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The liquid modernity of Bauman and its implications in a proposal for citizenship education


A modernidade líquida de Bauman e suas implicações em uma proposta de educação para a cidadania

La modernidad líquida de Bauman y sus implicaciones en una propuesta de educación para la ciudadanía


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Abstract: This article is developed based on a theoretical and bibliographical research of an analytical nature that aims to answer the following question: How can the conception of liquid modernity of Bauman be a challenge to the proposal of education for citizenship? The text is structured in two parts: in the first, we discuss the concept of liquid modernity of Bauman. In the second, the current challenges for promoting education for citizenship in the context of liquid modernity. Finally, we point out some possible paths for the promotion of education for citizenship in an educational scenario guided by the principles of liquid-modern life.

Keywords: Liquid Modernity. Education. Citizenship.

Resumo: Este artigo desenvolve-se a partir de uma pesquisa teórico-bibliográfica de corte analítico que tem por objetivo responder à seguinte pergunta: Como a concepção de modernidade líquida de Bauman pode ser um desafio à proposta de educação para a cidadania? O texto estrutura-se em duas partes: na primeira, tecemos uma abordagem acerca do conceito de modernidade líquida de Bauman. Na segunda, os desafios atuais para a promoção de uma educação para a cidadania no contexto da modernidade líquida. Por fim,

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apontamos alguns caminhos possíveis para a promoção da educação para a cidadania em um cenário educacional pautado pelos princípios da vida líquido-moderna.

Palavras-chave: Modernidade Líquida. Educação. Cidadania.

Resumen: Este artículo se desarrolla a partir de una investigación teórico-bibliográfica de carácter analítico que pretende responder a la siguiente pregunta: ¿Cómo la concepción de modernidad líquida de Bauman puede ser un desafío a la propuesta de educación para la ciudadanía? El texto está estructurado en dos partes: en la primera, discutimos el concepto de modernidad líquida de Bauman. En el segundo, los desafíos actuales para promover la educación para la ciudadanía en el contexto de la modernidad líquida. Finalmente, señalamos algunos caminos posibles para promover la educación ciudadana en un escenario educativo guiado por los principios de la vida líquida-moderna.

Palabras clave: Modernidad líquida. Educación. Ciudadanía.

Introduction

It is antagonistic that in a world increasingly inhabited by diversity (Akkari; Consalter, 2023), education projects that aim at standardization, homogenization and, consequently, promote the selection of some and the exclusion of others are gaining strength. These projects are customized into what Bauman (2001) calls liquid modernity. The sociologist understands that the present period is marked by rapid and volatile changes of a social, cultural, economic and personal nature, the result of a capitalist system, which has produced a changing vision of all reality. In this liquid modernity, traditional institutions (Family, Church, State) are no longer a reference for the constitution of individuals and constant novelty gains more and more centrality, establishing a new dogma: the “liquidity of relationships” (Bauman, 2004; 2007). From the melting and dilution of the values tested, consolidated and widely accepted in the past by the aforementioned institutions, the liquid subject emerged, who seeks satisfaction in everything he does and has the desire and expectation of a quick return.

This latent desire for quick returns is typically associated with terms and notions from a consumerist business lexicon, such as “goals”, “indicators”, “results”, “efficiency”, “effectiveness”, “profitability”, “meritocracy”, “results management”, “personal satisfaction”, “consumer happiness”, among others. In the field of education, the private sector appropriated these terms, typical of liquid modernity, and adopted the narrative that a “quality education” required by these “times” of rapid transformation, is measured by results expressed in numbers and indicators. However, this conception of education labeled “quality” contradictorily hides or ignores inequalities, differences, social conditions, the production of poverty, the precarious living conditions of the majority of the population and, as a result, weakens the promoting education for citizenship, thus diluting fundamental values such as critical and reflective training.

In this scenario, it is important to highlight and show that, as emphasized by Abrams (2016), an education guided by this vision [market] does not necessarily have commitments to fundamental aspects for the consolidation and well-being of societies. Fundamental characteristics for life in a plural democratic society, such as inclusion and social responsibility, take a backseat to standardized programs to reach a greater number of students at a lower cost. In addition to these programs, clearly aimed at producing “profitable machines” (Nussbaum, 2015, p.4), reforms and reformulations of curricula with a view to lightening courses, grouping classes under common core disciplines to optimize costs, reducing spending on teachers and widely use distance learning, both in basic and higher education. Such marketing strategies produced for the educational market induce schools to format and direct their curricula towards an instrumental, technical and utilitarian semi-training, disqualifying and excluding curricular components that promote critical, reflective and citizenship-promoting training.

