displacement from the family’s private space to the public space of the common good.

Regarding that aspect, Arendt’s work takes on a prophetic character, because it denounces a process of alienation in respect to a world that is still ongoing in the field of education. In fact, the educational practices based on the “psy” approaches were originated due to the repudiation of all types of insubordination, punishment, penalty, physical and psychical violence against the youth and children behind the school walls. In consonance with the new freedom atmosphere that inspired the United States in the 50s’, some European pedagogical discourses that were originated in the 19th century and in the first decades of the 20th century proliferated like the libertarian pedagogies from the anarcho-sindicalist’ ideology, the franc-Geneva’s New School, John Dewey’s democratic school, besides the new findings of the children’s developmental psychology studies (Best et al., 1972; Cousinet, 1968).

Certainly, Hannah Arendt was not contrary to the repudiation of violence and authoritarianism in the school environment. The main and most enlightening aspect of her debate is the one that explains that such discourses and pedagogical practices end by providing elements for the creation of new pedagogical methods that considered the child and the infantile world of the plaything and the children's play as the practically exclusive center and focus of the pedagogical and educational actions. In the North-American case, the author points to two main strands, the modern psychology and the pragmatism, as being the ones responsible for a significant part of the education crisis in that country. Arendt argues that the association between pedagogy, pragmatism and psychology transformed education into a field of knowledge about teaching, and thus transforming it into a science of the learning. Regarding that aspect, she regrets that the importance given to the content to be taught has disappeared.

For Arendt (2005), moreover, instead of educating children and youth to take a future action in the public world, such psycho-pedagogical approaches, in the extent that they refuse the teacher's figure of authority and role in the educational process, leave the subjects of education immersed in a generalized infantile process that is extended until adult age. We have there a dangerous assumption that

[...] there exist a child's world and a society formed among children that are autonomous and, insofar as possible should be governed by children. Adults are only there to help with this government. (p. 229-230, modified translation)

In this respect, the author emphatically warns about the risks of such education that leaves children and youth resigned to their own fate, or worse, at the mercy of their own group. With the introduction of the "psy" pedagogies, children and youth saw themselves free from adults' authority because adults consciously stopped wanting to intervene or exert any type of authority over the subjects of education. According to such educational concept, an adult can only tell a child "that he does whatever pleases him and then avoid the worst to happen" (p. 230). Consequently, children and youth saw themselves subjugated by an even more cruel and terrible authority, the tyrannic authority of the children or adolescent's group. When left to their own luck at school, children are subject to the tyranny of the majority, which represents for the author, an important aspect of the everyday violence in the 20th century.

[...] by being emancipated From the authority of adults the child has not been freed but has been subjected to a much more terrifying and truly tyrannical authority, the tyranny of the majority. In any case, the result is that the children have so to speak banished from the world of grown-ups. They are either thrown back upon themselves or handed over to the tyranny of their own group, against which, because of its numerical superiority, they cannot flee to any other world because the world of adults is barred to them. The reaction of the children tends to be either conformism or juvenile delinquency, and is frequently a mixture of both. (p. 230-231)

In questioning the deficiencies of the “psy” pedagogies, Arendt (2005) is not limited to pointing its problems from the students' point of view, but also approaches them from the own educators' point of view. Educators are also left to their own luck, once their deficient training from the point of view of the contents, no longer represents a legitimate authority towards the children, and frequently fall back on either authoritarianism or on “moral and emotional rhetoric” (p. 247). Then we have the problem that “under the influence of modern psychology and the tenets of pragmatism, pedagogy has developed into a science of teaching in general in such a way as to be wholly emancipated from the actual material to be taught” (p. 231). From the moment that pedagogy is conceived as a science of teaching to teach, arises the notion that the teacher can “teach simply anything; his training is in teaching , not in the mastery of any particular subject” (p. 231).

To these two problems adds a third, pragmatism and its presupposition that it is only possible to know and understand what we have done ourselves. For Arendt (2005), the application of pragmatism to education consisted in replacing the learning with doing or even with the notion of learning by doing, something which is very common to pedagogies that are predicting the need for knowledge building. The conscious intention of this educational pragmatism was not to teach knowledge, but to inculcate a skill so that in the United States the result was the turn of education institutions into vocational institutions. For the author, pragmatism as an educational method is problematic due to its primary presupposition, that is,

[...] is it only possible to know and understand only what you have done yourself, and its application to education is as primitive as it is obvious: to substitute, insofar as possible, doing for learning [...]. The conscious intention was not to teach knowledge but to inculcate a skill, and the result was a kind of transformation of institutes for learning into vocational institutes which have been as successful in teaching how to

drive a car or how to use a typewriter or, even more important for the “art” of living, how to get along with other people and to be popular as they have been unable to make the children acquire the normal prerequisites of a standard curriculum. (p. 232)

