

Training, development and innovation - For a poetics of deviation

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Letter from Academia

Abstract. Considering, as main reference, Donald Schön's proposal (1983, 1987) on reflective professionals' training, and on action competencies development adjusted to solving problems in dynamic and uncertain contexts and volatile circumstances, we intend, in this letter, to resume the reflection on system thinking, considering that its singular design, by the non-standard nature that characterizes it, constitutes the foundation of innovation and development processes. Taking into account the difficulties that resistance to change necessarily brings to the training processes, we also reconvene, on the thread of history, the concept of deviation, by means of an epistemic and (multi)referential examination of the importance of divergence, in its contours, contributions and boundaries, as a vital way to refresh and reinvent perceptions, knowledge and meanings. We highlight the possibility of choice within decision-making processes, understanding it not only as a means to escape from mimetic repetition, but also as an outlet to the uncertain, the unpredictable, and the novel. That is, we intend to reflect on the nature of the creative act as poesis, in its deep and seductive relation with the creator's emancipation, the ethics underlying a compromise with human values, the aesthetics of adventure, and the appeal of the open work.

Keywords. Training, reflexivity, deviation, innovation, poetic creation, autonomy and development

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1. On Training, deviation and innovation

The issues of training perceived as a crucial condition of human development processes remain one of the most relevant and persistent challenges in the long history of societies. In this development, we can notice both conceptualization efforts to reconcile approaches and action model's configurations – *Theoria* – and their respective implementation, in the most varied contexts and cultures, through training experiences – *Praxis* – aiming at bringing about change and ensuring, for each particular time and place¹, better living conditions under the principle of a dignified and responsible full citizenship. The evolution of this civilizational process is indelibly linked to the creative capacity – *Poiesis* – that distinguishes human beings in their deepest aspirations and most daring *designs*. This poetic undertaking² differs from mere technical action – *Techné* – for its innovative drive, its deviation from standard thinking and action, allowing, as such, the invention and creation of other possible dynamos of development itself. Without underestimating the role of technique, what is sought is to deepen knowledge about this *poietic* dimension³, counteracting routine processes with the possibility of enchantment and creative intelligence through which a new epistemology of the human is founded. Or, using Schön's terms, to deepen the knowledge emerging from reflection on, for and towards *knowing-in-action*, interweaving theory and practice and valuing the rooting and commitment of personal and social fulfilment of professionals.

Notwithstanding the long history that precedes us and the invaluable contributions that Greek civilization has left as legacy and patrimony to all mankind, it is from the second half of the twentieth century onwards that more relevant conceptual and methodological advances have been made, giving continuity and actuality to training issues. It is, moreover, from the cross-linked and confluent investigation of multiple areas of knowledge that drawing new contours to this theme becomes possible, opening and expanding frontiers and perspectives, and, above all, allowing an expanded and global understanding of problems and the establishment of new and compelling conceptual and pragmatic challenges. Pursuing this line of thought, we highlight Donald Schön's work (1983, 1987)⁴, upholding that the positivist grounded paradigms of training associated with

¹ This reflection is part of a long history (of about four decades) and a life history dedicated to the educational training of teachers and other professionals, of trainers of trainers, and of researchers within the institutional framework of the Aveiro-Portugal University.

² André Scucato quotes Manuel António Castro (2011) in *A Poética da poiésis como questão, uma relação entre poiésis e techné* [«The Poetics of poiésis as a question, a relation between poiésis and techné»]. For the author, *poiésis approaches an 'essence of acting', a 'creative force' that uses a technical knowledge, a technique (techné), to accomplish the creative will*. Retrieved December 07, 2018, from: <http://topicospeciaispoetica.blogspot.com/2011/08/o-conceito-grego-de-arte-mimesis-techné.html>.

