

DANILO GANDIN INTERVIEW: conversations with an old educator

Paulo Santos Lima Júnior¹
Luiz Felipe Alcântara Hecktheuer²
Danilo Gandin³

Danilo Gandin has a degree in Philosophy (University of Vale do Rio do Sinos, 1963), in Literature (Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, 1964), a specialist in Educational Planning (Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, 1970) and a master's degree in Education (Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, 1980). With more than 60 years dedicated to public education and 14 published books, Professor Gandin is a reference in participatory planning. His texts bring an incessant search for a better, more interesting school that mainly makes sense to students.

In this interview, we present a conversation with this old educator - and here it's important to avoid anything that may sound pejorative to this term. According to an ultimate that Professor Gandin himself often reproduces, the devil is wise not because he is the devil, but because he is old. And this old educator honors his title in an exemplary way: Jesuit by training, teacher, father, grandfather, researcher and, above all, passionate about life and education.

1. Professor Danilo Gandin, you completed your master's degree more than 30 years ago. At the time, you investigated resistance to educational changes with teachers and supervisors. To this end, you conducted a survey using a printed questionnaire. The data from this research were later tabulated with the help of punched cards, processed on a large computer. What would this investigation look like today in 2022?

I really consider myself an old educator. I'm now 86 years old. And being 86 years old for me is an extraordinary thing! When I was younger, I saw elderly people die at 50, 60 years old.

¹ Master's student in Education at the Federal University of Rio Grande. Line of research: Educational policies and curriculum. Contact E-mail: paulo.lima@gmail.com

² Phd in Science Education from the Federal University of Rio Grande. Professor at the Institute of Education at the Federal University of Rio Grande, in the research line Educational policies and curriculum. E-mail: felipao.rg@hotmail.com

³ Master in Education at the Federal University of Rio Grande. Specialist in Education Planning at the Federal University of Rio Grande. Contact: danilo.gandin@gmail.com

At that age almost everyone was already dead. So at 86 years old I get excited. And I'm still able to work. I did this research in the 70s. I finished my master's degree exactly in 1980.

That was a work that needed to escape the difficulties of the time. We were in the middle of dictatorship, in a strong moment of dictatorship, still in the 70s. I couldn't go around debating the topic of education and change as I wanted. In this, there is something that scares me to this day. We are in 2022 and the school continues to look more and more like the school that was created in the 18th century to help the rich who went to France to study. Then, in the 19th century, they started taking courses here in Brazil, to help them (the rich) choose, in what later became what we call an entrance exam, the university they would like and could be successful at attending. So, since that time, a number of disciplines have been created divided into human, nature and languages. All this to target these students who wanted to enter a university and also select them, because there were never places in this country for all students. This is an issue that we should debate, that we should end the entrance exam. He organizes the school in a way in which students are already preparing for the same. And parents want that, and it seems like society wants that, but this is not educational. You have a connotation that makes schools move in the direction of preparing for an entrance exam that doesn't make much sense, but that in a way helps a little to direct the student towards what they like or towards what they assume they will win money. So I had difficulty discussing the topic that popped into my head at that time: why don't schools change?

The world changes very quickly and this change is getting faster and faster. The changes in technologies, the changes in the economy, the changes in cities. Everything in the world is changing, at a rate of progress. But the school doesn't, the school doesn't change! If you had entered a school, like the one I was in in 1946, and looked after the school today, you would realize that they are exactly the same! But if you go to another field of human activity, for example, to medicine, you will see that today's medicine has almost nothing to do with the medicine of that time. So, I get excited about doing research.

When I finally presented my work, the first thing I said was that I set out to analyze the sea, the oceans and I only researched a little bit of the foam that arrives on the beach. Because, at

the time, I was in a situation where I didn't want to be arrested. I was called a communist and told that my questionnaires originated from communism. I was never a communist. I'm not against Marx, who only helped us understand the world, but real communism never attracted me. It's a difficult thing, despite many communisms having appeared in history, like the first Christians, like some movements today. I saw this in Chile, in Israel, where truly socialist communities are created.

I was very happy because the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) made available to me a computer that almost occupied a small house. It processed the data through information that came on punched cards. I created questionnaires with questions to gather the opinions of teachers, supervisors and directors. The questionnaires were different, but they all converged to elicit opinions. I paid a student at the technical commerce school (where I worked at the time) to punch the cards, based on the answers to the questionnaires. There were 420 questionnaires. It was a very large volume of work. I separated the schools by draw to carry out this diagnosis.

