

What is the basis for the teacher's authority today?

Philippe Meirieu
Professor at Lyon University, France (Université LUMIERE-Lyon 2)

The title of this lecture could have been “the teacher, a public servant”. But this formula, much used in Spanish-speaking countries, is somewhat unfamiliar to French-speakers ... which is undoubtedly regrettable. The word “servant”, in effect, contains a certain dignity which is too often ignored: does not the word “minister” also imply “servant”? Furthermore, the association of the words “master”, “servant” and “public” is particularly felicitous. Because, in principle, in a School worthy of the name, a true “master” can only be so legitimately if he is a “public servant”. This does not mean that he must obey the “public” he serves, but that he must enable that “public” to move from the private sphere to the public sphere, from infantile and family-based egocentricity towards the intelligence of other worlds and other languages, from “belief” which is based upon personal and community choices, to “knowledge” which is inherent in a wider, global process of validation. In this regard, to be a public servant is to contribute to the building up of the *polis*; it is to enable individuals to form part of a collective whole without losing their identity in the process. It is to work at the difficult task of articulating the “I” and the “us”, at a time when our society is becoming ensnared in a congealing process of individualisation, and where a desire for solidarity, orchestrated by the ever increasing power of the market and its “impulse-driven capitalism”, to quote Bernard Stiegler (*Réenchanter le monde*, Paris, Flammarion-Champs 2008), leads us to fear the systematic triumph of the “one”. For this reason I find it particularly interesting that teachers should recognise themselves as “masters” - that is to say the holders of a certain authority in society – because of the very fact that they undertake a mission of public service in the strongest sense of the term. This registering of their “mastership” in a political framework means that they will not see their profession dissolving into a multitude of tasks, or find themselves reduced to a perilous navigation between contrary currents or even become lost amongst individual survival strategies. The association of the teacher's authority with his status as public servant frees him from political contingencies and enables him to put into perspective the technocratic pressures which often hem him in. It records his subject knowledge and his administrative obligations within a perspective which gives them meaning. It avoids reducing those

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difficulties which he encounters to personal conflicts or sectarian confrontations. In short it confers upon him an identity by placing him in a valuable verticality: a verticality which enables him to escape the horizontality of the scholastic market without obliging him to adopt the uniform of a clerk or that of a private tutor. This verticality is both ambitious and modest since it recognizes him as a builder of the public space.

However, such a concept may be appealing as a theory, but it is nonetheless very difficult to put into practice. It appears to run contrary, in many ways, to our daily experience, to the sociological developments which are evolving and even to some current European institutional perspectives. For this reason I suggest, in the first instance, that we look closely at the situation without ignoring the problems or closing our eyes to that which could "create" a crisis. I will then attempt to show that the development of such a "crisis of education" in our democracies could prove to be an opportunity for teachers inasmuch as they are prepared to rise to the challenge. Finally I will ask the question as to what tools we can use to enable teachers in the future to become "public servants" to an ever-increasing degree within a supportive society.

I should point out, before going any further, that today I am venturing onto particularly delicate ground, and in doing so, in the context of a conference, I will be obliged to use certain simplifications. Furthermore, I am still a long way from having finalised my thinking about the questions I shall be looking at ... so I ask you to consider the thoughts which follow as an exploration and, above all, as an invitation to continue the reflexion and the debate.

Teachers shorn of their authority?

Although it is neither new nor original, the discussion on teachers' loss of authority is today taking on a totally new dimension. It is certainly linked, in part, to that social downgrading of teachers, which, according to the most recent reports we have available, is affecting most of the developed countries. From the former "man of repute" who, while not necessarily well-paid, was at least seen as a person above suspicion and beyond criticism, the teacher has become a service provider mistreated both by the media and by his pupils ... What is more serious still, perhaps, is that recent polls have shown that teachers themselves have embraced this downgrading and are desperately seeking ways to underpin their authority.

Thus, if we look at things more closely we may see that, in spite of what numerous "intellectuals" claim, *traditional systems of legitimisation are no longer valid*. Even if some people still cling to the old ideas, one cannot, today, regard the teacher as a cleric, the holder of a revealed truth and who works in a sacramental way; it is impossible to defend the idea that some sort of "ordination" at the beginning of a career can confer the timeless right to transmit knowledge in an unchanging manner to future generations by the laying-on of hands. In a world where everything goes very fast and where "in-service training" has become both a necessity and a way to greater mobility and social justice, the teacher cannot claim an exceptional status without losing credibility, nor can he extol the timeless nature of his skills and display indifference to new contexts, new problems or new requirements as they appear.

