



Michel Foucault's genealogy and history as diagnosis of the present: elements for Education's History¹

A genealogia de Michel Foucault e a história como diagnóstico do presente:
elementos para a História da Educação

La genealogía de Michel Foucault y la historia como diagnóstico del presente:
elementos para la Historia de la Educación

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Abstract

Michel Foucault affirms that his books are not philosophy treaties, neither historical studies, but are, at most, philosophical fragments in historical areas, which make it possible to say that his researches are situated between philosophic thinking and historiographical practice, being the present itself in the perspective of his history. It is about questioning the irruption of events that produced our present and historically investigating how and why we became who we are. In the genealogical approach of history on the field of education, the Foucauldian analysis falls upon knowledge, in terms of strategy and power tactics, implying in situating knowledge in the clash of struggles, the truth in the game of disputes. The purpose here is to take the discussion of genealogical history to the field of education, understanding that genealogical tools can provide elements to the suspicion and interrogation not only about the education constitution but also of the notion of history itself, allowing to understand discursive construction of educational memories as effects of real wills.

Keywords: Genealogy. History of education. Diagnosis of the present.

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Resumo

Michel Foucault afirma que seus livros não são tratados de filosofia nem estudos históricos; mas que são, no máximo, fragmentos filosóficos em canteiros históricos, o que torna possível dizer que suas pesquisas se situam entre a reflexão filosófica e a prática historiográfica, sendo que o que está na perspectiva de sua história é o próprio presente. Trata-se de interrogar a irrupção dos acontecimentos que produziram nossa atualidade e investigar historicamente como e porque nos tornamos o que somos. Na abordagem da história pela genealogia, a análise foucaultiana recai sobre o saber em termos de estratégia e táticas de poder, o que implica situar o saber no embate das lutas e a verdade no jogo da disputa. O propósito aqui é remeter a discussão da história genealógica para o campo da educação, entendendo que ferramentas genealógicas podem fornecer elementos para a suspeição e o questionamento acerca não só da constituição da educação, mas também da própria noção de história, permitindo compreender a construção discursiva das memórias educacionais como efeitos de vontades de verdade.

Palavras-chave: Genealogia. História da educação. Diagnóstico do presente.

Resumen

Michel Foucault afirma que sus libros no son tratados como filosofía o estudios históricos; pero son, como máximo, fragmentos filosóficos en rincones históricos, lo que hace posible decir que sus investigaciones se sitúan entre la reflexión filosófica y la práctica historiográfica, de una manera que, lo que está en la perspectiva de su historia es el propio presente. Se trata de interrogar la irrupción de los sucesos que produjeron nuestra actualidad e investigar históricamente cómo y porqué nos volvimos lo que somos. En el abordaje de la historia por la genealogía, el análisis foucaultiano recae sobre el saber en términos de estrategia y tácticas de poder, lo que implica situar el saber en el embate de las luchas y la verdad en el juego de la disputa. El propósito aquí es remitir la discusión de la historia genealógica al campo de la educación, así se comprende que herramientas genealógicas pueden fornecer elementos para la suposición y el cuestionamiento acerca no solo de la constitución de la educación, sino que también de la propia idea de historia, lo que permite comprender la construcción discursiva de las memorias educacionales como efectos de ganas de verdad.

Palabras clave: Genealogía, Historia de la Educación, Diagnóstico del presente.

Received: 2019/09/10

Approved: 2019/11/20

Everything, for us, is within our concept of the world; modifying our concept of the world is modifying the world [...]

Fernando Pessoa

Many times it is in the shadow of the past where the light of the present lies.

Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior

Introduction

We seek, in this article, to develop theoretical-practical questions about Michel Foucault historical-philosophical constructs, especially his formulations related to the project of a genealogical history, from which the philosopher outlines not only a conception of history but also, and above all, a way of implementing history, freeing it from the notion of totality and evolutionary continuity forged as natural and, according to which, the truth would be objective, and the work of knowledge should unveil a pre-existing essence.

From that, we seek to articulate theoretical milestones of the Foucauldian genealogy² with the effectuation of the history of education, arguing about the relevance of using the genealogical framework in enterprises in the fields of history and historiography of education, once that, incorporating genealogical notions, the research and knowledge production in history of education can gain theoretical-methodological expansions that can surely contribute to the design of other shapes in the comprehension of the forms of organization and functioning of learning in our society.

