

## THE EDUCATIONAL PRINCIPLE OF WORK: HUMAN EMANCIPATION AND ALIENATION IN THE CAPITALIST CONTEXT



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### ABSTRACT

The research addresses the ontological dimension of work and its relationship with alienation in capitalist society, highlighting work as the foundation of human existence. The general objective is to analyze the theory of the educational principle of work and its relationship with the process of human emancipation. The proposed hypotheses suggest that work, as an educational principle, acts in the two dimensions of education – adaptation and emancipation – integrating science, culture and work, while, in the capitalist context, alienated work reinforces adaptation and limits the emancipatory discussion of education. To investigate these issues, the methodology used consists of a literature review of classic authors of historical-dialectical materialism and contemporaries, with a critical reflection on the relations between work and education. The main results indicate that work, in addition to its ontological dimension, has an educational perspective that integrates science, culture and work, being essential in educational training.

**Keywords:** Ontological Dimension of Work. Alienation. Educational Principle of Work. Human Emancipation.

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to analyze the scope of the theory of the educational principle of work and its bias with the process of human emancipation. In this analysis, the ontological dimension of work and also the form of alienated labor in capitalist society are highlighted. What is intended to be demarcated is work as the foundation of human existence, considering that the human being is characterized by the proportion in which he produces his own existence through his needs.

For this reason, the central category of this study is work as an educational principle, guiding the processes of humanization and historical updating of the human being itself. Thus, in order to discover some elements, reflections were made on the texts of the classic authors of historical-dialectical materialism and some contemporaries that allowed us to discuss the category for the analysis of the relations between work and education. The guiding hypotheses of the analysis were as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Work is established as an educational principle, considering education in its double dimension – adaptation and emancipation – because it is a praxis that includes, as one of its foundations, the integration between science, culture and work.

Hypothesis 2: Work, in its social formation of capitalism, by instituting itself as alienated labor, reinforces the sense of adaptation and imposes limits on the emancipatory discussion of education.

The methodology used for this research is based on the literature review of classic and contemporary authors, considering that a theoretical and critical reflection promotes original content and important questions about the object of research (Minayo, 2012). The assumptions that guided the authors' choice lie in the centrality of work in their works and the discussions about the social being, as well as resistance to the forms of resistance to the excluding system.

At first, the category of work as an educational principle will be investigated from the perspective of the contradictory position of work, both in its ontological dimension, and of alienated work in classical studies Marx (1989; 2006) in his Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts and in Book I of Capital, highlighting chapters V and VIII, Lukács (1981) in the Ontology of Social Being and Gramsci's Notebook 12 and Notebook 22 (2000). A second axis of investigation will consider this same context to ascertain the educational principle of work in the studies of some contemporary authors, such as: Saviani (2007), Ciavatta (2005), Ramos (2005) and Macário (2001).

To highlight this discussion, it is necessary to clarify the category of work and what is meant by alienated work. As already indicated, the ontological dimension of work consists in the production of human existence from work, that is, a constant becoming provoked by work called human becoming. It is necessary to deepen that there is implicit in this process the historical dimension, the transformation that is produced by the relations between work and culture.

On the other hand, alienated labor is characterized by the expropriation of the worker's knowledge. In other words, the product manufactured by the worker does not belong to the worker, and the worker has no control over the work process, that is, he does not decide what or how and when to produce, there is inherent in this relationship the absence of control in relation to the process and the product of work.

The question that arises in this study is that this contradiction can generate resistance to forms of alienation, and the very doing of work leads to a knowledge of alienation. It is in this movement that the two hypotheses for the problematization in the context of the relations between work and education are sustained.

## **KARL MARX AND WORK AS AN EDUCATIONAL PRINCIPLE: AN ATTEMPT AT APPROXIMATION**

The assumption that guided the analysis of Karl Marx's Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts (1989) consists of the reiteration of theoretical aspects about the educational principle of work. In this way, based on the two hypotheses already highlighted, the objective is to argue with concrete elements passages in the First Manuscript that provide inferences of proof and/or denial of such hypotheses.

The category of work discussed throughout the Manuscript is emphasized as an essential aspect of comparison with the category of educational principle defended by Antônio Gramsci (2000). In the Marxist perspective, work is ontological, that is, the way in which human beings produce their conditions of existence, therefore, work is a founding assumption of human becoming, constituting itself as an educational principle.

