

Teachers, educational memory and the (im)possible connections with psychoanalysis

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Abstract

According to Freud, the *psiquê* is not given from its origins; time and memory are elements that constitute the subjective experience with which we are faced in our daily existence. If, at first, we were to ask what contributions psychoanalysis has made to education, we are immediately faced with Freud's assertion regarding the impossibility of education (governing and curing), which comes very close to pessimism. However, when we seek to understand it, especially through the notion of transfer and identification, we are lead to recognize the *impossibility of the existence of a positive science of education*. Freud (1913/1916), on several occasions, pointed out the importance of memory, stating: *'psychoanalysis was obliged to attribute the origin of the adult mental life to the life of children, and thus the old saying that the child is the parent of the adult needed to be taken seriously'* (p.185). Paraphrasing, we could say: "the student is the teacher's parent".

KEY WORDS: psychoanalysis and educational research, educational memory, transfer and identification.

Educational memory is based on the search for the possibility of a minimal discourse, by current or future teachers and/or other professionals, of their own knowledge and of the subjective implications contained in their choices, allowing for the production of other knowledge and of new meanings for the vicissitudes being faced by them, especially within educational institutions, over their advancement period. The archeology of the pedagogic

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processes is inserted in a teacher development model that considers the historical dimension of the *subject* as the starting point from which said place shall be occupied in the educational context.

In other words, it is possible to suppose that the *subject* of Psychoanalysis (the unconscious) is present in this production, thus allowing us to consider the *effects* of the (re)construction of personal/professional identity.

Working with educational memory is understanding its ties with the life history of a subject, recognizing that it is essentially subjective, and that the logic of this discourse is emotion and transformation; therefore, we must be careful with polyphony, with the ways memories are construed. In Freud's initial observations regarding trauma and memory, he warned us of the difference between what is *lived* and what is psychically *inscribed*, between childhood and its internalization.

In Psychoanalysis, we do not need history to understand the past, but need it to support the present and to project a possible future or, as in the words of Tanis, B (1998), *time and memory are the constituent elements of subjective experience with which we are faced in our existence*; it is the historical perspective in understanding the subject and psychoanalytical theory itself.

From another perspective, Pontalis (1979) said: *"...those we call adults are modeled, from one end to the other, by childhood conflicts, traumas, fantasies and desires"*.

...but the worst was yet to come, the dream was over, and I went to the first grade, the teacher was a witch called D, and just by mentioning her name I get scared, even today as an adult. That's when the terror began, she was dry,

stern, we couldn't talk in class, it seemed like a boot camp...I was really reluctant to go to school...but I had to go, and I internalized the trauma and it reflected upon my adult life...and from the second grade on up to college it was always 'hello' to the teachers, not even a 'see you tomorrow'...(An undergraduate in Education)

Thus, for psychoanalytic theory the psyche is not given from the outset, it obeys a constituting process, which is not an exclusively maturing process, and depends on the subject's experiences. In Chapter VII of the **Interpretation of Dreams**, Freud puts forth the idea that in our psyche there are the remains of perceptions that act upon it, being described as "mnemonic traces", and their functional relation is called *Memory*. The importance of childhood experiences (including the ones at school) come from this, and become the ingredients of the unconscious and the sources of repression. There has been a sharp increase in the quantity of research that is being done with written memories of student/teachers in order to better understand the learning/teaching process.

Some testimonies are in order here:

"...in the first grade the teacher asked us to introduce ourselves, and I was the last one, and to my surprise, just as I said my name there was a loud outburst of laughter, I even think the teacher laughed along with them...my name was immediately associated with a famous singer...I didn't like that at all...my name had carried me to the lyrics, the words (my mother had taught me how to read and write telling me stories from the lyrics of his songs!)...after a while she asked everyone to be quiet, and guess who she called on? When I answered, I told a nice story, everyone clapped, and I became a type of leader of the group...a few years later in fifth grade it was horrible all over

again...something similar happened because of my name..." (A graduate student in Education)

Memory, in all its complexity, has the capacity of recalling time-history, not as time that has passed, *but as time inscribed in the entrails of current time*. Given that the Freudian movement towards the origin is like perforating rocks in order to find the crystallized moments, in the clinical-analytical setting, by analogy or solely for its sake, it may be possible to extend this as we trace the path tread by teachers in their development, by way of written memories.

..."the first days of school were really interesting, there was the strictness of military discipline, the students didn't even blink, the class was so silent that the director wanted to know what was going on..." (public school teacher – São Paulo).

From among the conceptual tools in Psychoanalysis that may be used in reading memorials, the notion of transfer stands out, along with its relation with childhood.