With a view to a conceptual foundation, the basis from where the discussion is sustained is the essay entitled *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*³, of Michel Foucault, written in 1971, from which are taken the main concepts involving the genealogical history proposition, whose primary objective is to inflate knowledge against the pretension of a monolithic piece of knowledge, which in its domination, ends up by producing power effects in the elaboration and legitimation of historical knowledge.

² Genealogy is an expression that Foucault employs from Nietzsche to designate a way of approach of the historical constitution of objects, without referring them to a solemn source, to a fundamental beginning.

³ This text was published in the year of 1971 by the Presses Universitaire of France (PUF), in a book-homage dedicated to Jean Hippolite, together with eight other philosophers' texts, within which, Michel Serres, Georges Canguilhem and Jean Laplanche. In Brazil, it made part in the year of 1979 of the collection *Microphysics of power*, whose texts were translated and organized by Roberto Machado and edited by Graal Publisher. In 1994, it integrated in France the Volume II of the collection *Dit et écrits*, which gather conferences, interviews, and other Foucault's texts, until then scattered and assembled by chronological criteria, under the direction of Daniel Defert and François Ewald and edited by Gallimard, as in 2000, in the Brazilian translation of this collection, now with the thematic criteria and with text organization and selection by Manoel de Barros da Motta. The version of the text used in this article is the one published in *Microphysics of power*.

Michel Foucault's genealogical milestone

In the second moment of Foucault's work as a whole, precisely the one known as genealogy⁴, there is an expansion of his field of interest as he seeks to show the correlation between discourses and social practices, explicitly focusing the theme of power articulated to that of knowledge orders and configurations.

Foucault introduces the term genealogy⁵ in the initial chapter of the book *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison*, a seminal work of this genealogical phase. According to Machado, it is in this book that its sense is formulated in a more precise form. Below two passages in which the term appears in the book *Discipline and punish*:

The objective of this book: a correlative history of the modern soul and new power of judgment; a genealogy of the current scientific-judicial complex where the power of punishing is supported, receives its justifications and rules, extends its effects (Foucault, 1991, p.26).

A little further, still in the introductory chapter, Foucault evokes again the word genealogy: *The history of this microphysics of the punitive power would then be a genealogy or an element in the genealogy of the modern 'soul'* (Foucault, 1991, p. 31). By the theoretical-practical context in which the expression appears in Foucault's formulations, its connotation carries the relevance that power assumes in his researches as a correlative of knowledge constitution.

History in the perspective of Michel Foucault's genealogy

The genealogical approach, restoring the historical, allows realizing effectively historical research, in which the notions linked to the concept of origin assume opposite meanings to the original foundations that seek fundamental boundaries to the evidence of the essential exactitude of things and unmoved perpetuation of a fixed identification in time and space.

Genealogy makes the history of unexpected ways, paths, misleading, nonsense, provoking the suspension of the subject's timelessness, submitting him to the social practices, examining the moment of rising and specific conditions of events possibilities. There is no going back in time to reestablish the immensity of continuity beyond the dispersions of memory and forgetfulness. Genealogy does not have as a duty the reconciliation with the past, pointing out that it is fully alive in the present, secretly moving it, after having demarcated, since the start, a defined route and form. In genealogy, the certainty of linear evolutions is abandoned, which sees things as if they kept in their begin a pure and single truth. Through genealogy, it is possible to glimpse the chances and threats of historical constructions.

⁴ It became usual the conduct of establishing a systematization that characterizes Michel Foucault's whole work into three major phases, which are archeology, genealogy, and ethics, corresponding to the chronological period divided into the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, as well as the respective approaches to the question of knowledge formation, power mechanisms, and subject constitution. In this respect, see the chapter *The trajectory of Michel Foucault* from the book *Foucault, simply* of Salma Tannus Muchail, as well as the chapter *The three Foucault? Or an always-difficult systematization* that integrates the book *Foucault and the education* of Alfredo Veiga-Neto, whose complete references are at the end of this article.

⁵ Cf. MACHADO, Roberto. *Ciência e saber. A trajetória da arqueologia de Foucault*. 2a ed. Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1982. p. 187. Machado highlights that the expression also appears in the book *History of Sexuality I: introduction* as well as in *Collège de France*.

