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THE PEDAGOGICAL VALUE OF NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES IN LEARNING

El valor pedagógico de las experiencias negativas en el aprendizaje

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ABSTRACT

Phenomenological pedagogy focuses on experience and posits that learning originates from it. This idea, already present in Gadamer's work, is taken up by Günther Buck, who asserts that every negative experience entails an increase in learning. This article revisits the dialogue between them and extends it by offering a phenomenological description of the negative experiences encountered in learning. Phenomena such as irritation or frustration are analyzed in order to highlight the passive or *pathic* nature of these experiences. This characteristic shows them as moments in which the subject is affected during the learning process. It is precisely in this aspect that the productivity of the negative experience lies, as it transforms the subject by affecting him and demanding that he relearns.

Furthermore, this article will address the question of whether practice and exercise can be considered experiences in the aforementioned sense. While Buck denies this, Malte Brinkmann provides the foundation to affirm the variability of practice, its transformative effects on the subject, and, consequently, its *pathic* and experiential nature.

The results of this article demonstrate that understanding learning and practice as experiences emphasizes the processual nature of learning. This, on the one hand, enables understanding of learning as a process that involves setbacks and interruptions, and, on the other hand, encourages the recognition of moments of error or frustration as inherent elements of the learning process.

Keywords: learning; learning by experience; exercise; phenomenology; hermeneutics.

RESUMEN

La pedagogía fenomenológica se enfoca en la experiencia y plantea que el aprendizaje tiene su origen en ella. Esta idea, ya presente en Gadamer, es retomada por Günther Buck, que afirma que cada experiencia negativa implica un incremento de enseñanza. Este artículo retoma el diálogo entre ellos y lo amplía ofreciendo una descripción fenomenológica de las experiencias negativas que hacemos al aprender. Se analizan fenómenos como la irritación o la frustración con el objetivo de evidenciar el carácter pasivo o *pathico* de estas experiencias. Este carácter las muestra como momentos en los que el sujeto es afectado en el aprendizaje. Precisamente en ello reside la clave de la productividad de la experiencia negativa, que transforma al sujeto, en tanto que lo conmueve y le exige reaprender.

Asimismo, el presente artículo resolverá la cuestión de si la práctica y el ejercicio se pueden considerar experiencias en el sentido mencionado, ya que si bien Buck lo niega, Malte Brinkmann ofrece las bases para afirmar la variabilidad de la práctica, sus efectos transformativos en el sujeto y, por lo tanto, su carácter *pathico* y experiencial.

Los resultados de este artículo muestran que entender el aprendizaje y la práctica como experiencias permite subrayar el carácter procesual del aprendizaje. Esto posibilita, por un lado, entender el aprendizaje como un proceso en el que se dan retrocesos e interrupciones, y, por otro, propicia que se dé espacio a los momentos de error o frustración en tanto que elementos inherentes del proceso de aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje; aprendizaje por experiencia; ejercicio; fenomenología; hermenéutica.

1. INTRODUCTION

Phenomenology is a branch of philosophy that has influenced many other disciplines, such as psychology, medicine, and pedagogy. The latter is a particularly interesting relationship, because the founding authors of phenomenology had expressed an explicit interest in pedagogical concepts. Such is the case of Eugen

Fink, Otto Bollnow, and Günther Buck who, among others, are representative of what we now call phenomenological pedagogy, a current that already spans 100 years and which has been especially fruitful in recent times thanks to Malte Brinkmann's leadership in the recovery of its sources (Brinkmann, 2019, p. 2).

Like phenomenology, phenomenological pedagogy is a discipline that originates in Germany and is still mainly studied in that country. Although there certainly are Spanish-speaking authors who have approached it -Bárceñas, Mèlich, and Larrosa-, as there are also translations of Masschelein's and Biesta's texts, we still lack studies on the reception of the pedagogical writings of philosophers such as Fink, Bollnow, Buck, Meyer-Draw, Lippitz, or Loch, maybe due to the lack of Spanish translations of these author's works. This article aims at bringing one of the discussions of this discipline into the Spanish-speaking world: whether negative experience has pedagogical value. Thus, this contribution adds to research on phenomenological pedagogy in Spanish.