Given this context, the aim of this study is to understand how Bauman's conception of liquid modernity can be a challenge to the proposal for education for citizenship. To this end, the article is structured in two parts. In the first, we approach Bauman's concept of liquid modernity and its implications in the field of education. We understand that Bauman's (2001) liquid modernity constitutes fertile ground for the private sector to cultivate its nuances in the field of education, prioritizing models of standardized and instrumentalized semi-education to meet, prioritize and serve economic interests and minimize social demands of a plural democratic society. In the second part, we point out the challenges for promoting citizenship education in the context of liquid modernity. Finally, we conclude by pointing out some possible paths for promoting education for citizenship in an educational scenario guided by the principles of liquid-modern life.

Bauman and liquid modernity

To analyze the characteristics of liquid modernity theorized by Bauman, initially, it is important and fundamental to understand how the Polish sociologist explains the transition from solid modernity to liquid modernity. For Bauman (2001; 2000), one of the main values that enabled the construction of solid modernity or a society of producers was “work ethic”. In his book *Trabajo, consumerismo y nuevos pobres*, Bauman (2000) makes an instigating analysis of how the “work ethic” was decisive in structuring solid modernity. As Fávero (2013, p.201) observes, referring to the studies of Bauman (2000), work ethic served as the basis “to spread the habit of making people productive, as it makes it possible to combat, destroy and eradicate the obstacles that prevent the new and splendid world that was intended to be built in modernity”. It was necessary to discipline people to build a society of progress. In this sense, there was a postponement of individual pleasures, thinking about a life project linked to being rooted in a type of work and social architecture materialized by a certain tradition, historically and socially constituted. For Bauman (2001), in solid modernity, the solid was polished until no more defects were noticed, thus reaching a certain perfectionism.

In his conception, solid modernity dates back to the 14th and 15th centuries, having its peak in the 19th and 20th centuries. His main understanding of man and society is based on the idea that man would be capable of creating a new future for society, which would grow in parallel to a life rooted in strong and present institutions, such as the state and the family. Trust in humankind and their autonomy and ability to control the directions of their future are predominant traits of solid modernity. Therefore, it was important for humankind to adapt to the society in which they were inserted. Religion and nationalism gave a sense of community and a sense of belonging. Thus, according to Bauman (1999), human beings built their identity based on these references.

In this context, it can be said that solid modernity was characterized by the difficulty and solidification of human and social relations, of science itself and of thought. In this way, social and family relationships were rigid and lasting, guided by care for tradition. For Bauman (2001), solid modernity was ratified by confidence in the rigidity of institutions and the solidification of social relations. In the solid era, values changed at a slow and predictable pace, which generated a certain nostalgia with the feeling of control over the world, over nature, technology, the economy, for example.

Solid modernity, however, began to undergo changes from the 1960s and 1970s onwards, when the institutions, customs and certain dogmas that provided the guidelines for the individual to build their identity began to weaken, such as religious organizations, the family and the school.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 constitutes, for Bauman (2001), a symbol that “solid” modernity would be in disintegration and would be gradually replaced by “liquid” modernity.

According to Dalcin and Silva (2016), in so-called liquid modernity, solids are melted, but nothing more solid emerges in their place. This social and historical change thus assumes a condition of constant change, and therefore has no end in sight. This means that our institutions, references, lifestyles and even beliefs and convictions change before they have time to solidify into customs and habits.

However, Dalcin and Silva (2016) highlight that with the political and economic reformulations that emerged from this period, there were also major social transformations. The authors consider that for Bauman (2000), the structures or institutions linked to work, culture and education, among others, that were responsible for the production of social normativity become liquid, and are thus at the mercy of both responsibility, as well as individual action. In this sense, it is possible to notice that, according to Bauman (2000), there is a shift in social roles that were previously from “work ethic”, to “aesthetic of consumption”. In other words, the former “solid” confidence in a future perfectly designed by reason was replaced by uncertainty. The future has become hazy and undefined. Success, which was previously guided by a life regulated and planned according to social customs and norms, is now guided mainly by the need for social recognition, guided, among other norms, by the power of consumption.

In this sense, considering the principles of liquid-modern life highlighted by Bauman (2008), excessive consumption is a sign of success, a highway that leads to public applause and fame. “Possessing and consuming certain objects and practicing certain lifestyles are the necessary condition for happiness” (2008, p.165). “This society promises easy happiness that can be obtained through entirely non-heroic means and that must therefore be, temptingly and satisfactorily, within everyone’s reach” (2007, p.65). Liquid-modern society disapproves of the ideals of the long term and totality. What is at stake is the immediate search for individual satisfaction, for the glamor of personal achievements, for the satisfaction provided by consumption.