However, genealogy retrieves an indispensable restraint: it must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous purpose; it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel that has no history - feelings, love, conscience, instincts; it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they played different roles; and genealogy must even define those instances where they are absent, the moment when they remained unrealized [...] (Foucault, 1991, p.15).

To Foucault, as well as Nietzsche proposed, the color of genealogy is grey, as it escapes clear evidence, transparencies while seeking to apprehend erasures, what was obscured by the knowledge imposed as unique and definitive.

Genealogy seeks to listen to history and, with this one, apprehends that behind things, there is nothing that can be translated into a secret and timeless essence. There are things without essential attributes, without inventions built around elements foreign to them. In the historical genesis, the inherited identity, and preserved from the origin, is not found, but its disparate, its accidental deviations, its disagreement. The historical beginning belongs to the low extractions for dealing with slippages, unevenness, uncertainty, the uncommon, and for moving away from meta-historical pedestals built by ideal meanings. *The genealogist needs history to conjure the chimera of origin* (Foucault, 1991, p. 19)

At the same time, genealogical research enables the reunion of the multiple in events that are taken by an individual aspect as if their formation was done singly, with no dispersals. Genealogy maintains the peculiar dispersion of events, the reconstitution of accidents, fissures, mistakes, faults, and errancies that marked the birth of what is significant in our existence.

In genealogy, there is no going back in time to restore an evolutive continuity extended to the present, considering it as a natural and inevitable circumstance of the past. It seeks to know that in the genesis of what we are and what we know does not live the truth and essential being but the accidental exteriority. Genealogy enables reestablishing the games of domination in which one can observe the state of strengths where the events are produced, since these forces, while producing them fight each other, marking their position in the face of adversities, and when weakened, they seek to recompose themselves from their weakness.

The duty of genealogy is to make this history, showing the displacements, failures, weaknesses, replacements, renewals, giving visibility to other possibilities of interpretation that were subsumed by the prevalence of dominant and totalized visions.

Foucault shows the connections existent between genealogical research and traditional history, which he calls history of historians (Foucault, 1991, p.26). Genealogy is named *Wirkliche History*⁶ or effective history whose tool is the historical sense that

refuses the certainty of absolutes. Given this, it corresponds to the acuity of a glance that distinguishes, separates, and disperses, that is capable of liberating divergence and marginal elements - the kind of dissociation view that is capable of decomposing itself, capable of shattering the unity of man's being through which it was thought that he could extend his sovereignty to the events of his past (Foucault, 1991, p.27).

⁶ A German term used by Nietzsche, which designates, literally, effective history.

The historical sense is pointed in the direction contrary to the supra-historical perspective of the history of historians, whose look is totalized, reconciler of past displacements, reducer of the time into a single moment. The look of the traditional history is a look that pretends to be objective and believes in the perennial eternity of truth and a consciousness always similar to itself, a look that enables the recognition in everywhere, as if everything would reflect man, a look that aims a continuous evolution, with no barriers, breaks or deviations.

For the historical sense, to practice the *Wirkliche Historie* promotes the reintroduction of the becoming in everything that was supposed to be immortal in man. *Effective history differs from traditional history in being without constants. Nothing in man - not even his body - is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or understanding other men* (Foucault, 1991, p. 27). To use history genealogically in a manner that the historical sense is free from the supra-history means *to make use of a history that releases it forever from the memory model, at the same time, metaphysical and anthropological. It is a question of making history a counter-memory and consequently unfolding any other form of time* (Foucault, 1991, p. 33).

The genealogist rather than venerating the famous figures, their works, their creations, perpetuating their presence, raising a *monumental history* (Foucault, 1991, p. 34), parodies this history and makes of time a carnival, relocating the incessant emergence of masks, precisely for man to be unrealized in different returned identities. *Genealogy is history in a form of a concerted carnival* (Foucault, 1991, p. 34). Genealogy brings plurality and diversity that are unfolded in many other identities, which compete among them. What history does is not to discover a submerged identity, in readiness to its emergence but to show the complexity and multiplicity of aspects, sometimes disparate.

The purpose of history, guided by genealogically, is not to discover the roots of our identity but, on the contrary, to commit itself to its dissipation; it does not seek to define our unique threshold of emergence, the homeland to which metaphysicians promise a return; it seeks to make visible all those discontinuities that cross us (Foucault, 1991, p. 34-35).

