

Fordism and Post-fordism. Social control, and education¹

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Abstract

The present text forms part of a research process implemented to earn the author's master's degree in higher education at the Universidad Santiago de Cali, with the thesis entitled *The Specific Contributions of Virtual Environments to Teaching-learning Processes in University Settings*. It seeks to establish a panorama of the current context in which the university exists as an institution, and the global tendencies that involve economic models as part of educational processes. By way of documentary research, a bibliographic review of various authors who specialize in pedagogy was performed, so as to subsequently implement an analysis of the connections between these forms of work organization, changes in the pedagogical models that are predominant in society at one time or another, and the current higher education quality situation in Colombia. As a central idea, it was found that the apparent transcendence of pedagogical models, based on the *Fordist*-behavioral concept of education, beyond signifying an evolution in educational processes, is a way to reorganize university models to train professionals who are better-adapted to the new *Postfordist-neofordist* industrial systems, and who are less interested in proposing social change or reflections about fairer, more human economic-industrial models.

Key words: Taylorism; Fordism; Post-fordism; Neo-fordism; Pedagogical models; Knowledge society; Networked society.

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1. Introduction

The society of laboring and achievement is not a free society. It generates new constraints. Ultimately the dialectic of master and slave does not yield a society where everyone is free and capable of leisure, too. In this society of compulsion, everyone carries a work camp inside. This labor camp is defined by the fact that one is simultaneously prisoner and guard, victim and perpetrator. One exploits oneself. It means that exploitation is possible even without domination.

Byung-Chul Han in: *The Burnout Society* (2012)

This text seeks to analyze the way in which the administrative structures of *Fordism*, *Post-fordism*, and *Neofordism*, in principle circumscribed to the industrial field, have become the dominant forms of social organization, and have ignited the guidelines of educational systems profoundly, at different times, into the present day. With this goal, and based on documentary research, the analysis of pedagogical theoretical sources are focused upon, so as to pinpoint, with categories, the relationships between types of work organization, the changes to the pedagogical models that predominate in society, and the current situation of higher education quality in Colombia.

For this, the form of social regulation achieved by Taylorist/Fordist organizations during the 1950s and 1960s was used as a starting point. This continued through the 1970s and 1980s, with network or business cooperation models and analysis of the way in which curriculums, evaluations, and quality and flexibility concepts transformed as the administrative paradigm shifted. These changes simultaneously permitted schools to train individuals adapted to the system, and for them to be measured, controlled, and adjusted, such that they fit perfectly into the industrial model, a scheme to which individuals had to conform, at the risk of becoming social pariahs.

2. The magnitude of the various faces of the Fordist-Taylorist paradigm in educational practice

2.1. Work organization types, in function of social order reproduction

Taylorist/Fordist organizations, which were initially ways to organize manufacturing work, became social regulation modes (Hirst & Zeitlin, 1991), which predominated from the end of World War II to the crisis of the 1970s. Based on industrial dynamics, their ways of understanding work became established and ingrained in society, such that, even today, their effects are felt (Hirsch, 1992).

The concept of Taylorism (Taylor, 1911) is a group of techniques and principles that allow work to be analyzed scientifically. For this, a specific task must be broken into smaller parts that form the group of actions necessary to carry it out, as if it were a dissection performed in the natural sciences (Finkel, 1994). Viewed thus, the process is a group of automated actions, in which a specific task, such as shoe manufacture, is performed by different workers. Each one is charged with a different part, without the need for expertise in anything other than their own specialty. Said process seeks to regulate each work segment, and avoid individual initiatives. For this, planning is first separated from execution: some individuals think, and others do. This also permits the creation of work hierarchies and facilitates personnel selection, in accordance with the employee knowledge and education required.

The Fordism concept, which emerged with Henry Ford's management and organization model (1992) in the United States for car manufacture, evolved to become an organizational model implemented in all industrial production. It distances itself from the Taylorist system, in that it creates both increased work regulations and mass consumption, via publicity, in order to promote and create greater demand for the large quantity of products manufactured (Aglietta, 1979).

In this sense, Fordism recycles elements of Taylorism, but outshines it to transform into the dominant production and work organization model. It was able to influence socialization forms and political system structures, to modify the lives and social relationships of the general population. Thus emerged the so-called mass society, interwoven with consumption, with publicity as the driving force to generate the need to consume the products manufactured in factories (Hirsch, 1992). This is a society measured by money, work hierarchization, an economy based on industry and bureaucratic organizations, in which division is both specific and specialized.