All the more so, since the teacher does not practice his profession in a social vacuum, independent of the general context; this context itself is affected by the *emergence of what philosophers like Marcel Gauchet call "social individualism"* (*La démocratie contre elle-même*, Paris, Gallimard, TEL, 2002). It is not a question here of denigrating, with a certain nostalgic morality, the behaviour of our contemporaries. This is particularly true since thinkers such as Norbert Elias have been able to demonstrate that the individualisation of behaviour has been linked to an emancipation from the overwhelming power of the group, to the necessary specialisation of tasks within the social structure, and to the emergence of interpersonal differentiation (*La société des individus*, Paris, Fayard, 1991). In reality it is simply a matter of recognising the end purposes of religious or holistic societies which, because they were themselves structured in an indisputably vertical manner, conferred upon their agents a portion of that authority and protected them from any questioning of their legitimacy. In many ways we should rejoice at the demise of such societies, whether religious or atheistic theocracies, where anyone who questioned, however timidly, the legitimacy of the power structure, was doomed to be a heretic or a dissident. But we should also recognise that we are paying the same kind of heavy price in education. Guy Coq even enquires whether democracy does not, in a certain sense, render education impossible (*La démocratie ne rend-elle pas l'éducation impossible?*, Paris, Parole et Silence, 1999). Indeed, from the moment when there is no longer a consensus on values, and when any particular experience is respectable, educational institutions find themselves devoid of any stable frame of reference. And in the face of this lack, individual strategies seem the only ones to be allowed: parents – even more than “families” in the usual meaning of the term – develop a form of behaviour as “school consumers” which leads them to systematically suspect the competence of the teachers and even the teachers’ goodwill towards their offspring.

Amongst the elements which determine the context, we should, of course, also note *the disappearance of a consensus on "what should be taught"*. In the past it was understood that besides family education and the provisions for technical and professional training, which largely functioned through imitation, the School was required to transmit, in the words of Ernest Renan, “those good things inherited from the history of man”. But we are well aware that this obvious fact has dissolved into thin air: on the one hand because the “good things” which we were teaching were closely linked to a very ethnocentric view of culture, and that the “universal educational values” in many cases proved to be nothing more than a mediocre simulacrum of the Parisian “discreet charm of the bourgeoisie”. Furthermore, at the very heart of our western societies no one really knows how to define “good things”. The criteria of time, valid for many years (that which was good was simply that which had stood the test of time), has been broken down: the good may be new or old, it may be that which is, or is no longer, in fashion, that which holds us to our roots or which takes us beyond them, etc ... And, finally, the very idea that “the good” should be taught is far from reaching a consensus: “the useful” has largely replaced it. And the useful is in even greater danger of being relative: nothing is useful in itself, everything is useful for something. Reduced by contemporary utilitarianism to the level of “instrumental competence”, the school culture is thus diluted into a mass of know-how with no other legitimacy than an inevitably temporary, speculative and thus perfectly questionable relevance. “Please sir, what’s it for?” becomes the unvarying question of whole classes of pupils who have perfectly understood that in social and

political discourse, knowledge has become a tool brought into play with regard to its social utility ... including "citizenship training" enlisted for the occasion. Thus it is hardly possible to require students to "respect the authority of the teacher", where the latter's task is defined in constant reference to an external utility. By definition, the transmission of the "useful" is questionable because, in the end, it is for the receiver to verify the validity of the knowledge acquired in function of its instrumental fruitfulness ... Trapped in the race for the useful, the School is permanently obliged to adapt and the teachers to justify themselves.

There is thus very little left upon which the teacher can rest his authority and avoid exhausting himself with the day-to-day management of endless conflicts. The growing use of the word "management" in the field of education is, moreover, in this regard particularly misleading: if it were only a question of "managing" difficult situations, or even problems of authority in the traditional sense which psycho-sociology gives to the term, everything would, ultimately, be fairly simple. For a long time we have known how to "manage" the question of authority and we repeat *ad nauseam* that to achieve this all that is necessary is to find the happy balance between a rigid environment (where everything is determined in advance) and a haphazard one (where nothing is foreseeable): to construct stable frameworks and negotiate the unexpected, establish bench-marks and adapt oneself to events, combine firmness and openness, etc ... The variations on this theme are infinite and, while everyone is in agreement about what should be done, everyone is aware that it doesn't work. It is thus clear that the question of authority is no longer simply a question of the management of groups, but truly a problem of legitimacy of an entirely different kind. Not to recognise this fact is to wear oneself out in management: without an underpinning verticality one "manages" blindly and, at the worst, is content to survive by avoiding collisions ...