When discussing the wage of labor, Karl Marx (1989, p.101) points out that, with the growing division of labor and the advancement of machinery, the worker is reduced physically and spiritually to the condition of a machine. It is then in this relationship that the worker becomes dependent on fluctuations in the current price, in the employment of capital and in the determinations of the hegemonic class.

This means that the human being, when he sees himself in the condition of a machine, becomes aware of himself and his work, which makes it possible to know something more about his reality. This process favors the awareness of a portion of the alienation of their work. On the other hand, the dependence generated by this relationship characterizes the dimension of adaptation of the worker to the conditions that are imposed by capitalist society. Therefore, in the analysis of this idea, the educational principle of work is highlighted, where the very doing of work leads to a degree of knowledge, affirming the hypothesis that emphasizes the double dimension of adaptation or emancipation work.

This same debate allows the reflection of another hypothesis that contemplates alienated labor in the social formation of capitalism, reinforcing the sense of adaptation and imposing limits on emancipatory education.

In the last part of the First Manuscript, XXI, (p.157) Marx precisely proposes to unveil alienated labor. The author's considerations make it possible to identify that in the incorporation of new standards this dichotomous reinforcement is evidenced, as for example, in the process of organization and circulation, with new materials and processes, new organization, division and management of labor, changes in technology, among other factors. For better clarification, it is necessary to highlight Karl Marx's discussion at the beginning of the theme on alienated labor, where he refers to private property, the separation of labor, capital and land, the division of labor, confinement, labor that descends to the level of a commodity, affirming this second hypothesis.

Expanding the above argument, it is possible to conclude that the process of adaptation and emancipation happens at the same time, especially in education, so alienated work in its contradictions can generate resistance, leading the worker to a knowledge of the alienation of work, which explains the educational principle of work.

In the second Manuscript, when discussing the relationship of private property, Marx considers that the logical aspect of private property is separation, that is, the inventions of humanity, such as the products of labor, although they are part of the human essence, through alienation<sup>2</sup> man finds himself separated from the object. In other words, nature and technology become private property.

In view of these considerations, alienation, by separating the human being and the object, produces the awareness that the subject is something distinct from the totality. In

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<sup>2</sup> Alienation, in the Marxist conception, can be described as a process of dehumanization, where the worker not only disconnects from his work, but also from nature (Souza; Oliveira, 2024, p. 5873).

this regard, Marx (1989, p. 174) explains that: "Production does not only produce man as a commodity, the human commodity, man in the form of a commodity; according to such a situation, product still as a spiritually and physically dehumanized being".

Such a discussion brings the reflection on the second hypothesis closer, based on the principle that the considerations developed by Marx allow us to analyze that the conditions imposed by alienated labor promote such a great adaptation to capitalist forms that they suppress the possibilities of resistance of the working class.

At the same time, the author highlights the contradiction between the apogee and decline of this relationship (1989, p.175), and it is possible to glimpse forms of opposition to the legitimation of capitalist exploitation. In the face of this contradiction, it is possible to contemplate work as an educational principle. In other words, work is constituted as an educational principle when it generates in the subject a degree of resistance to alienation.

Expanding this debate in the third Manuscript, when referring to private property and labor, Marx (1989, p. 183) emphasizes the relationship between the subject and the object as one of the elements of objectivity, a prerequisite for the discussion of private property and the alienation of labor.

In this line of considerations, the discussion of the first hypothesis becomes pertinent when the private property object becomes foreign to man, being, therefore, a foreign and non-human object, where his manifestation of life is converted into his alienation of life

The double character of work is manifested by reinforcing indications that sometimes the educational principle presents itself as a means of adaptation, sometimes as a potential for emancipation. In short, work remains ontological in capitalist society, because the consciousness of alienation produces a change in the subject both in his existence as a social being and in his individual expression.

In the same direction, in "Capital", Marx (2006), Chapter V, when discussing the labor process or the process of producing use values, provides some elements to deepen the debate about the initial hypotheses from the perspective of labor as an educational principle.