Since Husserl, interest in experience is anchored in phenomenology, so it is only natural that phenomenological pedagogy resumes it. Experience has been linked to negativity since Gadamer's analysis of this concept in *Truth and Method*. What allows Gadamer to associate experience with negativity is his interest in going beyond the teleological aspect of experience -that is, its direction towards an end- and understanding it as a process. Thus, Gadamer defines experience as an "essentially negative" process (Gadamer, 2017, p. 428), inasmuch as it can imply the correction of false beliefs: there are experiences which refute ideas we had taken as true and thus demonstrate their error.

Gadamer makes a linguistic translation of the distinction between experiences that imply a correction and experiences that affirm a belief, and he observes the difference in the way we speak about these experiences: when it implies a correction, we say that the experience occurs to us (Gadamer, 2017, p. 428). We have an experience when we confirm our expectations, but an experience occurs (Gadamer, 2017, p. 428) when a cooking recipe turns out unexpectedly well at the first try, when someone we love betrays us, or when we discover that some of our prejudices against someone were not true. The experience that disappoints and corrects our expectations naturally leads to a certain reflection, since it is necessary to process this negation of our beliefs.

Thus, Gadamer deduces that "the negativity of experience has a curiously productive meaning" (Gadamer, 2017, p. 429), since we acquire a comprehensive knowledge. This has led to the association of the idea of experience with that of learning, since Gadamer clearly states in his text that experience teaches something: at least that which had been thought to be wrong. The formative condition of experiences is made even more explicit when Gadamer points out that "one's experience changes one's whole knowledge" (Gadamer, 2017, p. 429). These claims inaugurate the possibility of a pedagogical reading of experience, since Gadamer directly mentions the acquisition and transformation of knowledge.

The association between experience and the transformation of knowledge can lead to understanding learning as a process where one goes from one state to another. However, Benner had already warned us about the danger of understanding learning as a process where not knowing leads to knowing, or where not being able to do something leads to being able to do so, because that opposes both moments as if there was a clear separation between them. For this reason, Benner insists that there is a synchrony of knowing and not knowing, that is, he understands that there is an overlap of the two moments rather than consecutive facts within a temporal sequence (Benner, 2005, p. 8). This interpretation, rather than insisting on distinguishing between the before and after of learning and trying to segment it, points to the importance of the “in between”, of the moment of transition, so as not to think about learning as a substitution or an addition to knowledge, but as a process of transformation where the individual is affected (Benner, 2005, p. 9).

The theoretical origins of this reading are found in the reflections of Bernhard Waldenfels and his understanding of experience, which, departing from Gadamer's proposal in *Truth and Method*, opens a gap in experience through which passivity makes its way. For this, Waldenfels distinguishes between two varieties of experience: a strong one and a weak one.

The strong variety indicates that the experiences that occur to us and that we go through change us and our world, whereas the weak variety is limited to the existence or inexistence of the data we get from experience to either confirm or refute our presuppositions and preconceptions. In addition to this, experience is polarized and it oscillates between *habit* and *surprise* [...] This polarization can lead to the extreme of confronting us, on the one hand, with *clichés* and *stereotypes*, and, on the other, with *interruptions*, *confusions*, and *experience shocks* [*Erfahrungsschocks*] (Waldenfels, 2009, pp. 30-31)¹

Passivity makes its way through a gap in the strong variety of experience, where the one who learns suffers some kind of annoyance or irritation in the form of a *pathos*² that interrupts his experience. For Waldenfels, this is the experience that changes both us and our world, whereas the weak sense of experience only leads to habitualization, normalization, or even programming (Waldenfels, 2009, p. 31).

Bárcena, Larrosa, and Mèlich agree with Waldenfels and claim that “experience is what happens to us” and that “it is not made, but suffered, it is not intentional, it is not on the side of action but of passion” (Bárcena *et al.*, 2006, p. 255). This seems to confirm the *pathic* aspect of experience and the passivity it implies. Waldenfels introduces his concept of the *pathic* from the Greek notion of *pathos*, with the

¹ Italics in the original. Notice Waldenfels's coincidence with Gadamer, who also catalogues experience according to its effects.

² The Greek word *pathos* originally meant emotion, suffering, or passion, and it mainly referred to the effect of a tragic play in the audience. In this sense it also relates to affect and an explicitly passive sense, since the spectator is affected by what she sees.

intention of showing both its passivity and its relation to pain and affect (Waldenfels, 2007, p. 38). For Waldenfels, the pathetic and the pathological are forms of expression of the *pathic*, that is, they are ways through which this experience of being affected and moved by something that happens to us is expressed. Therefore, the *pathic* refers to a realm or a character of experience where the subject is patient in an ample sense of the word, that is, it is the one who receives experience, who suffers and is moved by it (Waldenfels, 2007, p. 38).