Arendt distrusts the pragmatic presupposition that every learning is a special form of doing, playing and entertaining, as if knowledge gaining depended exclusively upon those skills, becoming the child itself responsible for the knowledge generation. We can notice there the abandonment of the educational responsibility which, for the author, reflects nothing more than the loss of the adults’ responsibility towards the world itself, as they themselves no longer arrogate the role of authority refusing to lead the child into the world, its rules and institutions. In a word, says Arendt (2005)

The very thing that should prepare the child for the world of adults, the gradually acquired habit of work and of not-playing, is done away with in favour of the autonomy of the world of childhood. (p.233)

Besides, thinking education as a process of production can have authoritarian implications, as it requires the foresight of the end to be achieved in the future to be ready and done, as well as the use of violent, orthopaedic means, from which the end will be forged.

For the author, these three presuppositions – the abandonment of childhood to its own luck, the precarious training of teachers and the educational pragmatism – constitute the decisive and specifically pedagogical elements needed to understand the current crisis in education. The corollary of these three presuppositions is the irresponsibility of educators towards the world and its consequent loss of authority in the educational field, since the authority of the educator is “placed on the responsibility he or she assumes towards this world” (p. 239). The resulting problems of those three presuppositions are usually recognizable, in special the poor training of the teachers. However, despite the reformist eagerness always present in the educational discourse of the 20th century, in a “desperate attempt to reform the entire educational system” (p. 233), until today the pedagogical discourse has kept the fundamental, that is: the artificial retention of children and youth in their supposedly autonomous world; the notion of childhood and adolescence as natural subtracts foreign to the world and history; as well as the notion of pedagogy as a method and a

scientific knowledge encouraged by the psychology of development, associated to pragmatism.

From “crisis” in education to "critical” education

Certainly the discourse on the crisis in education is not dated only from the last fifty years, nor does it configure itself as something exclusive of the last decades, a moment in which the theme of educational crisis reached absolute centrality in pedagogical debates. In fact, people have talked about the crisis since the late 19th century when the scholar institution was consolidating in Europe, despite the fact it was not universalized yet. With effect, the discourse on the crisis in education and in the modern institutions was already present in the works of sociologist Émile Durkheim (2003), who had thought such crisis in the late 19th century as the unfolding of a wider social crisis. Then, in the very moment that began the process of universalisation of the scholar system and its institutions in the United States and Europe, with the development of the first long-range educational policies, the discourse about the crisis in education had been installed as a privileged *topos*.

In fact, Michel Foucault’s studies allow us to understand that the idea of crisis is present in an intrinsic manner in the own configuration of modern institutions and, consequently, of the own modernity in its own specific form of organization, that is, the disciplinary society of normalization. Not coincidentally, when discussing the problem of institutional crisis, what is expected is the intensification or the restructuring of its own disciplinary practices. For Foucault (1984), therefore, the operation of the disciplinary society presupposes a state of permanent crisis, since the application of complex disciplinary mechanisms depends precisely in confirming lack of discipline, that is, crisis. In this paradoxical equation, the crisis is the engine and the fuel for the operation of modern disciplinary society, because discipline is exerted to end with the state of crisis and indiscipline.

In the case of Brazilian education, as well as in most Latin American countries, historical studies on education inspired by Foucault's ideas demonstrate the existence of reform cycles preceded by analysis that indicate the crisis in educational systems. According to the Foucauldian theoretical perspective of genealogy, namely, from the point of view of the analysis of the constitution of the discourses and the

configuration of the educational practices, it can be shown that the crisis-reform binomial is part of the discourse about education (César, 2004). The educational reforms are always new attempts to establish a process of governmentality of populations, that is, it represents ways of governing the populations in order to produce a homogeneous population that is obtained in the schooling process (Foucault, 2004). In numerous processes of education reform throughout the 20th century, the argument of the crisis has always been fundamental, as Foucault has shown; the requirement to support a disciplinary project depends on its negative counterpart, the crisis. Let's see now how the configuration of the binomial "crisis-reform" is delineated in the current crisis in education.