First of all, work is a process in which man and nature participate, a process in which the human being, with his own action, drives, regulates and controls his material exchange with nature. It faces nature as one of its strengths. He sets in motion the natural forces of his body – arms and legs, head and hands – in order to appropriate the resources of nature, giving them a form useful to human life. By thus acting upon external nature and modifying it, he at the same time modifies his

own nature. It develops the potentialities dormant in it and submits to its domination the play of natural forces. (MARX, 2006, p. 211)

In this excerpt, we can infer that there is underlying this process of the nature of human work the confirmation of the first hypothesis, because through work the individual develops his potentialities and thus imprints a useful form to human life, being able to generate emancipation.

Further on, Marx (2006) provides us with some clues for the discussion of the second hypothesis, that is, the process of adaptation in the form of alienated labor, he states:

The worker works under the control of the capitalist, to whom his labor belongs. The capitalist sees to it that the work is carried out in a proper manner and that the means of production are properly applied, that raw materials are not wasted and that the instruments of labour are spared, so that only what is necessary for the performance of the work is expended on them. (Marx, 2006, p.219)

The worker works under the control of the capitalist, the labor force and everything he produces also in this process, production has specificities, what was an idea materializes in the product. The worker, therefore, although he incorporates labor in the manufacture of goods, does not appropriate the result. This set of elements confirms the second hypothesis where adaptation occurs in alienated labor.

In chapter VIII, it is stated about the Working Hours:

On the other hand, the specific nature of the commodity sold imposes a limit on the consumption by the buyer, and the worker asserts his right, as a seller, when he wants to limit the working day to a certain normal magnitude. Between equal and opposite rights, force decides. Thus, the regulation of the working day is presented, in the history of capitalist production, as a struggle for the limitation of the working day, a clash that is waged between the capitalist class and the working class. (MARX, 1989, p.273)

Reality as a synthesis of multiple determinations and the effective conditions of exploitation reinforce resistance and point to possibilities. In this sense, the educational dimension of external work becomes something internal, the perspective of work as an element of human formation. The double dimension external to the individual and internal to him/herself, generates the process of transformation in and with the other, whether in the sense of adaptation or in the sense of emancipation; For any human practices that lead to social transformation, lead to a transformation in the individual.



## WORK AS AN EDUCATIONAL PRINCIPLE IN GEORG LUKÁCS AND ANTONIO GRAMSCI

By analyzing the historical forms of capitalism, one can discuss the creative act of labor (ontological) and alienation. Lukács (1981) constructed an analysis of the ontological question, how the human being is made through work.

From this point of view, Lukács (1981) clarifies that the subjective dimension of the formation of the social being is based on the doing of work, without disregarding the historical conditions of the particular social formation.

For this author, therefore, human objectification is characterized by the transformation of the objectivity of the object and the subjectivity of the subject. However, the subject becomes capable of transforming his own objectivity, what lies between the subject and the object, that is, the path and/or process is called social ontology.

Based on this conception, Lukács (1981) argues that the work of a teleological activity, oriented towards an end, with the teleological putting existing at<sup>3</sup> the moment of projection, of the ideation that precedes the act of work, constituting an original phenomenon of life in society, of the social being.

It is this complexity that involves the discussions in the text *The Work* of Georg Lukács in the work "*Towards an ontology of social being (1981)*" where the contribution of his writings to discuss the emancipatory and adaptation character of work will be analyzed.

The emphasis is placed on the form originated from work, an ontological condition where the social being is capable of intervening in the external world and transforming it. Thus Lukács argues:

On the contrary, the essence of human labor lies in the fact that, in the first place, it is born in the midst of the moon by the self-activity of man. [...] and simpler than it may seem at first sight: all the other categories of this form of being have, essentially, already a social character, their properties and their modes of operating only unfold in the already constituted social being; any manifestations of them, even if they are very primitive, presuppose the leap as it has already happened. Only labor has, as its ontological essence, a clear intermediate character: it is essentially an interrelation between man (society) and nature [...] (1981, p. 3)

Thus, we have social labor, as an element of mediation between man and nature, a unifying element of all men, which becomes a dimension and characteristic of social beings. Lukács (1981) states that the ontological leap happens through work, with a unity of the subject with society, where he can enjoy human production. In this argument, the

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<sup>3</sup> In the work of Lukács (1981), teleological is understood as that which is considered to constitute the will

products are external to man, but constitutive of the human, this reveals an emancipatory character of work, proving the first hypothesis.