In solid modernity, institutions were firm, there was job security and a salary that allowed the individual to live with dignity and plan their life from a longitudinal projection. For Fávero and Consaltér (2019), the model of humankind and society, both characteristic of solid modernity and liquid modernity, can be understood and exemplified through the work of Richard Sennet (2009), who uses the figures of Rico and Enrico, son and father, respectively, to talk about two different models of workers. The Fordist, bureaucratized and routinized worker, represented by Enrico, planned his life and his goals with reference to a linear, cumulative and disciplined time. His professional expectations and personal fulfillment are based on long-term goals. On the other hand, Rico (his son) represents the typical worker of the era of flexible capitalism: he changes addresses and jobs frequently, does not plan his goals based on long-term expectations and lives a life of uncertainty in the eloquent search for a rapid professional and financial advancement.

Rico represents a new model of worker, defined by Dardot and Laval (2016) as “corporate subject”, “neoliberal subject” or, simply, “neo-subject”. This new figure of the subject operates an unprecedented unification of the plural forms of subjectivity that liberal democracy allowed to be preserved and which it knew how to take advantage of to perpetuate its existence. This neo-subject has total involvement with itself. Dardot and Laval (2016, p.327) point out that “the desire for personal fulfillment, the project that one wants to carry out, the motivation that animates the company's ‘employee’, in short, desire by whatever name one wants to call it, is the target of the new power”.

The latent desire for personal fulfillment at any cost motivates their existence, their actions and their searches. Haste drives this desire. There is no time to lose. For Sennett (2009), stability in the same job opens up space for multiple possibilities throughout one's professional life. In this new structure of the labor market, “a young American with at least two years of college can expect to change jobs at least eleven times in the course of work, and to change his basic aptitude at least three more times during his forty years of work” (Sennett, 2009, p.22).

To explain these rapid and significant changes in people's lives, typical of what Bauman (2007) calls “liquid life”, Sennett (2009) refers to the economist Bennett Harrison, who believes that the origin of this hunger for change is “impatient capital”, in other words, the desire for a quick return. The idea of suffering and resistance, represented in Sennett's work (2009) by the figure of Enrico, who patiently saved for fifteen years to be able to buy his own house, has become, in Bauman's (2007, p.65) words, “outrageous and repulsive”.

In the field of education, the market has grasped this new subject profile in a very significant way. This conception of education is undermined by the overvaluation of immediate and short-term results, which leads to a strong projection of “facilitated” teacher training models, the sale of training packages, workers who work as freelancers, as education consultants. These professionals orient their practice towards boosting results and qualifying external indicators, which would, in theory, be indicative of quality. They also encourage the emergence of “education entrepreneurs”, with a view to privatizing the sector.

This scenario of liquid modernity values the quick search for results, indicators and data and repels long-term ideals. This new profile of subject constantly identifies with the terms “goals”, “indicators”, “results”, “effectiveness”, which, in relation to the field of education, are widely used in the discourse of “education entrepreneurs” in systemic congruence with what they call the “education market”. This recurring discourse is supported by the norm that life's time is becoming less and less linear, less and less programmable, where today's congenital imperative is that long-term ideals or goals no longer exist. According to Dardot and Laval (2016), this rhetoric has brought psychological statements and economic statements closer together to the point of almost merging them, where a set of diagnostic techniques and “psychic orthopedics” in the educational, professional and family fields have been integrated into the great effectiveness device of industrial societies. In this way, Bauman's (2001) liquid modernity has become fertile ground for private initiative to cultivate its nuances in the field of education.

Abrams (2016) is emphatic in highlighting that education based on the perspective of private initiative, transformed into a commodity for consumption, necessarily lacks commitment to fundamental aspects for the consolidation and well-being of societies, democratic life and the promotion of social protection. In this sense, fundamental characteristics of free public education, which conceives education as a right and not a privilege, which aims to include everyone and not just the most capable, which strives for social responsibility and not the efficiency of profitable productivity, are marginalized to the detriment of standardized programs, formatted and praised as being profitable for economic progress and attracting investors. Thus, schools and curricula are operationalized to reach a greater number of students at a lower cost, teachers are transformed into service providers who must efficiently serve customers (students) in order to satisfy their desires, digital platforms gain pedagogical centrality to conduct educational work and distance education (DE) becomes an attractive option for education entrepreneurs to increase their profitability.