It is then appropriate to wonder if it is correct to interpret learning as a *pathic* experience. If the only truly transformative learning happens through the strong variety of experience, where something unexpected irritates us, interrupts us, or shocks us, formal pedagogy as a whole is put into question. Are we then dealing with a theory of learning that does not respond to what happens in a classroom? This question is crucial, since the pedagogical value of an understanding of learning that does not match the reality of formal learning would be limited to life experiences.

To answer this question, this article takes Buck's notion of negativity as a point of departure. In the first section, the different ways in which negative experiences in learning happen are explored, whereas the second section inquires how it is that negative experience teaches, that is, on whether we can consider it to be productive. Likewise, the connection between productivity and negative experience is shown to be linked to its *pathic* character, that is, to the fact that something external transforms the subject and thus changes his worldview. The third part of the article offers a deeper reflection on the passivity of experience in order to analyse, in the following section, if practical learning³ shares this element and, therefore, is more than an automatized habituation of gestures and movements. Finally, the last section inquires into the possibility of considering learning as experience and makes an assessment on which can be the risks and potentialities of this interpretation.

2. NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES IN LEARNING

The first clear proposal of understanding learning as experience can be found in Günther Buck's *Lernen und Erfahrung*, originally published in 1989. In the introduction of this book, Buck mentions that even ordinary language shows the relationship between learning and experience, since these two concepts are commonly used as synonyms, except in some kinds of learning which are not forms of experience, such as practice (*Übung*) (Buck, 2017, p. XXV). Besides, Buck points to the double meaning of the word experience: it refers to the particular experience of something -which in and of itself implies knowing that something in a certain way-, and to

³ Here, practical learning refers to the acquisition of body habits in the sense given by Merleau-Ponty and Waldenfels, that is, the acquisition of simple body practices -such as walking or driving a car-, but also complex ones, like professional dancing. All these practices require exercise or practice (*Übung*) for them to be habitualized or naturalized, that is, successfully acquired.

“a process where we always acquire something new from a previously occurred experience” (Buck, 2017, p. XXV). It is interesting that Buck uses here the verb *zuwachsen* (to increase) to refer to the acquisition or gain of something new from experience. Slightly later in the text, he adds the noun *Zuwachs* in the expression *Zuwachs an Belehrung* (Buck, 2017, p. XXV), which could be translated as an increase in learning. This addition is surely a reference to the expression *Zuwachs an Sein* (increase in Being) which is found in *Truth and Method* to refer to the increase in meaning of the artistic work every time an experience of it occurs to us. In this case, experience means also an increase, this time in learning, since every experience implies gaining knowledge inasmuch as experience widens.

However, if experience implies an increase, it is because there was something before it: here, Buck makes use of the husserlian concept of anticipation to show that experience can be opposed to certain previous knowledge that we had taken for granted (Buck, 2017, p. XXV). Anticipation shows that every experience implies other experiences, inasmuch as it paves the way for new anticipations and also cancels others, thus allowing for new experiences (Mitgutsch, 2009, p. 88). From here, Buck goes back to the gadamerian interpretation of experience and introduces its negative aspect, because it questions or refutes what was previously known.

Further down the text, Buck claims that both experience and learning are decisively marked by negativity and that what teaches us the most is what we have failed at (Buck, 2017, p. 43). Thus, new learning is not an addition to what was already known, it implies an *umlernen*, which we could translate as *re-learning*,⁴ in the sense of a modification not only of our representations but also of our disposition towards new experiences (Buck, 2017, p. 43). Under this interpretation, negativity preserves a productive character, just as Gadamer proposed, and it implies also a modification of our knowledge and of our horizon of experiences. It is then necessary to observe how this experience of negativity occurs in learning to assess the value of its productivity and its scope.

The first negative experience to mention is *irritation*. It is an emotional response to the feeling of not being able to do something, of not knowing how to do something yet, which implies a form of discomfort and an experience of strangeness (Rödel, 2019, p. 51). We feel irritated when something does not turn out as we expected, that is, when something we had anticipated does not happen, and this affects and annoys us. Irritation then appears as an immediate and temporary reaction that can be forgotten as soon as the difficulty that caused it passes. Irritation can take many forms, such as frustration, anger, disorientation, despair and even as doubt. Charles

⁴ *Umlernen* does not mean to learn the same thing again, but to modify learning, to reorient it according to the new experience that occurred to us. I propose to translate it as “learning again” or *re-learning* since neither Spanish nor English have an exact equivalent of the German prefix *um*, even if this translation could lead to confusion if it is interpreted as a mere repetition of learning. Another possibility in English is “learning over”.