In his narrative, Lukács (1981) defines the capacity for subjectivation, when the subject transforms there is objectification. This reveals the consciousness of a stone can have a human end. In short, work never ceases to exist, the ontological dimension has no end. To this end, it discusses the physical, chemical, and biological point of view to represent the transformation of man. Lukács argues that by transforming himself as a species, it is not only in the social that man transforms, but transforms the human species itself. What happens in a certain social group is not only in that group, the leap is universalizing, being attributed to the species, reinforcing the emancipatory character.

When referring to work as a model of social praxis, Lukács (1981) states that not even in the reproduction of one's own existence is the dimension of consciousness lost; Even in reproduction, work is still a generator of consciousness. However, the subject is increasingly alienated by the productive force, but even in alienated labor the emancipatory character is not lost.

In another excerpt, one can think of the second hypothesis of this research:

In the first place, every teleological position is ultimately socially determined, and the position of labor is very clearly determined by necessity, the appeal of which no science can ever completely get rid of. [...] As for the less direct connections, the worker may even have the most erroneous ideas; What matters is that there is a correct reflection of the most immediate connections, that is, that those ideas do not hinder the success of the work process (relationship between primitive work and magic). (LUCACKS, 1981 p.50)

For capital, it is immaterial whether the individual is conscious or not of his objectified work. Unawareness reinforces the permanence of the conditions of exploitation. In this way, magic is considered to show that it does not matter what the work is for, in order not to generate any awareness of the doing of the work.

Further on, the author highlights:

Today, at a time when the great development of the sciences would objectively make a correct ontology possible, it is even more evident that the ontological false consciousness in the scientific field and its spiritual influence have their roots in the dominant social needs. (Lukács, 1981, p.54)

It happens that, in complex work, objectivity is not perceived, it is continuous, but less emancipatory. In simple work and in objectified work this differentiation can be verified. In more complex work, of complex production, the objectivity of the work is less visible, that



is, the less the worker sees what his work is for (usefulness). On a large scale, objectivity is more distant and generates a lower degree of consciousness, closer to the second hypothesis, the subjective degree of consciousness.

Finally, it is worth talking about the studies of Antônio Gramsci (2000). It is necessary to consider, however, that the structure of the Prison Notebooks consists of reading notes, essay sketches made by the author. Gramsci (2000) sees the relationship between party and society as close, working with a historical bloc so as not to deal with a linear rupture, considering the permanent history made with continuities and ruptures.

For Gramsci (2000), the revolution must be cultural in the form of thought, analyze the political parties, where education is the material basis, principle dialogues with work and culture. In Notebook 12, the author demonstrates concern with the school, which is the bearer of the counter-hegemony, of the organic intellectual. It associates two main ideas: intellectuals and hegemony.

Hegemony consists of the construction of economic legitimacy, acquiring legitimacy in the face of the power of the material base. For example, the emergence of a set of ideas and social practices, which have legitimacy and legality, considering the political, cultural, and legal elements.

The social classes create a group of intellectuals to confirm this *status* of legitimacy. The organic intellectual is fundamental in the construction of a certain hegemony of a social class. In this way, the importance of the school appears, as the place where the different categories of intellectuals are formed. Gramsci (2000a) clarifies that man does not stop the intellectual from thinking and acting, but not everyone in society plays the role of intellectual.

Oliveira et.al (2024), emphasizes that for Gramsci it is essential to guarantee not only the technical mastery of knowledge, but the scientific principles and their processes. For him, as long as education was focused on the interests of the capitalist system, it would not produce critical knowledge about the reality of workers, restricting the possibility of becoming leaders in society.

Returning to the initial questions, the first hypothesis can be discussed, highlighting the following excerpt from Gramsci (2000a):

The crisis will have a solution that, rationally, should follow this line: a single initial school of general, humanistic, formative culture, which fairly balances the development of the ability to work manually (technically, industrially) and the development of intellectual work capacities (Gramsci, 2000a, p. 33).

Expanding this argument, the author points to the creative relationship between work and school:

The relation of such educational schemes to the childish spirit is always active and creative, as is the relation between the worker and his working utensils; also a system of measurement is a set of abstractions, but it is impossible to produce real objects without measurement, real objects that are social relations and that contain implicit ideas (Gramsci, 2000a., p. 51).