We should thus not be surprised at *the fixation of teachers upon that which they feel still remains the "hard core" of their power*: marks, sanctions, and the procedures for orientation or exclusion. When authority slips away, one resorts to a power which can restore, if not legitimacy or respect, at least a form of recognition and even, sometimes, simply a little peace. Thus the institutional power which teachers claim today helps them not so much to solve their problems but to keep them at arm's length and to resist the wearing down of whoever tries, desperately, to find a viable compromise in horizontality. In the absence of being able to build up one's identity or to imagine oneself in a particular position invested with a clear mandate, one makes do with binding up the wounds to one's self-esteem ... Moreover, this is how we can attempt to understand the corporate reactions of teachers against any proposal which appears to attack their prerogatives: whether it concerns changes in the distribution of their duties, reviewing the timetable of their subject at secondary level, considering new responsibilities for school directors or heads of institutions or proposing to offer greater representation of parents in school committees or in decisions concerning the future of the students. A professional who sees his authority as legitimate, based on a clear mandate and being part of a well-defined mission, is able to review the conditions of his activity calmly. A professional who finds himself reduced to carrying out tasks on contradictory instructions and without any clear frame of reference views any questioning of the conditions of his activity as an unbearable aggression. Without the means to render "vertical" his daily

existence, he will cling to the methods and conditions which give some security. Not very glorious, but very natural.

It is an apparent paradox that this weakening of the teacher occurs at a time when *social pressure on "results" has never been so strong*. Events seem to deprive the teacher of the means of fulfilling his mission while he is required to be ever more efficient! In reality these two aspects are very closely linked and arise from a total change in pattern: to explain this in a manner which is perhaps something of a caricature, but which corresponds fairly accurately to what teachers experience in their daily life, we have moved from the *transmission of a culture and received values* (which, of course, does not mean that these were not questionable on ethical or political grounds) to the *production of defined results*. However, in spite of an apparent social consensus on the nature and importance of these results (the acquisition of a common core of knowledge, citizenship training, the raising of the level of qualifications, etc) these results are at present no more than "educational and social utilities", devoid of any verticality capable of linking them, at the same time, both to a heritage and to a project, to a past and to a future. In reality, this obligation to achieve results to which teachers are subjected today is a denial both of the School's cultural mission and of its educational function "to instil a subject". In fact, that which characterises both a culture and a subject is that in this case the whole may not be broken down into the sum of its parts: a culture may not be reduced to the whole of the knowledge which it encompasses, no more than a subject may be reduced to the whole of the skills which it masters.

In this regard the renewal of behaviourism in the educational debate – whether it is due to the presence of an army of evaluators of all kinds, or to the precepts of educationalists who do not hesitate to link it to a constructivist profession of faith – is neither fortuitous nor the residue of a former epoch. It is the obvious corollary to the problem of founding the profession of teacher otherwise than in the horizontality of human exchanges – "exchanges" which it is as impossible to despise – at the risk of falling into misanthropy or self-satisfied isolation – as it is to throw oneself into them entirely – at the risk of being no more than a manager of the here and now.

Should we therefore despair of the profession of teacher? Should we resign ourselves to the fact that he can no longer be a "public servant" but must become the exact opposite, a "servant of the public"? This would be to renounce any true educational ambition. It would also be to despair of our world ... Thus, since he is still entrusted with the principle of educability, the pedagogue cannot agree to this. Even if he is aware of the degree to which his optimism may appear naïve, he still prefers this to the aesthetic of despair. It is doubtless a question of posture rather than position, not devoid of affectation, but it is an attempt, in the words of Gramsci, to ally the pessimism of reason to the optimism of will.

A crisis which could be an opportunity?

Social individualism is the corollary of the demise of all forms of theocracy. In the absence of a power which decides what is for the "common good", each individual is elevated to "master of his own fate" ... which, beneath the elegance of the formula, concretely means "judge of his own interests" and "free to choose the strategies to achieve them", as long as he complies with the legal framework within which he lives ... or manages to exonerate himself from it without being caught!

