Chapter 4 / Capítulo 4

Teachers under evaluation: the imaginaries of power and fear in Colombian education (English version)
ISBN: 978-9915-9680-5-6
DOI: 10.62486/978-9915-9680-5-6.ch04

Hope and resilience / La esperanza y la resistencia

"There is no change without a dream, just as there is no dream without hope."
— Paulo Freire

The air in the square smells of damp paper and reheated coffee. Teachers are gathered, some holding banners the wind lifts like improvised wings. It is a day of strike, but also of gathering: here we talk, we sing, we recognize the faces that the classroom keeps apart. Amid the noise, someone takes the megaphone and says, "We are not protesting only for our salary, but for the dignity of teaching". The phrase vibrates against the walls like an ancient echo.

That scene —repeated so many times in big cities and small towns— is an act of pedagogical resistance. Not only because it challenges a policy or demands rights, but because it affirms a deeper truth: hope is also a method (Freire, 1997).

To resist, in the world of education, is not only to oppose: it is to keep teaching with meaning when everything pushes toward forgetting, to build community where fear sows competition, to remember that knowledge is a shared territory.

Hope as pedagogical and political act

The teacher arrives early. The cold of dawn still clings to the courtyard, and footsteps echo among chipped murals. In the classroom, before turning on the board, they look at the empty desks and smile. It might be a simple gesture, but in that gesture lies all the politics one could imagine: the decision to keep believing.

Hope, in the teaching profession, is not naïveté; it is method. Freire (1997) insisted that "hope is an ontological need": it is not waiting for something to happen, but committing oneself to make it possible. The teacher who opens the classroom every morning, knowing the system weighs on them, embodies an active hope: that of someone who resists through the very act of teaching.

In a context where the discourse of "quality" tends to neutralize the pedagogical soul, hope becomes counterculture. Decree 1278 (MEN, 2002) promised meritocracy and professionalization, but brought with it fear and competition. In response, hope rises as a counter-dispositive: a way of thinking and acting that does not deny pain, but transforms it into meaningful energy.

Sarmiento Pinzón (2021) argues that the hope of the Colombian teacher is, above all, "*an ethical practice of staying*": staying without giving up, staying as an act of resistance against discouragement, staying to remind society that educating is not producing, but making humanity.

Resisting from the classroom: pedagogies of care and dignity

There are forms of resistance that are not announced with banners, but with gestures. A teacher who chooses to listen before sanctioning. A professor who turns a cold lesson into a living conversation. A principal who makes room for dialogue when everything pushes toward results. Those small actions sustain the school more than any decree.

Foucault (1975/2008) taught that where there is power, there is resistance. Not a grandiloquent resistance, but micro-resistances that slip through the cracks of the everyday. In the classroom, that resistance takes the shape of care: caring for the other, caring for meaning, caring for language. To care, in a system that promotes competition, is a deeply political act.

Bourdieu (1994) would speak here of a *habitus of resistance*: a disposition learned in practice, one that turns teaching into a field of symbolic struggle. Every time a teacher refuses to reduce their work to a rubric, every time they protect the pedagogical relationship over the protocol, they reconfigure the educational field.

Along these lines, Covarrubias and Brito (2007) noted that the social commitment of the Latin American teacher lies precisely in their ability to dignify the profession from within, without letting themselves be devoured by the machinery of control. Resistance is not always shouting: sometimes it is continuing to teach with love when the environment demands coldness.

And yet, resistance is exhausting. Hope is fuel, but not infinite. Therefore, as Román-Acosta (2024) reminds us, the fragility of bonds in liquid modernity forces us to rebuild community again and again. Resistance, without community, wears down; with community, it blooms.

The Colombian teaching profession and collective resistance: from fear to organization

In every strike, every march, every union assembly, the voice of Colombia's teachers has turned pain into a tool of dignity. Crowded streets filled with white smocks, improvised banners, and protest chants are also a form of pedagogy: a public pedagogy that teaches citizenship, justice, and memory.