The unitary School, mentioned by Gramsci (2000a), is guided by the educational principle of work. To overcome the dual model, the author proposes the unitary school disinterested because it is not organic to capitalism. Unitary, unique, in the sense of union between science and work, technique and work.

When referring to Americanism and Fordism, in Notebook 23, Gramsci (2000b) makes it possible to discuss the first and second hypotheses. Another highlight of the work suggests the second hypothesis.

On the other hand, it is necessary to forward this regulation and the creation of a new perspective. It should be noted how the industrialists (especially Ford) became interested in the sexual relations of their employees and, in general, in the organization of their families; The appearance of 'puritanism' assumed by this interest (as in the case of prohibitionism) must not lead to erroneous evaluations, the truth is that the new type of man required by the rationalization of production and labor cannot be developed until the sexual instinct is adequately regulated, it is also rationalized. (GRAMSCI, 2000b, p. 252)

This process allows us to identify that the rationality of work in its complex form in capitalism is configured in the mutilation of the corporeality and spirituality of work, being historical consequences of alienated work. From these statements, Gramsci makes us understand that even in alienated labor that expropriates the worker's knowledge, there are elements for overcoming alienation.

When talking about animality and industrialism, Gramsci (2000b) ponders:

Here the first forms of serfdom of the land, of the professions, etc., are inserted. Up to now, all changes in the way of being and living have taken place through brutal coercion, that is, through the domination of a social group over all the productive forces of society: the selection or education of the man suited to the new types of civilization, that is, the new forms of production and work, has taken place with the use of unprecedented brutalities, by throwing the weak and the refractory into the hell of the underclasses, or by eliminating them entirely. (p. 262)

In this situation, Gramsci (2000b) denies the second hypothesis even though he refers to the rationalization of production and work, because even in the perspective of alienated labor there are underlying mechanisms for intellectual activity<sup>1</sup>. Because of this, the first hypothesis can be seen as work in its double dimension.

With regard to this first hypothesis, Gramsci (2000b, p. 272) deepens that in the same way that the subject does not need to reflect on his movements to move, the same can happen in industry with the fundamental gestures of the craft and at the same time one can think of everything one wants.

Faced with this possibility of thought, of the freedom to reflect and become aware of the conditions of exploitation of labor by capitalist society, Gramsci attributes to education the means by which the human being can acquire the conditions of humanization and, therefore, of emancipation.

## **CONTEMPORARY AUTHORS AND THE DISCUSSION ON WORK AS AN EDUCATIONAL PRINCIPLE**

Another parallel for the analysis is the productions on the educational principle of the work of some contemporary authors. Ciavatta (2005) in the text *Work as an educational principle in contemporary society*, describes the humanizing and creative dimension of work, confirming the first hypothesis by referring to work as a praxis that contains science, culture and work in its foundations. This inference can be seen in the following quote:

Human work is carried out, it is concretized in things, objects, shapes, gestures, words, colors, sounds, in material and spiritual achievements. The human being creates and recreates the elements of nature that are around him and gives them new shapes, new colors, new meanings. (Ciavatta, 2005, p. 2)

At the same time, Ciavatta (2005) brings us closer to the reflection of the second hypothesis, as he uses the writings of Lukács to point out work in its historical dimension, clarifying that the production of human existence and the acquisition of consciousness happen through work: "Work is the structuring basis of a new type of being, of a new conception of history (Ciavatta, 2005, p.3).

In a second axis, it presents the consequences of alienated work and the process of adaptation that it imposes on the worker, limiting the conditions of emancipation: "[...] in view of the need for an increasing number of unemployed people or in itinerant, precarious

jobs, offer them the opportunity for some learning and make them responsible for creating new forms of work [...]" (Ciavatta, 2005, p. 4)

Macário (2001, p.9) in the text *Ontological determinations of education, a reading in the light of the category of work*, reinforces the first hypothesis by noting that work is the creative moment of consciousness, so by and in work, from the ontological point of view, the human being mediates with nature and with himself.