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Seen in this way this social individualism is very deeply linked to the classic liberal doctrine which is regularly served up to us in the pretty disguise of modernity and which simply refers us to the conclusion of Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*, published in 1714: "Private vices make public virtues."

We should not, as a result, lock ourselves into a deadly alternative between tyranny and chaos. At the very least as a working hypothesis we can hope for something else: a passage-way between dictatorship and civil war, between the despotism of a *pater familias* and the reduction of the family to a perpetual conflict of individuals, between the head-clerk and the head comrade, between an education of the highest standards and an education of abandonment ... Nobody would like to see a repeat of the atrocities which stained ex-Yugoslavia; but nobody would like to see, either, the return of a despot, under the pretext that he was able, for a time, to contain the centrifugal forces of the different ethnic and religious communities. No-one can approve the reduction of the family to a group of people who compete for the use of the same refrigerator and the same washing-machine; but should we, therefore, promote a concept of the family where the male once more imposes his whims, with family meals where the children are systematically constrained to silence? No one wants situations to develop in school where the teacher is despised or even aggressed; but can we simply reinstate old rituals and return to a cherished time where pupils, carefully selected at each stage of their schooling, only succeeded if they knew how to be politely bored? In spite of the accusations made to teachers by those who do not listen to them, no one really approves the general laxity, the lack of demand and the general demagoguery towards youth; but who could claim that an increase of sanctions alone would suffice to teach young people self-control and self-examination? *We therefore need to find a way between the nostalgia of authoritarianism and the inter-destruction of peers.*

To tell the truth, we are experiencing a new situation which could, possibly, enable us to move towards a new social pact: instead of regretting the rising tide of individual and community interests, we could investigate the incredible opportunity which it offers and try to build together a "common good" from that base. The fact that this "common good" would no longer be defined by theocratic powers, and relayed by licensed subservient clerks, carries both a potential danger of explosion and the chance to construct another form of verticality ... For we must face up to what Milan Kundera so rightly called "the unbearable lightness of being": we are moving forwards into a vacuum with no great founding myth or collectively assumed ideal. As Antonio Machado expresses it so well, there is no path and we must make the path by walking: "*Caminante, son tus huellas el camino, y nada mas; se hace el camino al andar. Al andar se hace el camino...*". Or, again, as Claude Lefort explains, "*democracy is a form of society in which men recognise that there is no ultimate guarantee of social order ... in which men accept to live in the trial of uncertainty. (...) In these conditions the place of power is seen to be an empty place (...) Wherever an empty place occurs there is no consolidation between power, the law and knowledge, nor any possible assurance of their foundations. The exercise of power is a matter for endless debate. (...) The totalitarian adventure has shown us the attraction exerted by the top-to-bottom domination of bureaucracy ... At present it is the expansion of the free market, supposedly self-regulating on a world scale, which is threatening the power of democracy.*" (*Le temps présent*, Belin, 2007; 991, 992).

We cannot be sure that there really exists a possible model between an all-powerful totalitarianism and the free market. It is even likely that nothing of the sort could exist without a tremendous human effort to establish it. And it seems to me more or less certain that such an effort would need to be made without the slightest hope that whatever is established would free us from the power of the establisher. Continually renewed and on-going work is necessary to achieve an “in-between” existence: a collective state which is both structured and open at the same time, capable of deliberating with the least possible harm and of planning for the future on the basis of acceptable concept of the “common good”. There is, of course, no question, in this context, of denying the legitimacy of individual interests: they are the building materials and even the energy without which no society can exist. But we should work with and on individual interests, enable them to express themselves, explain themselves, work for the future and put themselves to the test of anticipation and reciprocity ... We must build a democracy, modestly but with persistence and with in mind a utopia which is as good as any other: the aim of escaping from a vertical existence whenever men are able to rise above their immediate interests to define together the conditions for long-term survival of the “human condition.”