Understanding transfer as a special way through which human subjectivity expresses its constitution, memory ceases to be an evocation, and becomes action. Freud (1914) states in remembering, repetition and elaboration: *"...the person being analyzed does not remember, in general, anything of what was forgotten or repressed, but **acts upon it**. It is not reproduced as a remembrance, but as action, it is repeated, unknowingly, and of course it repeated" (p.152). It is repeated, not in the same manner, which is where the possibility of innovation, creation, lies.*

In a similar fashion, the situation of transfer allows childhood desires to emerge, along with the marks of their history of frustration and

accomplishments, of memory and amnesia. An interpretative and re-constructive movement takes place, that re-signifies, constructing its own historic truth. More memories:

“ I don’t remember very much of my first years in school...my mother says that even before I had learned to read and write, she would place me near my father while he was deep in study, I would scribble on piece of paper, playing school for hours, convinced that some day I would be teacher...”

(undergraduate in Engineering/ graduate in Education)

“both the nice teachers, as well as those hated by the students, had a certain love for education, a love for the profession that, even with all the years of activity and the occasional deceptions, was never lost...it is this love that drives me and encourages me to face the difficulties and prejudice of society for having chosen the profession, a noble but an unappreciated one...”

(undergraduate in Education)

“...one thing that really marked my pre-school was when I got lice and my mother solved the problem (hers) by shaving my head, I was literally bald at a time when that was not the fashion at all...this situation isolated me from the rest of the kids, and since I was ashamed of wearing a kind of wig all the time, the other kids “played” with me by taking away my wig, running away and laughing at me” (undergraduate in Education)

From psychic reality to historic truth: it is no longer the recovery of history as it was actually lived; it undergoes a symbolizing process through the psyche, creating a space in which historical, chronological time, events and the time of the unconscious, repetition, après-coup, and re-signification do not correspond.

The transforming of the relation between memory and teaching allows us to reorganize forces – a field of possibles and limits, of inspiration and disillusion, but certainly one of reference.

“...it’s a different experience the one of thinking and searching our memories for what was part of our development, what experiences influenced the way we act and how we see things today...” (undergraduate in Education)

“...all the way though high school, I had the chance of having excellent teachers that left their mark on me because they were more my friends than they were my teachers...not only did they teach with envious professionalism, but they also foresaw and helped me overcome the obstacles that came my way”. (undergraduate in Education)

“...all kinds of feelings came over me, it had been so long...but mother T. really wanted to see how much of her style of dealing with students had rubbed off on me, and how much I had copied in my profession (graduate student)

“...in secondary school we had a teacher who really left her mark on me, and that’s exactly how I would like to be when I am a teacher” (undergraduate student - Education)

Thus, the pedagogic scenario favors the conditions of transfer that allow the re-editing of affectionate and/or hostile feelings that may hamper or promote the recognition of teachers’ authority in teaching. The transformation of formal authority into real authority depends on a favorable transferal field for the student-teacher “relationship”. The child depends on its teachers as it did on its parents, the all-encompassing shadow of the parent figures being projected upon the relationship with teachers, outlining the contours of intellectual

seduction; a seduction that is based on the erotic connection with the authority of the teacher.

“...my mother said that when I was small, I didn’t like my teachers, I idolized them... (undergraduate in Education)

“...I remember that the discipline was strict, the teacher would punish the student by making him or her kneel on grains of corn for misbehavior in the first year, in the second and third years the teacher would use a rod on those who misbehaved or on those who didn’t do their homework, but every month the best student in the class would wear a medal, and at the end of the year the student that had won the medal the most times would keep it” (public school teacher – SP)

“...in the sixth grade, I remember that I couldn’t stand math...if everyone said such and such teacher was a ‘witch’, I say that that my math teacher was a male ‘witch’ in my life, it was my first failing grade, I avoided going to his class” (undergraduate student in Education)

With the help of some principles put forth by Lajonquière (1999), on the relations between adults and their past, there is the need to learn of the past so as not to die subjectively; in other words, we need a history, the construction of a “*historic truth*”, to produce a new relationship with what was lived, to historicize the past.

“...I don’t remember much of my educational past, especially my childhood...unfortunately I can’t tell you more...I am ashamed of sending you so little, that’s why it took so long...you have no idea how difficult it was to write” (public elementary school teacher - SP)

“...the proposal of writing down my memories was a very nice idea...I remember the smells of my pre-school...the pencils, the inks, the modeling clay, the new books...when I finally owned one of those big books, brand new, I really thought I was important!” (municipal public school teacher- SP)

In conclusion, it is possible to consider that the writing down of educational memory triggers a process through which the teacher/student relationship may come to terms with the child within or, paraphrasing the teachings of Freud in which *the child is the Father of men*, we could say: *the student is the Father of the teacher*.

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