³ Or, as Roberto Lyrio Duarte Guimarães (2014) maintains, in Dossier *Poesia. Poética. Poético* [«Poetry. Poetics. Poetic»], *the rupture with the procedures (routine), the escape from conventions, the infringement of the rule, the good expressive behaviour push the connoisseur to a gesture of interpretation and collaboration with speech that is in itself the terrain of poetry. These distortions of literalness, both in verbal and audiovisual expression, would be based on the intention of provoking an effect, of altering the state of perception of the connoisseur, in the sense of moving him/her to a state of sensibility and special perception, produced as a consequence of his/her collaboration with the work* (Retrieved December 09, 2018, from: <https://www.cinecachoeira.com.br/2014/09/poesia-poetica-poetico/>).

⁴ Following John Dewey (1910) and reaffirming his contributions to the understanding and complexity of the cognitive and (socio) emotional processes associated with the act of thinking.

instrumental action and with a kind of technical, reductive and uncritical rationality do not fully respond to the complex nature of practical problems – uncertain and indeterminate as they are – that characterize the real circumstances in their (multi) variance and volatility. Due to their repetitive and uniformizing nature, they prevent the possibility of divergence, thus constituting an obstacle to innovation and change. Alternatively, Donald Schön proposes a reflective, situated, and critical perspective that establishes another *epistemology of practice*. That is, a form of *critical reasoning* based on a *dialogue with each particular situation*, intending to offer, from this positioning towards reality⁵, and with due anticipation, answers that are consistent, adjusted to and coherent with the nature of each problem in its own circumstances. It is in this capacity to transgress, to think strategically and to single out each possible answer that the concept of deviation gains its full significance. It dares to face the challenges of the unknown, including, in the reflective playing of the multiple variables intervening in a given situation, the dimensions of *not knowing*, the risks, the doubts, the uncertainties, as well as an indistinct amalgam of fear and courage interwoven in the knowledge, values and convictions that govern choices and decision-making. In this sense, deviation constitutes the alternative to the dominant model, thus implying the possibility and actual freedom of choice. Without an alternative, you are confined to the one sole idea, whether you are aware of it, or not. It is, therefore, in this intentional act that professionals are valued for (1) their ability to equate and reconcile context variables in their intrinsic dynamism, (2) courage and daring to confront routines and norms, (3) gathering of information available as reference (4) awareness of the possibility of change and taste for risk-taking, (5) ethical and creative intelligence, and (6) attention to the interactive relational and communicational flow emerging in the action itself so that they might, ultimately, build up *scenarios* of a proactive and coherent orientation. It is a matter of elaborating feasible, plausible and reliable hypotheses of action, based on an interpretation of reality that seeks to respond to the unpredictability of the event itself⁶, thinking strategically and generating original and, consequently, *non-standard* solutions. From this point of view, one is no longer confined to reproducing and imitating, to repeating patterns and producing uniformity and stagnation. This perspective rather encourages creation and invention, values the experience *memory*, the added value of diversity, of cultures and environments, as well as the dimensions of enchantment that characterize discovery and the quest for knowledge⁷. Schön calls it *artistry* and stresses that this competence is difficult to verbalize as it *surpasses the limits of any model*. It is in this epistemological detail, in this possibility of leaving the models behind, that the idea of *deviation* makes sense, deviation being understood as *diverging from a pattern of behaviour considered appropriate*⁸. The acting of these professionals is viewed as a *Poiesis* or as an activity that interconnects, in the same purpose, knowledge and values of reference, the various types of *input* from the situation, the unknown, and the wonder at each happening, the fears and enchantments associated with them, and yet persist and bring forth, in this *journey*, the illuminated drawing of

⁵ Bronfenbrenner (1979).

⁶ A particular attention to the work contexts in which the author has developed his professional activity as a teacher, trainer and researcher (artistic learning environments such as architecture offices, art and *design* studios, music and dance schools, and sports training and practicing institutions) allows a more detailed understanding of this perspective.

⁷ Without, of course, falling into pure wandering.