By transforming schools into companies, the educational market induces educational institutions to standardize their curricula based on an instrumental-economic conception, aimed at shaping docile, productive subjects who are subservient to the current economic model. For Nussbaum (2015, p.4), if this trend persists, education systems “will be producing generations of

profit-making machines, rather than producing citizens of integrity who can think for themselves”, who are able to “criticize tradition and understand the meaning of the sufferings and achievements of others”. Nussbaum (2015) considers that the changes in curricula, eliminating humanities subjects, imply precisely the direction indicated of preparing a “set of obedient workers, technically trained to carry out the projects of the elites, aimed at foreign investment and technological development” (Nussbaum, 2015, p. 21). In this sense, any policy that promotes students' freedom of thought and the promotion of citizenship is a threat.

Having made this brief diagnosis of the times, the next section aims to systematize some challenges that can promote education for citizenship, in the Freirean spirit that “it is true that women and men can change the world for the better, to make it fairer, but starting from the concrete reality they ‘arrive’ at in each generation. And not based or founded on daydreams, false dreams, without roots, pure illusions” (Freire, 2000, p.53-54, emphasis added). From Freire's perspective, it is not possible to transform the world without a dream, a utopia or a project, because “the transformation of the world needs both the dream and the indispensable authenticity of the dream depends on the loyalty of the dreamer to the historical and material conditions, the levels of technological and scientific development of the dreamer”. It is this “hopefulness” of the dream that encourages us to propose challenges.

Challenges for promoting citizenship education in the context of liquid modernity

The concept of "liquid modernity" made Bauman (2000) famous among scholars. Unlike solid bodies, liquids cannot hold their shape when pushed by any external force. Bauman (2000) described a modern liquid society as an entity without a stable reference point in which individuals are constantly led to adapt to change. Bauman created the term "liquid modernity" as an alternative to "postmodernity." Many thinkers agree in identifying the beginning of the twenty-first century as a period of social and ideological decline that responds to the political-economic extension of global neoliberalism.

The end of great ideals, relativism, the emphasis on wealth and profit as primary values, consumerism, mercantilism, the destabilization of morals, relational and professional instability, caused the emergence of a kind of vacuum. This vacuum is being filled by the return of religion and populist-nationalist pressure that feeds each other in many parts of the world.

What would be the role of global citizenship education in this context of liquid modernity? First of all, it would be useful to understand the emergence of the concept of global citizenship education. The ancestor of the idea of global citizenship education is probably cosmopolitanism (Zgaga, 2009). Civic and citizenship education, as a pillar of national education systems, are facing a crisis of legitimacy in the context of globalization and liquid modernity. On the one hand, citizenship is linked to the liberating and educating force of the Nation-State. Globalization has led to the concept of citizenship being called into question if it is considered to be associated with the schema of the nation-state. On the other hand, the rise of inequalities between nations and within each nation make the idea of citizenship and equal rights more virtual than real for the majority of citizens, in particular for the youth.

International organizations, especially UNESCO, have had a great responsibility in popularizing global citizenship education over the past two decades. In particular, Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 clearly articulates the importance of the concept:

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable

development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development (UNESCO, 2016, online).

Ironically, the United Nations, which calls for the promotion of a culture of peace through global citizenship, has been unable to resolve the dozens of conflicts that are tearing our world apart. The imposition of injustices by the force of arms is much more used by hegemonic nations to shape the world according to their narrow national interests.

Citizenship in a context of neoliberal globalization appears to be an ambivalent and not credible concept at least in the global South because we are all "individuals with rights" driven to seek individual solutions to collective problems generated politically, economically and socially, which does not allow to be solved. You can't really protect yourself from pollution individually, or you can avoid unemployment individually in a flexible labor market where capital seeks to increase at a lower cost. The neoliberal version of world citizenship is a relevant support for liquid modernity. However, it is possible to have a more critical version of global citizenship education in which learners are led to understand inequalities, historical injustices and their collective individual responsibility to reduce them (DeJaeghere, 2009; De Vries, 2020; Andreotti, 2014).

Mikander (2016) pointed out the tendency to portray globalization more as a natural process rather than as something politically constituted. Critical global citizenship would timely challenge Eurocentric worldviews and bring opportunities for more analytical and critical learning. By critical approaches, students could learn to question their own role and the role of their own society, including the contents of their education, in the reproduction of inequalities. The controversial nature of education about global inequality and the role of different actors are essential. There is a need to tackle this question even if they might make students uneasy.

The idea is not to deflate students or to bring about guilt. Instead, the aim is to point at the politically constructed nature of globalization. By learning to ask and discuss critical questions, students can begin to challenge the ruling assumptions of global inequality as something necessarily static. Teaching about global inequality from a critical point of view can be challenging for educators, especially when the educational material, such as textbooks, discourage critical thinking.