It is interesting to note that Macário (2001, p.13), when discussing the identity of education, points to the finding of the second hypothesis that considers the adaptive character of alienated labor, mentioning that education discriminatorily privileges cultural wealth, which is provided to the ruling classes. To the workers, education is offered in a trickle, in a minimum dose to be governed.

Ramos (2005, p. 107) in his text *Possibilities and challenges in the organization of the integrated curriculum*, leads us to our first hypothesis emphasizing that: "Apprehending the meaning of teaching contents implies recognizing them as historically constructed knowledge that is constituted for the worker, in assumptions from which new knowledge can be built [...]". Thus, he glimpses, with Gramscian theory as a horizon, the possibility of overcoming through the educational process.

Ramos (2005) analyzes professional education and finds that it reinforces the adaptive character of individuals, and it is for this reason that he proposes a form of coping, which according to the author is contemplated in the proposal of Integrated High School, where training articulates work, science and culture, making the process of emancipation viable.

Finally, Saviani (2007) works from the perspective of generic work, that is, of the human race, so the first hypothesis is constantly referred to in his text *Work and education, ontological and historical foundations*, as it considers work in its double dimension.

Saviani (2007, p.154) explains: "If human existence is not guaranteed by nature, it is not a natural gift, but has to be produced by men themselves [...]. Therefore, the production of man is, at the same time, the formation of man, an educational process."

Saviani (2007) highlights how the new form of production of human existence, industrialization, was decisive in the reorganization of classes, and also evaluates that specific qualifications and machinery introduced demands directly related to the needs of the productive system in the world of work and in the educational sphere. In this way, there

was a proposal and the legitimization of a structural dualist school, that is, professional schools for workers and a school of sciences and humanities for future leaders.

This context expressed by Saviani (2007) fits into the reflection of the second hypothesis, considering that the dual school reinforces the adaptation of the subjects, each within their class perspective.

In summary, contemporary authors contribute to thinking critically about the need to understand the ontological dimension of work, but also to perceive the contradictions of alienated work, as it presents itself in capitalist society influencing educational objectives.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In summary, the assumptions that guided the analysis of this text in the theoretical plane from the perspective of work as an educational principle, show that sometimes it is possible to understand work in its double dimension of adaptation and emancipation, sometimes it presents itself as adaptation limiting the possibilities of emancipation.

The authors studied, both classical and contemporary, dialogue with these two hypotheses in their texts, however, by way of conclusion, it is contemplated that even in alienated work, work is an educational principle because it provides elements to individuals so that they can become aware of the alienation imposed on them by capitalism.

What was possible to observe is that Marx's objective (1989; 2006) went to study labor in capitalism, making a critique of political economy. Therefore, Marx (1989/2006) considers that work has always been historical, understanding its ontological dimension, the ontological character. However, the author also understands the existence of work that weakens in the sense of alienation.

Lukács (1981) advances in the discussion about the ontological character of the social being, and states that without the human being there is no humanity. Thus, in the work of Lukács (1981) the affirmation of the first hypothesis becomes more evident, as he considers that in each historical moment there is being and the duty to be implied in the relationship with the object.

Based on this conception, it is believed that in the face of a problem, man produces answers and new needs arise, there is a constant, not static, day-to-day process. Work, in this perspective, is a mediated relationship.

This formulation is reinforced, from a scientific point of view, by Gramsci (2000), as he considers it essential to educate each individual through work. For Gramsci (2000), even alienated labor has an educational dimension.

Gramsci (2000a) defends work as an educational principle, proposing a school that integrates two elements: science and technique; technique and work. Work is seen as an organizer, as a science, not as an abstraction, but as something that derives from labor relations. This training, for Gramsci (2000a) would give the subject the conditions to become a leader, technician and politician. In this rationality, for Gramsci (2000a) the possibility of freedom would be posed.

It is in this movement that it becomes possible to verify the ontological dimension of work and its educational perspective, considering education in its double dimension – adaptation and emancipation – as it is a praxis that includes, as one of its foundations, the integration between science, culture and work.

In this set of factors, work is an important element in educational training because it has a theoretical-practical sense capable of intervening in the integration between work and education.

In summary, in capitalist society, which favors the process of alienation and adaptation, it is necessary to create an educational process that integrates science and technique from the principle of work, so that the articulation between science, culture and work can be established.



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