

# Against barbarism and lack of communication by building a learning society

## *Contra a barbárie da incomunicação e pela construção de uma sociedade educativa*

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Martín-Barbero, Jesús.

*A comunicação na educação*

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### ABSTRACT

*A comunicação na educação*, written by Jesús Martín-Barbero, deals with issues concerning the process of literacy in communication in its many interfaces with culture; the decentralization of the school as the primary socializing agency and questions the hegemony of literacy culture to enhance orality and visibility as forms of knowledge construction; proposes a shift from educational system to a society of shared knowledge translated into an educational city project.

**Keywords:** Communication, education, teaching-learning, culture, citizenship

### RESUMO

*A comunicação na educação*, de Jesús Martín-Barbero, trata de questões referentes ao processo de alfabetização em comunicação em suas múltiplas interfaces com a cultura; do descentramento da escola como principal agência socializadora e questiona a hegemonia da cultura letrada ao valorizar a oralidade e a visibilidade como formas de construção do saber; propõe o deslocamento do sistema educacional para uma sociedade dos saberes compartilhados traduzido no projeto de uma cidade educativa.

**Palavras-chave:** Comunicação, educação, ensino-aprendizagem, cultura, cidadania

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**A** COMUNICAÇÃO NA EDUCAÇÃO (*Communication in Education*), by Jesús Martín-Barbero, is work fertilized by more than four decades of rich academic experience and scientific contributions to the field of communication. The noble tradition of pondering communication with education as its starting point, initiated in Latin America by the philosopher, who lives in Colombia today, may be grasped by the readers who may also become aware of the logic and sensibility of his narrative – which considers education as sourced from culture at the same time that it understands the communicative processes shaped by that which is pedagogical.

Martín-Barbero's book has the merit of establishing dialogues not only with his past theoretical productions – the author, in his doctoral dissertation *Word and action* written at the turn of the 1960s and as yet unpublished, searches for theoretical elements to ponder the relationship between communication and education – but also with, among others, ideas and concepts developed within different fields of knowledge. His book is thus an example of knowledge acquired without the “barbed wire of territories and disciplines, of times and discourses” (p.120).

It is, however, the theoretical acquisitions of *Critical Pedagogy* by Paulo Freire – considered the “first innovative input into the theory of communication from Latin America” (p.17) – and Antonio Gramsci's philosophy that weigh heavily in Martín-Barbero's book when the author analyzes the relationship between communication and education in Latin America: “It was the admixture of Gramsci and Freire which taught me to think of communication at the same time as a social process and a field of cultural battle” (p.21).

In this sense, according to Martín-Barbero, one of Paulo Freire's great merits was to have presented communication in his *dialogic structure*, as he developed a true “pedagogy of word and action,” that is, a pragmatic theory which converges with the theories of Austin and Searle as regards the performative capacity of language, for it incorporates the analysis of “language action” into an action and expression program, the idea that we act in the world through speech. Hence, by means of the relationship between communication and education, subjects make use of “worn out words” or of words belonging to those in positions of dominance to “say new things” which illustrate their yearnings and struggles (p.34).

Armed with these theories, Martín-Barbero begins to notice that dependence structures pervade all of society and, consequently, the scope of culture as well, causing an impact on educational communicative processes. Thus, explains the author, the conquest of the settlers vis-à-vis the colonized peoples takes shape as a “cultural battle,” which, through a violent acculturation process,

led the dominated majority to model their values, attitudes, and projects on those of the dominant minority. Martín-Barbero calls such a process one of “noncommunication”: noncommunication with history, which is apprehended as the history of the most notable individuals rather than as the history of a people; noncommunication with the political doings of the masses, excluded from the political process; and noncommunication with the intellectual elites, isolated, owing to their exclusive language, from the speech and memory of the majorities. Therefore, if it was in “education” that the vision of the oppressor “became a de facto, legitimate situation, legitimated by the oppressed,” it lies “in *another education* the possibility of causing the situation to explode as the humiliation and submission codes are subverted” (p.24).