The *Postfordism* and *Neofordism* concepts, notably, discuss those work organization types that appear beginning in the 1970s, and which persist today. A number of authors (Piore & Sabel, 1984) refer to *Postfordism* as the period after the great surge in *Fordism*, a time characterized by the ascent of small and medium-sized companies, the diversification and flexibilization of production, and a change in the economy of "...a great company dedicated to creating a great product", to one of companies that produce in networks. Decentralized companies, in which not everything is produced in the same place, where companies that can complement and/or complete production are actively sought out, appeared. This, subsequently, resulted in subcontracting (Hirst & Zeitlin, 1991). However, in the mid-1980s, and especially in the 1990s, the phenomenon took an interesting turn, and instead of falling completely out of use, the *Fordist* model renewed itself. Networked firms were absorbed by large corporations, monopoly and "large corporations" became the symbol of this new *Fordist* surge, that earned the name *Neofordism* (Ferruci & Varaldo, 1993).

Both *Postfordism* and *Neofordism* generated changes in production that affected society as a whole. The Fordism crisis was apparent, but what seemed to be its end was merely a time of transformation, in which the networks through which it would later transit were established. These networks began to meet needs that large companies did not, and were

embraced as *outsourcing* companies. The networked firm was thus formed, in organizations that flexibilized their productivity to satisfy diverse consumers with varying tastes. With these new firms, companies saw the need for a new type of worker (Piore & Sabel, 1984). In this new paradigm, workers did not specialize in the manufacture of a single part of a product. They were required to be polyvalent and multifunctional. However, employees had to work overtime, as they had lost many rights that had been won by *Fordist*-era unions. They were exploited, with low salaries or sub-contracts on the verge of illegality (Reta, 2009). It was the new world order, the new era of globalization, in which cheap manual labor was offered worldwide. This paradigm demanded both a new type of employer and employee, one that could not have been trained in schools of the time.

2.2. School and reproduction of the *Taylorist/Fordist* paradigm

The *Taylorist/Fordist* paradigms straddled the limits of administration and functioned as regulating societal principles, permeating thus both secondary and higher education systems (Hirsch, 1992). In careers such as administration, engineering, technical training, and of “qualified” workers, said principles were rapidly adopted. As such, a specific, profit-driven viewpoint of education emerged: “...that invested is earned” (Monteiro, 1996).

In Latin America, technocrats and behaviorists thought of students as empty beings without knowledge, who, by completing a curriculum (assimilating the *Fordist* conveyor belt), would be filled up with the knowledge (parts) necessary to graduate and become a finished product that was useful to society (Fingerman, 2011). These paradigms finally gained the ground necessary to steer elementary, secondary, and higher education. A “useful product” was sought, one which possessed the abilities required for the corporate jobs available. Some were prepared to design, plan, and think, or for management jobs, and other workers, were taught to develop, implement, and do. Education adopted basic principles from scientific organizations, such as segmenting knowledge, positive and negative reinforcement, control of individual student performance, and evaluation as a quality control process (Varela & Álvarez-Uría, 1991). Schools themselves trained students in obedience, observance of norms, the discipline imposed by an all-powerful “boss” (the teacher), and the fear of losing (failing the year/losing their job), and being a failure. This is clearly reflected in the film *The Wall* (Parker, 1982), based on the British rock band *Pink Floyd*’s album, with the same name. In one of the film’s shots, a direct reference is made to the *Fordist* industrial model, with a string of students on a conveyor belt that takes them to a tank, into which the students fall and are made into ground beef, an industrial product. School educated (and educates) for the market, industry, and thus, with time, the universities created are forged by industrial consortiums (ICESI and EAFIT, in Colombia), and private universities align themselves with technocratic models, seeking the best way to position their graduates in the market. Said market seeks well-behaved workers who ask few questions, and fulfil their duties as instructed.

Another audiovisual portrait of this *Fordist* society was created by filmmaker Terry Gilliam (1985) in his film *Brazil*, in which Sam Lowry, a worker that has to fill in forms all day, in a hy-

perbolically industrialized society, wishes to leave that world and find a woman who appears in his dreams. However, his daily tasks and systemic oppression prevent this, in the same way that the technocratic/conductist educational system that educates workers for industrial society dashed his dreams, differences of opinion, and the possibility of emancipation. It is the perpetuation of the *status quo* as well as the capital that are difficult to change, because some are educated to lead, and others to follow.