Bauman (2002) has analyzed the evolution of education in the context of liquid modernity. Starting from Meyers' (1960) comparison of pedagogical ideas and educational institutions in thirteen different civilizations, Bauman (2002) highlighted the growing tendency to see education as a product rather than a process. When it is seen as a product, it is conceived as something that can be "obtained", total and accomplished. This idea of education as a product is reminiscent of Paulo Freire's notion of banking education. The effort to assimilate knowledge through education and learning should not stop on graduation day. The appetite for knowledge should remain kindled throughout life to continue to live and grow. The individual could appropriate this knowledge as an enduring property in the "solid" stage of modernity.

According to Bauman (2002), in the modern-fluid world, the solidity of knowledge and competencies is relative. Today's consumerism does not consist in an accumulation of things, including knowledge, but in the ephemeral pleasure they provide. Why should the body of knowledge gained from attending school or university be an exception? Knowledge is adapted for instantaneous use and is intended for a single use: ready-to-use and ready-to-throw knowledge, of the kind promised by computer programs entering and leaving specialized shops in an increasingly rapid succession, seems much more attractive.

In this context, the rise of the use of Artificial Intelligence in education is an opportunity to speed-up the liquidity of knowledge in contemporary societies. It is appropriated by subjects without due judgment or more cautious analysis and used for immediate pleasures and desires, providing answers to complex problems with simplistic solutions. Often, these solutions only fulfill an anesthetic function, generating immediate relief, typical of Bauman's liquid society (2001).

Final considerations

Promoting citizenship education in the context of Bauman's (2001) liquid modernity, as we analyzed, it is complex and challenging. The desire for quick fulfillment and the search for immediate pleasure are obstacles to tackling complex problems that require consistent citizenship education programs, such as climate issues, hunger and violence, for example. These problems also require complex solutions, which transcend individuality to collectivity and are permanently constructed.

Liquid modernity values quick results, discarding long-term ideals and the principle of collectivity. In this way, Bauman (2002) analyzes education in liquid modernity, highlighting the growing view of education as a product, something “obtained” and concluded, similar to Paulo Freire's “banking education”. This approach contrasts with the idea of continuous learning throughout life, which is essential for personal growth and the promotion of citizenship.

As analyzed, in liquid modernity, education has come to value quick results and short-term goals, boosting simplified training models and educational packages. Professionals work as freelancers and consultants, seeking to optimize external indicators seen as synonymous of quality. This context of liquid modernity favors privatization and the rise of “education entrepreneurs”, who have no commitment to social responsibility and the creation of democratic societies. According to Dardot and Laval (2016), modern educational logic rejects long-term goals, reinforcing discourses of efficiency and productivity, consolidating the influence of private enterprise in the education sector, which sees schools as having the obligation to prepare future workers with the techniques and skills required by the market.

Education conceived by the market is quantitative rather than qualitative, since it is measured by numbers and indicators rather than by the social relevance of educational processes. The most relevant social aspects of a progressive education (Freire, 2000) include a school that bases its pedagogical exercise on its local identity, its regional needs, its historicity and the constant interaction with its constituent members.

Therefore, education for citizenship in the context of Bauman's (2001) liquid modernity is challenging, but necessary. In a scenario in which education has been conceived as a product rather than a process, promoting critical and reflective training has become fundamental to promoting a humanizing education and actions aimed at the well-being of societies. This approach seeks to get students to understand inequalities, historical injustices and their collective responsibility in the social transformation of these realities (DeJaeghere, 2009; de Vries, 2020; Andreotti, 2014).

Although addressing inequalities can cause discomfort, the aim is not to generate guilt, but to reveal the political construction of these processes. Critical teaching allows students to question assumptions and see inequality as something changeable and to recognize themselves as agents, subjects of this transformation. Hughes (2021) understands this process as something slow, but that must rest on the central aims of education, which, in his view, are to think deeply, consider multiple perspectives and situate knowledge in time, power and politics.

In this sense, it is also necessary for teachers to ask themselves what kind of discussion is taking place in the classroom to ensure critical thinking and a deep reflection on the power of representation in the way textbooks, workbooks and the internet itself present subjects and materials to students. In the context of quick, often simplistic answers, entangled in artificiality, promoting education for citizenship requires, first and foremost, fostering the power to exercise critical thinking (Hughes, 2021) and understanding education as a practice of freedom (Freire, 2000) and not as a space for reproducing and consolidating the goals of impatient capitalism and the ephemerality of Bauman's liquid societies (2001).

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