*In this case it is not the democratic ideal which represents verticality, but which makes democracy possible: the founding and improving of those institutions which establish the “common good”, and the education of our children to enable them to live within these institutions and to make them progress. Verticality is the state of a horizontality which is not a war of individualities. And, in this respect, the School can embody such a verticality: insofar as it is not reduced to a sophisticated system for managing change, or to a juxtaposition of fragmented teaching, but is considered as a “cultural programme” in the sense in which Jérôme Bruner defined it and with those requirements which I attempted to formulate in *Lettre à un jeune professeur* (Paris, ESF, 2005): “A school’s programme may not be reduced to the disciplines which it teaches. The major discipline of a school, seen from a cultural point of view, is the school itself. This is how the students experience it and it is this which defines the meaning it has for them.”*

The problem, of course – and Régis Debray formulated it remarkably well (*Aveuglantes Lumières*, Paris, Gallimard, 2006) -, is that this kind of verticality has a very formalist character and finds it difficult to rival religious transcendence, traditional political ideals or commercial idols. “Constitutional patriotism”, as extolled by Habermas, seems inadequate to mobilise the crowds: we can imagine men going to war to defend a Nation or a faith: we have seen people sacrificing themselves to fight against an oppressor; we have even seen young people today trampling upon each other to attend a concert and older ones fighting in stadiums ... but we can hardly imagine citizens being actively mobilised, writing hymns and engaging in a peaceful and determined battle to defend the “*a priori* conditions of the constitution of a democratic public sphere!” Verticality is particular in that it needs to be manifested: it needs temples and priests, rites and festivals, symbols and celebrations ... Thus – on the basis of another utopia – let us postulate that the School, understood in a much wider sense than the traditional school “format”, could provide a feasible verticality which would enable our world to avoid falling into those conflicts inherent in a horizontality with no references. And since no verticality can exist without a guardian figure, let us postulate that Jean Zay (1904-1944), the Minister for National Education and Fine arts of the *Front populaire* between 1936 and 1939, should be

that figure. Contrary to Jules Ferry, who is constantly put before us in France as the supreme educational reference, and who was totally bogged down in the contradictions of the 19th century – speaking of nationalism and colonialism, revenge against Germany and fear of the *communards* – Jean Zay is a man of the 21st century: he wants to democratise access to the educational institution, but understands that this is impossible without the support of students and real help with their individual work; he believes in the power of the School but promotes movements of popular education which extend his educational work by facilitating peer encounters supported by young adults acting as mentors; he insists on the importance of transmitting the cultural heritage but also makes physical and sports education compulsory; he develops the travelling library to encourage reading, but promotes school radio; he creates the school medical service and the Cannes Festival, dreams of a National Centre for Scientific Research and of social support for young people in difficulty ... in short he is a true visionary, capable of grouping together in a coherent project the whole range of educational needs and doing so in the interests of democracy.

In a society where individualism reigns, education could thus become the route to active democracy. Of course this difficult route is strewn with obstacles and we must constantly think what direction to take. There are genuine hopes, false friends and misunderstandings at every step ... The Cat and the Fox, as in Pinocchio, continually lead us to mistake bladders for lanterns, to the extent that we could end up thinking that Neill, author of the famous “Free Children of Summerhill”, is more progressive than Baden Powell, the founder of the Scout movement whose image has been totally outmoded : however Neill does no more than postulate a libertarian enclave where he exchanges constraint for seduction, while Baden Powell, with his system of certificates, which Célestin Freinet subsequently takes up, offers us an authentically educational concept of evaluation as a means of surpassing oneself. Rather than denigrating pedagogy as a whole, by referring to various libertarian practices, one should instead look at the way in which Makarenko, for example, by a systematic rotation of tasks avoids any subject becoming bogged down in facts ... Indeed, what we are lacking to make the teacher’s authority an “authority which authorises”, in the words of Michel de Certeau (*L’invention du quotidien 1 - Arts de faire*, Paris, Folio-Gallimard, 1990), is a clear concept of what a true “education for democracy” could mean. What educational verticality could today form the basis of the teacher’s legitimate authority?

Teachers as vectors of democracy?

If we imagine a “School for democracy” we may, from my viewpoint, make of the teacher a true “public servant” whose mission is to make possible the citizens’ exercise of democracy. The teacher is thus enabled to rediscover a verticality which will henceforth free him from spending his time in managing institutional tensions, social conflicts and pressure of all kinds. He has been liberated to build an identity for modern times.