In this sense, Martín-Barbero’s book is not lacking in assumptions underlying his critique of the *schooling model*. Appropriating Mead, Bourdieu, Arendt, and Tedesco, the author points to changes which move the school away from its central position in the socialization process, namely as follows: the fact that youth’s cultural experience no longer fits in the linear sequence of the printed word; the fact that there exist communicative ecosystems which end up denouncing the pretense which, at times, characterize the traditional learning and teaching processes; the difficulty in integrating professional qualification, deemed a key point by market agents, with transmission of the social heritage and education of citizens; the continuous scrapping of the public school, increasing the fragility of this place of meeting and recognition of the excluded majorities (pp. 122-124).

Such changes redefine the meaning of knowledge itself because, as the author understands, the transformations in the ways information circulates carried out by the communication media, denote the fragility of the radical separations the school made among art, science, and technical knowledge and force the acknowledgement of intertwined skills engendered in cultures overflowing with literature and the arts (pp.127-128). In this context, the meaning of education agents is also redefined: we are all agents of knowledge and we build and share it without separating mind from body or reason from sensibility.

Martín-Barbero, gifted with a profound humanistic vision – thus swimming against the current of increasing instrumentalization of the pedagogical processes at all levels as is defended by the perverse neoliberal policies developed by world economic organizations – states that “the urgency of a *reeducation in humanity*, of another kind of learning allowing humans” not to give up their “utopia of a solidary community” (p. 14). With this in mind, he states the change from a society with an educational system to an educational society, that is, a move from an outdated banking education, where the agents of knowledge

take an opposing position and a counterposition, towards a society of shared knowledge where classroom boundaries expand to embrace the quotidian life of these very same agents, to their local and global relationships, mediated or not by technologies.

Aware that the teaching and learning processes, through multiple mediations, already take place anywhere regardless of the age of the knowledge agents, Martín-Barbero is audacious to propose the reinvention of a school which takes on its role of institutional socializer and favors, in addition to the traditional agents of the process, mass media and the new means of network communication. In this sense, the author emphasizes the need for the school to tighten its relationship with the city because he understands that – if today we all live inserted in a reality which allows for continuous learning – beyond literate knowledge, there is knowledge from means other than the school, such as everyday life, orality, visuality, audiovisuality, and interconnectivity.

The Latin-American theorist indicates that the school is questioned by the contemporary city, a space where technological mediation is denser and from where the new ways of being together emerge, a space no longer designed by assembled bodies but rather by interconnected bodies. Addressing this issue, the author takes up again the relevance of youth as transformative social actors and reiterates that the commitment of education to civic preparation requires that new generations appropriate technologies to make their plurality of voices heard and thus actively participate in the democratic dialogue. He emphasizes that technology insertion in the school will only transform reality if the technologies are integrated into a model in which knowledge is built in a collaborative or horizontal way. The contrary leads to the reproduction of the status quo, that is, a lack of space for cultivating counterhegemonic thoughts in school, and the employment of such technologies no longer represents the possibility of the agents' social inclusion and emancipation.

Starting with a research study carried out in the Mexican city of Guadalajara and of another town – the findings of which were still unpublished when this went to print – and extended to five other Latin American countries, plus Spain, the theorist presents us with a “project-map” (p. 139) for the development of societies of shared knowledge. Confirming the fabric of reflections he weaves throughout his work and which are based on data from his reading experience and his writings done in what he calls “educational city” (p. 119), Martín-Barbero shows the ways to implement public policies and insert educational projects which enable the teaching and learning processes in contemporaneity: enhancement of the importance of civic practices, of intercultural relationships, and primarily of the key factor of interactions between the school and the city.

In Brazil, Martín-Barbero's work has come to establish a dialogue with "educommunication" studies which enhance project pedagogy; integration of the different fields of knowledge; the use of repertoires shared between teachers and students in the teaching and learning processes; the acknowledgement and management of communication ecosystems by implementation of communicative actions; the acquisition of literacy in different languages and devices to prepare, more than critical readers of media, citizens capable of developing their own narratives by appropriating the media and thus participating in the historical process and increasingly intervening in social, cultural, political, and economic reality.

Published by Editora Contexto, *A Comunicação na Educação* is obligatory reading for all those interested in the juncture of communication and education and in the "educommunicative" processes and practices as a form of resistance to the barbarian incommunicability imposed by the practices of capital. ■

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