⁸ Dicionário infopédia da Língua Portuguesa [«Infopedia Dictionary of Portuguese Language»]. Retrieved December 07, 2018, from: <https://www.infopedia.pt/dicionarios/lingua-portuguesa/desvio>

solutions brought from the future and inscribed there, in the reality and in the instance of each present moment. A deep symbiosis of Science and Art – sciences of *ingenium*⁹, capable of ever new conceptual architectures, if we want to resume, in its essence, the meaning of this concept. As Gil (1998)¹⁰ points out, when he emphasizes, with particular foresight, the importance of creative thinking: whatever field of practice is considered, *no one can replace the poet, handling words, or the architect, comparing projects, or the scientist, struggling to dominate the cognitive dissonance that leads him to investigate – this architect, this poet, this scientist – here and now – nobody in the name of any of them will glimpse the new version of the problem and perhaps its solution. And nothing can force one to want to triumph from a difficulty. (...) the liberty of the conjecture will never be overemphasized: strangely, we are prone to forget it.*

From this point of view, and safeguarding the deeper meaning that is hidden in the wording of a *perchance solution*, the freedom of conjecture, that is, thinking by itself rescues in its essence the idea underlying *poietic* action as the action that, being committed to reality and its transformation through a concrete result, also restores to the subject himself the consciousness of authorship and his radical uniqueness. Within this framework, the identity and the development of the professional as an individual is revalued and recognized, both as a participatory, transformative and responsible citizen, and as an epistemic constructor and producer of knowledge for him/herself and for the social and conceptual contexts that sustain and legitimize his/her intervention. In other words, a personal epistemology that, in the flow of a *silent game*¹¹, merges into an ontology perceived as a possibility of change and of being *otherwise*, within the framework of public epistemologies.

2. On Poetics and deviation

One could always say that the contribution of epistemologists (bringing together the contributions of psychology, ecology, systemic, sociology, philosophy, literature and poetry, the cinema, ethics and/or anthropology itself, to the formulation of new models and approaches) is no more than mere theory, or gets lost in the exercise of conjecture. In this case, it is important to resume and recognize, in Gil's words (1998)¹², the reconnection between the theoretical, *poietic* and *praxic* dimensions of intentional, responsible, and reflected action, leading to a new understanding that emphasizes the meaning and importance of thinking itself as a *poietic* act (...) *so I did not think it inappropriate to consider with you the play of the spirit itself – poietic, practical and theoretical – that the conjecture is.* In the same sense, also Onésimo de Almeida (2013)¹³, reaffirming the

⁹ In Portuguese language, the term *engenho* originates from the Latin "*ingenium*" which means "*genius*", that is, *a natural quality, more specifically of the mind, therefore an intelligent invention.* Dicionário Houaiss da Língua Portuguesa (2002) Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores. So, *sciences of ingenium / ciências do engenho*, correspond, therefore, to the special capacity to conceptualize, imagine and design new configurations for theoretical approaches, models, or tools for action.

¹⁰ In I. Sá-Chaves & J. Arroiteia (2017), *Universidade de Aveiro. Causa Honoris.* (p.189). Universidade de Aveiro: UA Editora.

¹¹ Metaphor used by Schön to distinguish this intrapersonal dimension from the reflection about the *interplay* that defines the universe/plural system of interpersonal relations among all possible actors in a given situation.

¹² In I. Sá-Chaves & J. Arroiteia (2017), *Universidade de Aveiro. Causa Honoris.* (p.189). Universidade de Aveiro: UA Editora.