As we know, the presence of the national state under the aegis of the universal school was the *sine qua non* condition for the production of the national identity engendered according to previously defined cultural patterns, aiming at the formation of a particular identity for each State (Querrien, s/d.). It was from the invention of the disciplinarian institutions, which is the historical basis of modern society, that the most important of these institutions arose, the modern school. Just as the emergence of the modern state is the result of the transformation of power structures and its exercise that took place around the 18th century, maybe now we are experiencing a transformation of great magnitude, both within government and in the educational context (Veiga-Neto, 2002). Since the nineties of the 20th century with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the acceleration of the economic globalization process and the hegemony of neoliberalism have observed an abrupt change in the political-institutional world scenario, which seems to suggest that we have begun to stop being modern. It means the traditional disciplinary institutions, among them the school, are undergoing profound transformations: on one hand, the disciplinary school is no longer "the" privileged instance for the production of non-subjected and standardized subjects; on the other hand, after undergoing deep changes the school also changes its agency in the new production of contemporary subjectivities. The seriousness and specificity of the hodiernal crisis in education and in other modern disciplinary institutions seems to lie in the fact that such crisis can no longer raise old reformist impulses dedicated to restoring the disciplinary order, which seems to be about to run out and make way for new instances of subjective production (César, 2004).

After examining the political, economic and institutional transformations that desolated the planet in the last two decades of the 20th century, Gilles Deleuze (1992) stated that the disciplinary society theorized by Foucault began to be replaced by the “society of control”-. That is the proof that the means and apparatus that animated the functioning of the subjects began to give rise to new forms of social and subjective control, strongly marked by new technologies. This, on the other hand, completely changed the discourses and the educational practices in the contemporary world, creating new political orders, new syntaxes, new forms of social organization, new forms of resistance and, above all, new subjectivities. If the school, despite having lost its former centrality, still remains in the epicentre of the subjectivity production and attribution of meaning to children, youth and adults, the question that now arises is about the way it plays its role in contemporaneity. In other words, given the crisis in disciplinary school in the contemporary world, what is the new meaning of school? What is the school, this two-hundred-year-old institution, good for in the contemporary world? (Veiga-Neto, 2000). We certainly do not dispose of answers to these questions, and it is for this reason they are so urgent: if we want to think the current crisis in school and education, we have to start facing the challenge these critical questions impose.

The analyses of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze about the crisis in modern and contemporary institutions have the merit to show us that the crisis is part of these institutions. Therefore, more important than trying to reaffirm old reformist arguments is to critically think the meaning of these crises. It is precisely in this respect we find a surprising convergence between the analyses of Foucault, Deleuze and Hannah Arendt on the crisis in education. Even though Arendt, Foucault and Deleuze follow distinct theoretical patterns, they end up revealing that the crisis in education is the crisis of modernity; moreover they offer us an important theoretical tool for thinking critically about the meaning of such crises. Once raised the critical suspicion in relation to the binomial crisis-reform, which insistently feeds back the discourse about the crisis in education and in the modern institutions, we are now much more prepared to understand the important theoretical mutation that Arendt’s thinking about the crisis promotes.

Arendt (2005) proposes an interesting way to deal and approach the crisis. Despite the incisiveness of her criticism towards the loss of meaning in modern education,

which is related to the loss of meaning in the current public space, she surprisingly argues in favour of the possibilities revealed by the crisis. When disagreeing with an attitude that pertains to the past and which is limited to feeling sorry for the loss of authority in the present; as well as disagreeing with a reactionary attitude that would intend to re-establish in the present the good order lost, Arendt believes that the crisis in education is not harmful by itself. Rather it should be understood as part of the insuperable tension between the innovation and conservation we experiment each day in a world in which the past is no longer seen as an unquestionable guide for the action and for man's thinking in the present. According to Arendt's perspective, the crisis is a crucial moment because it enables one to observe the deficiencies of that which is found in crisis, besides the fact it shows clearly the failed attempts to overcome it up to now. Therefore, much more serious than the crisis itself, is the fact we do not see it as the right moment for critical thinking. If we do not take the crisis as an instance that requires criticism, then, without our knowing it, we will only deepen the problems our continuous educational and institutional reforms intended to solve. In the case of the crisis in education, the crisis means the opening of an opportunity to observe the intrinsic fragility of the scholar institution's organization and the schooled knowledge, which until then had been supporting the two hundred years of schooled education in the West. Arendt (2005) redefines the concept of crisis, since, despite the fact that her ideas confirm the seriousness of the situation, she argues in favour of the opportunity this situation promotes towards critically thinking and analysing the crisis. For her, the crisis forces us to go back to more important questions, which, in turn, also requires us to formulate new answers and new ways of judgement:

A crisis forces us back to the questions themselves and requires from us either new or old answers, but in any case direct judgements. A crisis becomes a disaster only when we respond to it with preformed judgements, that is, with prejudices. Such attitude not only sharpens the crisis but makes us forfeit the experience of reality and the opportunity for reflection it provides. (p.223)