Let us begin by eliminating a long-held misunderstanding: Schools, primary schools and secondary schools, are in no way democratic institutions, in the sense that students, teachers and other members of personnel can decide, according to the principle of “one man, one vote”, on what takes place there. The lack of symmetry

between pupils and educators is an underlying fact: if the pupils could express their opinions on the school in the same way as the adults, this would mean that they were already educated and would no longer need to go to school. On the other hand the School is a place where democracy is learned, that is to say a place and a time where minors learn simultaneously and in a closely linked fashion to “think for themselves” and to exist in a society, in order to become part of what Kant calls the majority. Everything is in the phrase *simultaneous and closely linked!* Indeed, to think for oneself would be meaningless if it signified ignoring the thought of others, or the knowledge and achievements acquired throughout the history of man. It would be an exercise as equally ridiculous as that of Baron Munchhausen who thinks he can pull himself out of the water by his own hair. “To think for oneself” requires one to exist within a society which articulates the verticality of a culture laid down over time and the horizontality of exchanges which allow the acquisition of the culture through a process of sharing ... However, existing in a society, at the intersection of space and time, does not exonerate the individual from making efforts to avoid the temptation of trading his escape from solitude for subjection to a “leader”. Blind identification with others or with an idea prevents a person from questioning or being himself, and thus from becoming truly human as one subject among other subjects.

This dialectic of the “us” and the “I” is expressed in the pedagogical act in the form of tensions is one which I have tried to explore systematically in *La pédagogie entre le dire et le faire* (Paris, ESF éditeur, 1995-2007) and in *Faire l'École, faire la classe* (Paris, ESF éditeur, 2004-2008). More recently, in *Pédagogie: le devoir de résister* (Paris, ESF éditeur, 2007-2008), I have tried to show how work on these tensions would enable us to sketch out what I refer to as the “pedagogy of the subject”. The subject can, in effect, structure himself insofar as he accepts the tension between the principle of educability – “Any individual can learn and grow” - and the principle of liberty – “No one may constrain an individual to learn and grow”. His own motivation to learn needs to interact with the transmitted culture which pre-existed him. Without this such a fusion culture will be condemned to remain inanimate. Thus Marcel Gauchet himself can write: “There is no point in claiming to imbue (an individual) with knowledge (which predates him) of which it is equally improbable to spare him its antecedence, with all that it implies of the need to understand it. It is between these two terms that the art of pedagogy must function. It must look for a middle ground between these two equally unavoidable dimensions with the opposing requirements which attach to them. To facilitate the student's personal appropriation of the necessary knowledge, while at the same time making perceptible and intelligible its origins: the search for this difficult equilibrium is what justifies to the mediating function of education.” (M.-C. Blais, M. Gauchet, D. Ottavi, *Conditions de l'éducation*, Paris, Stock, 2008, 91). Marcel Gauchet does not go so far as to say that this mediating function could enable our scholastic institutions to help individuals raise themselves above the rampant disorder of social individualism ... But for my part, I think it would be possible to explore this hypothesis quite seriously.

We must then ask ourselves what are the characteristics of a “pedagogy for democracy” which would be neither a “gift” (one should be able to train for it) nor a “science” (whenever one works in tension the art of application is inappropriate and we are obliged to become inventive in order to overcome contradictions), but rather an “art of doing”, as Michel de Certeau says: the art of “making do”... rather than being tempted to assume godlike powers and abolish the resistance of the matter to

be transformed. The art of “doing by using that which one has already encountered or observed”... instead of being tempted to act by oneself, forgetting the pedagogical heritage and ignoring the experience of one’s peers. The art of “doing at the right moment” by using favourable opportunities instead of being tempted to act in a blind and systematic way. We can doubtless find the founding principle of education for democracy in the following remark – which is not without a certain pathos – of Hans Georg Gadamer: *“It is truly a gigantic task which is given to each person at every moment. It is a question of keeping our prejudices, our desires, our impulses, our hopes and interests under sufficient control so that others do not become, or remain, invisible. It is not easy to understand that we must be able to accept that another may be in the right and that our own point of view or interests may be in the wrong.”* (*L’héritage de l’Europe*, Paris, Payot-Rivages, 1996, 23). It is not easy to understand and even more difficult to put into practice! This is something which, in effect, requires that determination and support which any democracy should transmit to its members, at the risk of despairing of itself. And it is this transmission that modern pedagogy has been exploring since the time of Pestalozzi.

Thus, from Ferdinand Buisson to Germaine Tortel, and from John Dewey to Marta Mata, pedagogy proposes three main methods of transmitting the capacity for developing oneself whereby the individual becomes a subject in a community: the *experimental method*, which enables him to learn to express hypotheses and to verify them; *documentary research*, which enables him to consult documents, to know who is speaking, when and how, and to compare points of view and identify constants; and finally, the *creative process*, which teaches the subject to express through symbolism his most intimate feelings as they refer to universal values. Grouped under the acceptable heading of “active pedagogy” these approaches remain, in my view, extremely fruitful at the present time.