Bautista (2009) documented how Decree 1278, by fragmenting the teaching career, created internal divisions between veteran and newer teachers. Yet that fragmentation, though painful, also sparked awareness: the realization that only collective organization can counteract precarization. In that sense, resistance is not merely a labor defense act, it is a political exercise in reconstituting the teaching subject.

Freire (1997) warned that freedom is not received; it is won. And it is won collectively. Trade unions, so vilified in neoliberal discourse, have been spaces for the construction of meaning in Colombia. FECODE, for example, does not merely negotiate salaries: it produces discourse, memory, and identity. Assemblies, beyond grievance, are laboratories of pedagogical thought.

Tenorio (2014) underscores that contemporary education policy seeks to "modernize" teaching, yet rarely includes teachers in the discussion. Collective resistance breaks that structural silence. When teachers speak —whether in the streets or in the classroom—, they reconfigure power: they move from being objects of policy to political subjects.

As Castoriadis (1987) would say, to resist is to institute the new. It is not enough to oppose; one must imagine other ways of being a teacher, other ways of community. In that horizon, hope is not waiting: it is invention.

Utopy as everyday practice: Freire, Castoriadis, and the creation of meaning

In education, utopias are not shouted: they are taught. They are taught when a teacher trusts a student everyone else had given up on. They are taught when a lesson is improvised without resources, yet with passion. They are taught when one cares for language amid the noise.

Freire (1997) affirmed that utopia is not an illusion but a direction. Pedagogical hope does not lie in denying difficulty, but in betting on what is possible. *"Hope is not waiting, but walking alongside the other to make the impossible possible"*. In that shared journey, the teacher becomes a sower of the future.

Castoriadis (1987) complements this view by arguing that every society—and every institution—requires instituting imaginaries, new meanings capable of breaking the given order. In teaching, that imaginary can be as simple as redefining what we mean by success: not the grade, but the transformation. Not competition, but cooperation. Not obedience, but consciousness.

In this sense, utopia ceases to be an unreachable horizon and becomes a daily practice. Teaching is, in itself, an act of faith in tomorrow: no one educates without believing that the world can be otherwise. And that belief, in a context where disenchantment has become the norm, is a radical form of resistance.

Popkewitz (1994) noted that educational reforms impose models of subjectivity; yet teachers, through creativity and deviation, rewrite them. Every improvisation, every adjustment, every gesture of freedom in the classroom is a small semantic revolution. This is how utopia stays alive: at the margins, in the everyday, in what escapes the norm.

Between evaluation and hope: the right to imagine another school

Evaluation continues to be the terrain where the tension between control and freedom is played out. Tamayo (2010) showed clearly: in Colombia, teacher evaluation was configured more as an instrument of power than as a tool for improvement. Yet even there, among forms and rankings, teachers have carved out cracks.

Collective self-training, study circles, alternative pedagogical projects, and teacher networks are expressions of that luminous fissure. Bautista (2009) called it "the pedagogy of organized hope": spaces where teachers reclaim knowledge and the right to imagine themselves beyond the norm.

Vygotsky (1978) would remind us that learning is social, that no one grows alone. Teacher evaluation should acknowledge that truth: teaching is not an individual act, but a collective endeavor. Yet while the system remains unchanged, teachers reinvent it from within. Every time a group supports one another to prepare for the exam, every time one colleague explains what they've learned to another, evaluation stops being a threat and becomes a tool for solidarity.

That solidarity is the foundation of hope. As Mejía (2011) notes, "*resistance is not measured by shouting, but by the persistence of tenderness*". And pedagogical tenderness —that willingness to believe in another despite everything— is the ethical core that sustains the school when everything else fails.

Sowing as we teach

When evening falls, the teacher gathers their papers and looks at the empty desks. They know that tomorrow will be the same and yet different: the same questions will return, but with new faces. In that cycle there is something profoundly political: the ability to begin again and again, to sow without seeing the harvest.

Hope is not found in decrees or programs; it lives in the living classroom, in conversation, in shared words. To resist, in this time, is to keep teaching with meaning when everything pushes us to give up.

Freire (1997) was right: "*What kills is not difficulty, but hopelessness*". And perhaps for that, every morning, when the teacher opens the door and writes the first word of the day, with no applause, no speeches, the history of education begins again.