Arendt's idea to consider the crisis as a moment of making explicit the fragilities ingrained in the educational process keeps off the idea of crisis as something that promotes the loss of values and ideal virtues, which are buried in an idyllic past that

would have preceded it. For Arendt (2005), "such a reversal will never bring us anywhere except the same situation out of which the crisis has just arisen" (p. 245). The author argues that the crisis, on the contrary, keeps in check the certainties and the security that held up this ideal past. As the argument for any reform is the emergence of a new situation that came out of control destroying the supposed good results that previously ruled, the discourse of the educational reform always ends up arguing for the reinstatement of the lost order caused by the crisis, resorting on the idealized figures of the past. Reacting to this conventional interpretation of the crisis is to try to understand what was exposed by the educational crisis, displaying the fragilities as a constitutive part of the own scholar institutional situation and the deficiencies that are a constitutive part of all educational reform processes.

When considering the contemporary crisis in education as an opportunity to reflect upon the meaning of education, Hannah Arendt (2005) affirms, as we have seen it before, that "the essence of education is natality, the fact that human beings are born into the world" (p. 223). Therefore, it is through education that children begin to live in a world that is already old and that still remains unknown to the newcomers. The child is a stranger to us and to the world; it comes into the world and to us suddenly and only gradually becomes someone recognizable, that is, he or she becomes one of us. Education plays an important role in this change process of the child's radical alterity into something recognizable. As Larrosa (1998) declares, "education is the way people, institutions and societies receive or respond to the arrival of those who are born" (p.234-235).

However, this act of hosting or receiving the new in an already old world cannot come about without tension. At the same time that child and birth represent the safeguarding of world renewal, the world itself also needs to be put in safety against the child and youth. For that reason, Arendt (2005) argues that education is always unquestionably a field of tension, a critical domain in crisis. From this important thesis, education can be understood as a field of permanent tension between the new and established, that is, between the new beings and a world that is already firmly settled and has a long cultural tradition. Understanding education as a field of indissoluble tension, Arendt affirms that "where the line between childhood and adulthood falls in each instance cannot be determined by a general rule" (p. 246). After all, as education is the only way we have to receive the children that are born

and come into the world, the conflict and crisis are permanently established in this field, since at each birth a new tension emerges between the new and the cultural tradition, displayed in the conversion of that unknown being into "our" logic way to see and relate to the world. If to educate is to receive and present the world and the cultural tradition to the newcomers, the origin of the new will always be an element of destabilization of the educational field. This, in turn, should be cared for with kindness, given its fragility, since school and education constitute a field in passing, a place of preparation for adult life and to take political care for the world. In this sense, it is quite possible that the hodiernal crisis in education is also related to the increasing absence of tension between the new and tradition, between the present and past, since the past itself is transformed in mere merchandise for fast and voracious consumption of a population of adults and children crazy about the ideal of immediate happiness.

Anyway, the important aspect to be highlighted is that, through Arendt's perspective, thinking about the political crisis of modernity is one of the most fundamental aspects to critically rethink the role of education in the contemporary world. Such role, on the other hand, should be considered in its constitutive *(im)possibility*. This paradoxical concept of education has to do with the following parameters: on one hand, the educational task in modernity has become an impossible task, permanently in crisis, because of the very instability of the modern world. After all, it is education's duty to preserve the world and pass on the contents from the past to the present, and, due to a rupture in tradition, we have simply lost the certainty and security of our relationship with the past. Arendt (2005) teaches us that the rupture in tradition is an irreversible modern problem, so that we cannot simply act as if it was indeed possible to recover "the agreement between the specific *ethos* of the educational principle and moral convictions of society at large" (p.244).

On the other hand, however, maybe education is still possible, once we recognize that the rupture in tradition and authority, despite the fact that our access to the past and transmission of knowledge related to the constitution of the world we live in became problematic and critical, still has not made completely impracticable the possibility to preserve part of the authority and tradition in the course of the educational process. According to Arendt (2005),

in practice the first consequence of this would be a clear understanding that the function of the school is to teach children what the world is like and not to instruct them in the art of living. (p.246)

According to this other perspective we get from reading Arendt's (2005) reflection, educating becomes a task that is crucial in order to face the crisis in modern education. In sum, the educator must recognize that contemporary education has converted itself into a paradoxical and aporetic game, an indissoluble confrontation of opposites, since what is at stake in education is the necessity to protect the old against the new and the new against the old:

[...] the problem is simply to educate in such a way that a setting-right remains actually possible, even though it can, of course, never be assured. Our hope always hangs on the new which every generation brings; but precisely because we can base our hope only on this, we destroy everything if we so try to control the new that we, the old, can dictate how it will look. (p.243)

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