However, it is important to reintegrate them into three themes which have been updated more recently in pedagogical writings: the questions of learning, of work and of meaning.

- *On learning*, following in the wake of Piaget and Vygotsky and thanks to the contributions of researchers such as Jean-Pierre Astolfi (*La saveur des savoirs*, Paris, ESF éditeur, 2008), we can measure better today to what degree this is not determined: learning happens in by each individual in a particular way whenever a given situation (whether it be an experimental situation, a masterly lecture, an individual or collective situation) becomes graspable by the intellect of he who must learn it. For it to become graspable it must contain precise and intelligible instructions, accessible material and the intellectual effort of bringing the instructions to play upon the material; it is this intellectual effort which permits learning. In this regard there is no truly democratic training for democracy except where one makes an effort to struggle against the haphazard nature of learning by working systematically on widely varying situations and in enquiring into the way in which each student tackles them.

- *On work*, thanks to the effort of educators and the warnings of the ESCOL team of the University of Paris 8 – Saint Denis (Stéphane Bonnery, *La construction des différences et des inégalités scolaires*, Paris, La Dispute, 2007), we know to what degree it is important to distinguish *the task* from *the objective*. The task, while it is visible and easily evaluated, is ephemeral and its success does not necessarily imply the success of the learning process; the objective, on the other hand, is initially invisible; in order to be truly mastered the objective needs to be set in a different context – hence the need to be explicit about “that which must be learned”. “Good students”, who benefit from a supportive family environment, do not stop at the task and know that they will be judged on what they have understood. Students with learning problems, on the other hand, think that if they have carried out the task, they have fulfilled their duty. From this point of view attitudes to school work should be seen as a high stakes issue: as long as we allow certain students to be satisfied with a mechanical concept of work, where “doing” presupposes “understanding”, we will never be able to educate citizens.
- *On meaning*, in the context of the work of someone like Serge Boimare (*Libérer le désir de savoir chez l'enfant*, Paris, Dunod, 2008), we have managed to move beyond a simplistic view of things: meaning cannot be reduced to what would be useful to a student in his daily life ... Because one would then take a double risk: that of remaining within the sphere of concrete thinking, which would block any access to the abstract, and that of restricting knowledge to a very low level of categorization for those whose field of personal and social experience is limited. Furthermore, we have learned to move away from a narrow concept of motivation, according to which one should always tie educational initiatives to the clearly existing interests of the students: we are aware to what degree this approach accentuates inequalities and seriously underestimates the appeal of serious cultural activities ... On the contrary, the most promising work in pedagogy attempts to mobilise students' capacity for complex thought through relevant approaches. By demonstrating that learning is about the basic questions which men have always asked and which been at least able to understand, if not solve, we can restore its emancipating power. In this regard, giving precedence to the truly cultural dimension of learning – beyond its strictly “scholastic use” – is a fundamental requirement: it enables students to acquire the pleasure of learning and put the search for precision, accuracy and truth at the heart of school work. It contributes to the development of citizens capable of overcoming prejudices and, throughout their life, of acquiring knowledge as an emancipating adventure and not because these are “things they ought to know”.

You will not have failed to notice that I do not place in foremost position of those skills required for democracy training the subjects traditionally valued in this way, such as student councils, work on regulations and sanctions, school life etc ... all of which are traditionally regarded as a means to “socialisation”. There are two reasons for this: on the one hand, as Antonio Novoa shows us in his example of Brazil – but which I feel is largely valid elsewhere – there is a real danger that our school institutions may divide into two blocks: the one charged with instructing the well-heeled and the other with pacifying the barbarians. This temptation to pacify difficult students through “active” methods alternating with learning appears to me to be both serious and fraught with danger. On the other hand I am convinced that it is impossible to “socialise from nothing”: socialisation comes about from and through education The democratic debate can only be constructive when it mobilises knowledge and works from actual scenarios. We are inclined to think that the democratic debate can start from a blank sheet: nothing could be more wrong ... True democratic debates begin when one discusses “something” and more often than not, such debates arise from a written text which acts as the support for the discussion and allows it to develop. To feed the debate with content does not cut it short. On the other hand to let it be thought that one can discuss nothing is an illusion. Without resources the debate is often sterile and degenerates into a confrontation of individuals: the exact opposite of what an authentic democracy seeks to achieve.