At the time, I was very happy to have this possibility of combining the data I collected. Professor Carmem Baía, my advisor at UFRGS, was fundamental in this issue, guiding me to transform our conversations into the questions I wanted to ask. Computer punch cards were a fairly good method of gathering and statistically evaluating this data produced. For me, as a student, nothing was charged to the university. I imagine that today the technological possibilities are much greater. The freedom we have today is much greater. So, we could question the school on much deeper issues, so we can know why it is always the same.

I always tell that joke where Father Anchieta was resurrected and wanted to see São Paulo, the city he had founded. He wanted to see everything and when they took him in the morning to Vale do Anhangabaú and then to Avenida Paulista he said, "this is not São Paulo, you are fooling me". Until they took him and entered a school that was no longer his little school, but a beautiful school, full of beautiful things. And he said "ah, now it's São Paulo!", because it was very similar to school, the way classes were taught in his time. Why does it happen? It's a very interesting topic to deal with.

Paulo Freire also wrote about a changing school, from the perspective of profound change, transforming people. The very movement of a society is in itself an educational process.

2. In relation to what you mentioned just now, is it possible that when we say “the school doesn’t want to change”, are we personifying a cold building, with 4 walls, a floor and a roof? Isn't it people who don't want to change? It is always said that “education can change the world”, but wouldn't people need to change by educating themselves in order to change the world?

Absolutely! Education, especially school education, has no power to transform the world. But if it allies itself with governments, moving in the same direction, perhaps. I would like to be resurrected in 30 years to see what the history books will reveal about this mess that is Brazil today. The school is an organism, a necessarily conservative institution, as its function is to integrate these people who come, our boys, our girls, into this world. Alone, they cannot organize themselves, they do not have an instruction manual to do so. Is it us? We often don't know how to help these children to be autonomous, supportive, participatory, fair and to truly grow. Who are we? Those who should help them educate themselves. Pay attention to what I said: I didn't say we should educate them! Nobody educates anyone, nobody educates themselves. Everyone educates each other, mediated by relationships and nature (that is, the world). These are such basic words, but very strong.

3. Let's go back to the past, to your school days: there's no way to compare a car workshop in Nova Trento (your hometown) in 1942, 80 years ago, with a mechanic shop today, where they connect a computer to the car and have all the diagnosis. Or compare The Santa Casa de Nova Trento with a modern hospital today. But if we put little Danilo in a time machine and brought him from his classroom in 1942 to a classroom today, he might not even cry because he was scared because he would be so comfortable, recognizing everything around him. We have already placed 4 or 5 robots on Mars and the school remains, in general, very similar to the one that existed in 1942. So, why is it difficult, professor, to incorporate these technologies, these new developments? Is it a school's fear of not being accepted by the society in which it operates?

It is certainly society that has to change first. There has to be a reason for being. A direction to walk. You used a word that I really liked: the school reproduces. How does the school reproduce? The most important thing for a society is a dream of the future, a dream of greatness, a dream of autonomy, a dream of solidarity. The anti-war dream, lots of progress. Far from today, right?

The indigenous people had good schools without having schools because they built the transmission. And by transmitting, they reproduced their own society. Because the little indigenous boy or girl left home with their parents and a culture was built that already existed. This culture was transmitted and this culture was worked on to improve it more and more, to make it greater and so on. Today we can no longer do that. Perhaps in family farming, in very deserted places, with little population, it is still possible for the father to take his son to the farm and, together with him, build himself up and there is a hierarchy of values.

So, the school has to play this role. But today we are in a very controversial situation, both in the world and in Brazil, especially, in which society is lost. So, the teacher himself is lost. He sticks to the content. In teaching the Discovery of Brazil. Why? Why know that the Portuguese arrived on April 21st and the first mass was said on May 1st? What use does this have in your life?

So, the father pays for the private school and pays an extra teacher, so his son can pass the entrance exam. Education is very important, isn't it? No. The father thinks about the money his son will earn if he takes a course that trains professionals who charge a lot. Money.

I dream of the day when the 3 levels of education - Early Childhood Education or, as I like to call it, Kindergarten, Elementary School and High School - no longer work by subjects but by themes. We will no longer memorize dates but rather study the important themes that Brazil has outlined throughout its history. Work on projects, each project with a theme. And not a pre-established, dry content. Which, nowadays, is of no use - just to pass the entrance exam.

4. Speaking of entrance exams, BNCC and skills: Rubem Alves said that the teacher's role is not to educate but to provoke. That the teacher is the one who says to the

students: “here is the world! They go! Explore!”. Can a teacher today be motivated, provocative, when he is sitting behind a pile of tests to correct, even though he has technological tools to reduce this bureaucratic work? How to be a provocative teacher these days, when students are so far away – technologically and emotionally?