2.3. School and high quality (quality control)

The appearance of *Postfordism* in the 1980s coincides (not fortuitously) with the Latin American surge of constructivist educational models, whose proposals tend to have a student create their knowledge themselves, to be able to learn and relearn in context, and be able to perform, once processes have been learned (Fajnzyilver, 1992). Educational discourse began to educate a different kind of student, but not one any less apt for industry. Concepts like teamwork, respect, tolerance, self-evaluation, and quality standards began to form part of the educational discourse of the time. Education recycles elements of constructivism and cognitivism (Ginsburg, 1977), conserving certain conductist model foundations. This model hybridization, in which rigid curricula coexist peacefully, utilizes education schemes for credits, or constructivist pedagogies, in the classroom. These include flexible thought, self-improvement discourse, of the competencies which involve students (to be responsible, culpable) in their own education (Varela & Álvarez, 1991). More malleable workers are educated in this way, to perform various functions at once, and constantly learn new functions. They are competent in various settings, with the ability to work in teams to accelerate and improve production, with various people who function with a specific purpose. – A worker, in accordance with the new type of company, is polyvalent, and thinks flexibly (Reta, 2009). In high-quality discourse, the student/worker is responsible for their own knowledge/productivity. Students who become employees who do not watch the clock, and work more hours because they must comply with specific tasks that, in practice, require more time than the company allots.

The competencies and discourse model is integrated into quality standards, qualified registries, and national and international accreditation. Measurement based on several specific topics which can be homologized nationally and internationally is proposed (Reta, 2009). Universities are free to determine their IEPs, but the state defines those contents most appropriate for communicators, administrators, or psychologists to know. If universities adhere to this model, their students may form part of global communities, participate in exchanges, and be more capable in a globalized world (Colella & Díaz-Salazar, 2015), a world in which the concept of quality is passed from business practices to the educational field (Fernández-Enguita, 1990), where educational institutions may be considered and evaluated as productive businesses, whose goods are properly-educated students who are prepared for a globalized world, and consequently, their practices must be submitted to the same evaluation criteria applied to all dynamic, efficient, and flexible companies (Gentili, 1996).

3. Conclusions

Following the bibliographic review, a constant historic incidence of these forms of work organization, in the educational models implemented in different countries, including Latin America, was established. The *Fordist* model, adapted in countries such as Mexico, Chile, and Colombia, from the beginning of the 20th century, was easily incorporated into scholastic conductist pedagogical models that the Catholic church had established on the continent. The arrival of Postfordism, for industrial organization, brought with it the receptivity of educational models to more flexible constructivist models that permitted less rigid education, although not one that was any less meant to train and educate for the industrial system. Finally, *Neofordism* was established as the dominant form of industrial organization in the so-called knowledge society (Castells, 1998), permeating universities with quality discourse from the business point of view. Today's university was thus conformed, with academic attitudes adapted from productivity discourse (Colella & Díaz-Salazar, 2015).

Educational institutions began to be measured by quality standards, as were companies from the productive sector. Students became clients, and professors administrators, service providers. Within this dynamic, which initially seeks quality as a concept and objective, academic spaces for reflection, professorial group thought, are lost, and the university becomes just another company (Fingerman, 2011). Professors become employees measured by compliance indicators and management reports, in which innumerable activities are established, many of them administrative, and with little relation to the true professorial role. *Neofordism*, immerse in the so-called networked society (Castells, 2000), established a globalized setting in which the speed, rush, and abundance of work, exhaustion, has become the human condition of the time (Brum, 2016). The university, which forms part of the culture (Vygotsky, 1953), is not separate from today's reality, and is caught up in the race to be the most productive, with ever more presentations, more papers, more activities. One finds oneself working 24 hours a day, seven days a week, connected to WhatsApp, Facebook, and responding to questions and requests. It would seem that the work day is interminable, and approaches that which Korean philosopher, Byung-Chul Han (2012), would call the burnout society. Time and intimacy are voluntarily surrendered, to life without pause, without necessary intermediaries to reflect and/or analyze the different and ever-more diverse contexts between which we move.

Neofordism, then, may be said to have twisted this apparent flexibility into the worker's own self-control, through which they comply with the requirements of their job. The university is very much immersed in this reality, and is today at a crossroad, where it must stop and analyze the route to transit. It must be clear that, in a world in which education is designed to reproduce the system, it must fight to propose social change, emancipation, and reflection on a more just, more humane economic/industrial system. Although education is not the only factor that plays a role in the determination, preservation, and perpetuation of social control systems, it is among the most important. The political, economic, and social fields constantly seek ways to reformulate, renew, and reestablish the imposed order through education.

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