On the whole, I think it is possible to found a “pedagogy for democracy” by remaining true to the underlying principle of Gadamer, by recapturing the inspiration behind “active methods” and by taking into account the most recent developments in educational thinking. Such a pedagogy should closely articulate three requirements: to defer / to understand / to discuss.

- *To defer* first of all; to delay taking action and to take the time to reflect and to detach oneself from preconceived images or stereotypes which give a false picture. To defer in order to keep apart those things that impel and those that bind.
- *To understand* next, in the strongest sense of the term: to gain access to the intelligence of beings and things, to acquire and build knowledge which renders the world comprehensible, to be able to think for oneself and avoid living in blind acceptance. To understand in order to remain independent of the easy slogan or the quick-fix recipe.
- Finally *to discuss*, but without nourishing conflict; to enter debate in order to articulate well established learning, value choices, objective knowledge and probable scenarios; to shift points of view, to interrogate possibilities and anticipate objections; to be in permanent dialogue with others and with oneself in order to avoid becoming wrapped up in the inevitable dogmatism of solitude. To enter into debate in order to hold at bay all temptations to rigidify one’s position.

Thus we would be in possession of a “provisional ethic” for a “pedagogy for democracy”. And from this perspective we could question our educational practices: do they contain the necessary rituals to learn how to defer? Do they offer intellectual challenges which are sufficiently strong to mobilise the intelligence of the students? Do they incorporate regulated times for interaction where points of view can be

expressed without causing conflict in order to arrive at greater precision, more accuracy and truth? Or, more concretely, are there periods of quiet which permit reflection, structures which oblige students to delay stating their point of view on making proposals? Are there moments of intellectual sharing where the teacher explores his own knowledge in sharing it, bound by a desire to make it accessible and to transmit its particular savour? Are there times for group work where each individual assumes different roles and positions, where texts and documents are discussed and where students learn to construct progressively a “common ground”?

We may well see that, defined in this way, the pedagogical task, far from being reduced to a “service to the public”, is able to endow the “public service of education” with a true verticality. Thus we can settle – uncomfortably, it is true, but there is rarely any comfortable position in a democratic project! – the teacher’s authority on something other than an old-fashioned nostalgia or a race against time within some “scholastic market”. In this way we can attempt to free ourselves from organizational rigidity and collectively invent a new way of embodying the “principle of hope” through pedagogy.

In (provisional) conclusion: what model should we choose for education as a public service?

Unfortunately, the notion of “public service” has not, in my view, been the subject of sufficiently profound reflexion. Thus, in this field, we are still trapped in an infernal oscillation between, on the one hand, a technocratic and centralising model, which makes of the State’s systematic investment and the anxious control of its actors the guarantee of the quality of the service, as such, while, on the other hand, privatisation and competition are presented as a guarantee of the quality of the services rendered. Politically there does not seem to be any other way, the left systematically supporting the first idea (particularly when it is in opposition) and the right putting the second option to work when it is in power.

Thus the real question, the ultimate democratic and civic question, is indeed that of the quality of the public service conceived as an institution designed for the “common educational good”. As we have said, in a democracy individual interests are legitimate ... but the common good is built upon them through a patient process of confrontation and invention. The School cannot escape from this rule. It cannot exclude the parents – relegated to the rank of “users” - or simply install them in a condescending manner upon spare seats. If one does not associate the citizen-parents with the power structure of the School, as a public institution, we should not be surprised if the user-parents try to exercise their power over schools by playing them off one against the other ... or against the private sector.

We should be inspired in this reflection by the stimulating perspectives already opened up some time ago by Bertrand Schwartz, when he spoke of “the pedagogy of dysfunction” (*Moderniser sans exclure*, Paris, La Découverte, 1997). Dysfunction, he explains, is that which enables an institution to progress whenever treatment of it is not externalised. Faced with a dysfunction an institution should always open up areas for dialogue and, above all, areas for the communal construction of solutions. This would be a grand project for the “public service of education”! In point of fact this is what would permit it to be worthy of the name. For a School in which a single

family is forced to seek a solution outside the School, and at its own expense, cannot claim to be a true public service.

Such work, undertaken side by side with parents as concerned citizens, far from compromising or undermining the authority of teachers, as one sometimes believes, would reinforce it and legitimize it. It would avoid students continually playing off one educational body against another. It would, at last, help to bestow upon teachers a clear mission: to be "public servants" in the "public service of education".