It is not a seek for recognition of continuities in which the beginning of our present is found, in a continuous process of preservation; on the contrary, genealogy enables a breakdown of our identities, presenting multiple possibilities and heterogeneity, removing *the mask of the self* (Foucault, 1991, p. 35), allowing us other identities.

In this manner, Foucault formulates this project of a genealogical history, offering new notions to the approach of historical time and space, giving new visions to reminiscences, continuities, and knowledge itself. Reality is undone in parodies, identities fragmented, and the truth destroyed. In this way, the event loses its continuous linearity as genealogy seized its rules, forces, the inversion of these forces, which turn against who uses them, weakening the vigor of dominations under movement, in the game of history, in the hazards of the fight⁷.

Genealogy is, this way, directed to the study of forms of knowledge crisscrossed by relations of power. Hence, we can understand Foucault's genealogical approach as a historical investigation of manifestations, technologies, and power strategies in their connections with knowledge. In short, genealogy provides keys to historical interpretations of political forms and conditions in which knowledge is produced and diffused.

⁷ According to FOUCAULT, Michel. *Nietzsche, a genealogia, a história*, 1992. p. 28. / According to FOUCAULT, Michel. "Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire", 1994, p. 148.

What I mean by genealogy is, simultaneously, the reason and target of analyzing those discourses as events; and what I am trying to show is how these discursive events have determined, in a certain way, what constitutes our present and constitutes our selves, our knowledge, our practices, our type of rationality, our relation to ourselves or others (Foucault, 2017, p. 105).

Notions of genealogy in history of education and the actuality

While incorporating genealogical notions and categories, the research and production of knowledge in the history of education can gain theoretical-methodological contours that certainly bring, if not exactly new, other perspectives to the comprehension of the forms of organization and functioning of the educational order in our society.

The question may be that we realize which theoretical repertoires we have at our disposal today, which critical conceptual arsenals we have to face a world that also became much more sophisticated, opaque, and complex. In this context, we need to learn how to use the existent methodologies to unfold them into many others, and how we can address the results produced interdisciplinary in the interior our area with the ones from other areas, in a way to enrich our comprehension of the present and tasks that are still possible (Rago, 2002, p. 272).

It is a matter of questioning space and time notions, of putting under suspicion, crystalized concepts of object, subject, learning, school, teaching, childhood, youth, instruction, education, and finally, of the own notion of history and historiography with which we operate. Such questioning leaves us aware concerning the individual construction of the truth, the personal writing of history, especially, of education, as something that is constituted, itself, historically, by dated and specific categories that legitimize a particular point of view.

The forms that historical objects acquire can only be learned by History itself. It is through investigating the constitutive layers of specific knowledge, event, fact, that we can apprehend the movement in its appearance, to approach the point when it gained consistency, visibility, emerging as hard shells do, from the slow petrification work in the mud of the mangrove (Albuquerque Júnior, 2000, p. 120).

Although historical-educational facts, events, objects are material left by the past and are records that seek to crystallize the sense of moments and experiences, the historian of education will have to throw new glances, searching for cracks, fissures, gaps and dispersals that constitute as such. There is, in this mode, a refusal for the search of the origin as a solemn beginning, space where the deep sense of the past would be hidden as the essence from where everything derives, in a growing line, whose culmination is in the present time. The project of genealogical history proposes to show that it is a myth the historical objectivity that seeks for the deep and secret sense of truth, collecting into a hermetic totality the diversity of time.

History of education, in the genealogical perspective, seeks to perceive the need and contingencies of determined discursive constructions, which sustain reports that describe what and how knowledge was in the past, the practices, and the subjects in the educative processes composition. In this mode, it is clear that objects limited to the knowledge of the history of education were transformed as such at a given moment and given conjunction of forces and narratives, which allows us saying that each historical-educational object is, before all, carved as a political object.

The contours we give to the past, the regions of this latter that we illuminate, the subjects that we take within the dust and make them enact again, the plots that we thought heard in the garret of the files, meet problems and struggles of our time, in which our own lives are dived. Nothing arrives at us from the past that was not convoked by a strategy, armed by a tactic, viewing to attend some demand of our own time (Albuquerque Júnior, 2000, p. 123).