¹³ In I. Sá-Chaves e J. Arroiteia (2017), *Universidade de Aveiro. Causa Honoris.* (p. 189). Universidade de Aveiro: UA Editora.

inseparable character of the theoretical and pragmatic dimension of knowledge and the primordial epistemic value of knowledge in itself, alerts to the practical meaninglessness of a thought that is not fulfilled in action, and to the bareness of an inconsistent and unfounded action. And he states: *I am fully aware that the construction of an ideal does not imply that it is put into practice, but the truth is that, without it, the starting point will never be surpassed.* It is in this sense that, when it is ethically conscious, shared and situated in its own specific contexts and cultures, the emerging knowledge of reflection on *praxis* can reverse and reinvent those same cultural territories, and thus make possible not only the processes of personal development, but also their extension to a more participatory, more informed and therefore more legitimized and recognizable social and human level. As we have said elsewhere (Sá-Chaves, 2013)¹⁴ about the different types of rationality that inspire the paradigms of training and the ways in which these paradigms potentiate or limit the horizons of being and thinking: *potentialities lie, above all, in the possible reversals of meaning, as in dance, in which weight becomes lightness, flight happens without wings, and the geometries of trajectories, risking imperfect choreographies, draw the memory that it is not illegal to fly, wish, feel, live, die, or to simply imagine. The limitations, as an encounter with the dimension of the unknown, and, therefore, with the not yet intelligible in the relationship between the self and the world, for which, in the slow run of time and incessantly, words and intelligibility are sought.* And, further on, using Gonçalo M. Tavares words, we emphasize that this freedom to create and risk deviations *resumes, redefines and expands the concept of imagination, referring to it, not as ignorance or mere impromptu, but as a different rationality, a free rationality that builds for itself a logic, a methodology.* And it makes it possible to include in the act of imagining the whole experience of creating, of building possible worlds, of thinking and making them realities through action. The author adds that *whoever has few images in his mind has few meanings, and this linguistic poverty, this wording and imaging poverty is a poverty of world.*

3. Concluding

It is, therefore, necessary to rediscover the meaning of *Poetics* as an enriched tool for the understanding, reflection and (self) critical evaluation of the processes of creation and training, adding to the fabric of formal logic and linear causality the silk threads that are the wonder, the flow and the enchantment by which all investigation and search are woven and enriched. And it is also important to risk deviations, inversions and even some degree of transgression because, therein, routes are redrawn, possibilities are opened, meanings are enlarged, sharing is fostered, and the wonder of a *larger* [and better] *world* is established.

4. References

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¹⁴ Sá-Chaves, I. (2013), *Atlas do Corpo e da Imaginação. Teoria, Fragmentos e Imagens: um texto, um olhar, uma leitura* [«Atlas of the Body and Imagination. Theory, Fragments and Images: a text, a look, a reading»] Public presentation of the book *Atlas do corpo e da imaginação. Teoria, Fragmentos e Imagens* by Gonçalo M. Tavares, Aveiro University, December, 18th, in which the author exquisitely rehearses, elaborates and develops a fascinating poetics of deviation. Retrieved December 15, 2018, from: <http://portal.doc.ua.pt/opac/pdf.final.pdf>

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Biographies



Idália Sá-Chaves. Is a retired Associate Professor from the University of Aveiro-Portugal and Doctor in Education in the speciality of Teaching Training and Supervision by the same institution. Assuming a complex approach to I&D, her research interests lie on the intersection of Professional Training and Supervision, and Human Development. She is an integrated researcher of the Research Centre Didactics and Technology in Education of Trainers (CIDTFF), having been a member of the design and coordination team of the centre's Doctoral Program in Education. She collaborates regularly with multiple national and foreign universities, particularly in Spain and Brazil. During the last decade, she has been collaborating with the international post-graduation Program (Doctorate-Master) «Educación Intercultural» at the University of Huelva - Spain. Her vast bibliography includes manifold successively reprinted books, articles in specialized journals, as well as numerous book chapters in the area of Education. She assumed multiple roles in Teaching, Curricular management and Research, having performed various scientific and pedagogical functions. Throughout her career, she has developed, supervised, and coordinated multiple research programs, scientific research networks and doctoral and postdoctoral studies. She is part of multiple editorial committees and integrates manifold national and international scientific societies. She joined the National Council of UNESCO and is an elected member of the Coordinating Council of the Réseau Intelligence de la Complexité (the Programme Européen Modelisation de la Complexité et de l'Association pour la Pensée Complexe (MCX-APC), Paris).