The teacher's task is not to set limits, it is to give horizons. Our society already imposes many limits on us. Our parents impose many limits on us. Here comes the school and the teachers also imposing limits? No! We have to abandon these trinkets taught at school. There will come a time when it won't fit anymore! Then the curricula try to do things like Mathematics and its Technologies, Natural Sciences and its Technologies. It's not a way out. We cannot work on “little things”, we have to work on big, daily, meaningful issues. Let's go to the supermarket and see how it works. The mathematics of change, the science of refrigerators, the biology of food. What we need is, through studying the themes, to create our own thinking to grow. Create our own autonomy. Create our solidarity. I mean, before thinking about school, we have to think about people, a society and what this society needs.

And, maybe put some things in the foundations of this school: basic mathematics, basic language and communication and science, for example, which I think is fundamental from a young age. Scientific methodology, problem solving, I will test hypotheses, I will discard what is false. Identifying fake news means following the steps of a methodology. You take this for life! When you are a dentist, or a physical education teacher, or a baker, the methodology goes with you. I have a problem to solve. How do I solve it?

I learned the scientific method from my father, planting corn. He was a farmer and I really liked to accompany him and do work with him. My job was weeding. He planted corn in Nova Trento. And, through experimentation, trial and error, he discovered the ideal space for each hole where he placed the corn seeds. He discovered that if he planted the rows of corn very close together, he got more ears per corn stalk, but they were small. If you planted them too far apart, they would get bigger, but fewer in number. All of this on the same land, fertilizing in the same way, recording the discoveries. This is how he discovered the ideal spacing and obtained the best and most beautiful corn crop in the region. In his own way, he

was a scholar. Very rudimentary, but this is the principle. When I entered the Gymnasium, I discovered that what he did was the scientific method. The school needs this. If you try it, you learn things you never thought you would. This is why we must replace disciplines with major themes, projects and experiences. They spill over into other knowledge that you will choose. This gives you autonomy. Opening of scientific horizons, moral horizons, social horizons.

5. Today, we have several technologies that make our networked lives easier. How has the pandemic affected your speaking work?

Although I'm working a lot, I travel less, as I feel the weight of the years. I traveled a lot, inside and outside Brazil. I traveled to several municipalities, working on participatory planning and speaking to teachers and managers. At this time, we communicated a lot over the phone. I also used letters at the beginning. You sent a letter and had to wait 15 days for a response. After that, in modern technologies, I used Facebook a lot. A trip to Minas Gerais, for example. In the morning they asked me about the possibility of a lecture and in the evening everything was already arranged.

I also communicated with the groups of specialists I worked with over the years: Celso Vasconcellos, José Libâneo, José Pacheco, Carlos Carrilho, among others. Then the pandemic came, and in-person events disappeared. And I was especially afraid because of my age. But then something came up that was magnificent, a group wanted to listen to me and I could speak through my computer, using communication tools like Meet and Teams. It was just as stimulating as when I was there. And I even think that some people who are afraid of speaking in front of an audience sent me a question in writing, they had the courage to ask. I started to like it a lot. Now people know that I am already old, entering old age and slowing down. I think they even want to respect me.

6. There was a lot of talk during the Covid-19 pandemic that we would have a new planet when it passed, a “more human”, more empathetic humanity. That technology would help in many processes. However, what we see are people attacking each other in the street because of political differences, the wars are not over, people continue to

suffer. And this was all reflected in education itself, that is, in addition to the pandemic, politics entered the school, the crisis entered the school. I ask you: should we still believe in school? Is it worth waking up our children every morning to go there?

Someone who listens to me has to understand me well, I have great faith in the educational process. I have faith in some experiences that are happening around the world. I have faith in defeating the 4 Horsemen of the Pedagogical Apocalypse, which are the pre-established content, the grade, the entrance exam and all the regulations that exist in basic education today. There are 4 horsemen of the Apocalypse that you hope will die. Maybe I won't see it. But then, instead of withdrawing from education, I insist.

There is no human being capable of understanding everything that happens. The Einsteins of life are few. They wrote things that we know to be true, but often we don't understand. There are things that Einstein wrote that were only recently proven, they were so advanced. But he was able to say that the main thing is the human being, it is our solidarity with each other, you know? What does that mean? It means we can't lose that side. Humanity cannot be lost.

Submission in: 04/07/2023

Aceito em: 28/01/2024

EDITORA E GRÁFICA DA FURG
CAMPUS CARREIROS
CEP 96203 900
editora@furg.br