Having in the horizon of analysis the use of genealogical tools in the investigation of objects of high spectrum of analysis of the educational field, be it in the coverage of educational policies, educative projects, governmental programs, and legislation, be it in the cut of the school institution with its formation processes, pedagogical practices, rules, regulations, as well as other numerous possibilities of emergence of historical objects that can appear in the field of education, it is appropriate to say that the work of the historian who proposes to narrate instruction, should be supported by an inventory of questions to scrutinize both education and history as fields crossed by relations of power. How was the emergence of such a historical-educational object possible? Which is the history said of such historical-educational object? Which conception of education does it seek to perpetuate in the memory? What makes the idea of naturalness possible for something produced in the historical plots of the educational field? What made education become what it is? Is it possible that education changes to something different? What history of education was written? Which truths the historical-educational narrative establishes? Which subjects are highlighted in this history?

The historian of education work laid out by interrogations of this sort, puts it in a level of suspicion, of questioning not only the education but the own notion of history and historiography, providing other forms of seeing the constitution of instruction in the configuration of the society, as well as the institution of truths regarding the education in the educational memory by effects of wills, crystallizing narratives that prevail specific points of view and end up by obscuring the emergence of other perspectives.

The dimensions that were given to the past, the privileged places of this past, chosen subjects for (new) visibility, discourses heard from sources, end up by answering to problems and questions of the present, and are related to our way of living. Whatever comes to us from the past is crossed by strategies and reached by tactics that seek to achieve our current demands.

If the work of history is about dating back to the past, conferring it some intelligibility in narratives that describe it, analyze it and perpetuate it, keeping it in the coherence of discourse, it is possible, at the same time, to affirm that in Michel Foucault's enterprise in what refers to genealogical history, what is done is the establishment of a historical-philosophical interrogation about the present.

So, the philosopher appeals to events of the past to interrogate the present, our modernity. To problematize the question of the form prison, for example, he goes back to tortures and other kind of punishment of the classic age to show that prison is a creation much more recent than one dare imagine and that not always the penalty, by excellence, in the game of the punitive society, was the imprisonment. In the same direction, when he addresses the theme of madness, his objective was not to compose a narrative of the different ways of being mad or, of participating in the society while a mad, over a temporality, but allow the vision of the mutability of madness, removing it from all and any natural obviousness, and showing it as an object produced by discursive and not discursive practices in relations of knowledge-power.

In the text *What is Enlightenment?*, published in 1984, Foucault approaches, once again, Kant's classic opusculum, *Answer to answer: what is Aufklärung?*⁸, this time to highlight the different aspects that take him to make an analysis that points to a diagnosis of the present and the comprehension of the modernity as an attitude and not as a historical period with a defined time cut, in a way that the critical attitude is related to a form of relationship with the present. In such a way that it is the problem of the present, of the actuality that is taken into consideration, what happens nowadays, and it is not a search for the comprehension of the present from a totality or a future to be realized, but it is the introduction of the difference from today to the past.

Education and history are produced in fields of disputes, collisions, balances of power, in a manner that working with the discontinuity, with the destruction of fixed points, with breach of identities, inversion of forces, deconstruction of discourses, instauration of the difference, can enable the perception that truths are built riddled of wills and strategies that end by elaborating versions whose mark is precisely the interested character.

There is no single path or unified time, equal to themselves, without curves and dangers or voids and discontinuities; on the contrary, there are paths with many shortcuts and errancies, different temporalities with breaks and reserves, so that it may be correct to say that the route to be followed by the historian of education is the own meeting of the deviations or the paths sketched out of any teleology, as well as the time to be marked, is the one of multiple temporalities that cross the present and make us be what we are. *Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are* (Foucault, 1995, p. 239), which positions us in what Foucault calls ontology of the present, diagnosis of the present, as it is in the refuse of what we are that we can situate ourselves in the field of possible experiences of the present.

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⁸ Foucault addresses in different moments this Kant's opusculum, written in 1784, as answer to the question *What is an Aufklärung?*, proposed by a newspaper, and along with *What is Enlightenment?*, the other more significant text and probably most important in which he analyses the Kantian propositions is *What is critic?*, result of a conference held in 1978 in the *Société Française de Philosophie*.

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