S. Peirce says that “doubt is an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves” (Peirce, 1877, p. 5), so it can also be considered as irritation. In any case, it is essential to underline that irritation is primary and immediate, that it is mainly emotional, and that, precisely for this reason, it is the most immediate negative experience in the process of learning.

Another experience that is immediate is *disappointment*. As Mitgutsch points out, disappointment also has the function of bringing us out of our error. Mitgutsch shows this through an analysis of the German word *enttäuschen* (to disappoint), which is formed by the negative prefix *ent-*, which we could translate as removing or stopping to, and the root *täuschen*, which means to deceive, so *enttäuschen* would be something like *to stop being deceived* (Mitgutsch, 200, p. 3). In his *Experience and Judgement*, Husserl had already mentioned that disappointment was another expression to refer to the overcoming of an expectation through a new impression, that is, the negation of the expected is a disappointment (Husserl, 1939, p. 97). Because of this, when an experience disappoints us, it shows us that what we used to believe was wrong.

As Benner says, disappointment shows us that something behaves in a different way than what we expected or were used to (Benner, 2005, p. 7). This disappointment, in the case of the acquisition of a skill, can refer to our own body: that is what happens when someone is learning to play piano and cannot hit on the right key, even if this person knows which one it is. In this case, disappointment is an experience that one makes with one's self and one's own performance in an immediate way.

Besides, this disappointment can come along with another experience: *surprise*. While learning a practice we can be surprised by the effects of our actions, by our capacity or incapacity to do something, or the reactions of other people to our learning process. Just like disappointment, surprise implies a negation of our anticipation: something surprises us because it is not as expected. In this sense, disappointment and surprise are related experiences: both appear within the horizon of our expectations to negate them and, because of that, they are considered negative experiences.

Surprise has a phenomenal specificity, that is, there is something special about the way in which it appears that makes it necessary to interrupt the listing of negative experiences precisely to question the characterization of the latter as negative. So far, this article has assumed this distinction and, with it, the dialectical idea that an experience opposes its anticipation -and precisely for this reason is considered negative-. However, the adjectivization of something as negative is confuse and requires clarification, as we can clearly see in the case of surprise. This experience shows that there are positive and negative experiences, surprises that make us glad and other that make us sad. Why, then, should we list it among the negative experiences in learning?

In this case, the use of the adjective “negative” does not refer to a valorisation, that is, there is no moral or emotional load attached to it. Negativity rather refers

to an opposition, a negation of something previous. Disappointment and surprise, among many other experiences, negate what had been anticipated or expected. This negation, in the case of surprise, can occur in a way that is emotionally positive, as it happens when someone unexpectedly wins a price and is happy about it, but as long as this experience negates the expectation of not winning, then it is a negative experience.

Interruption often comes along disappointment and surprise. As Rödel shows, disappointment and surprise show us that we are not masters of our experience (Rödel, 2019, p. 202), that is, that it is not under our domain. The reaction to this is often the interruption of an activity, since there is a moment in which we lose control and need to reorient the learning process. Interruption can be caused by a mistake, a distraction, or the need for reflection. In any of those cases, it means a pause in the activity and it usually turns into an invitation to reflect about it. This need for reflection as a response to the lived experience has been very well represented by Nuria Pérez de Lara and José Contreras: “It is experience that imprints in us the need to rethink, to turn back on our previous ideas, precisely because what experience shows us is the insufficiency of or the dissatisfaction with our previous way of thinking” (Pérez de Lara Ferré and Contreras Domingo, 2014, p. 22).

Mistakes are another form of negative experience that marks knowledge and that has being lately revalued in pedagogical theory, as the work of Fritz Oser, Reinhart Kahl, Saturnino de la Torre, and Jean Pierre Astolfi, among others, shows. The experience of making a mistake refers to a norm that regulates a process or a fact, that is, a mistake is something that is not as it should be, that does not fit in a regulated system (Althof, 1999, p. 11). Experiencing a mistake is, therefore, to become aware of a discordance between what is and what should be, and because of this it always implies knowledge of an external system or the presence of an authority that points out the mistake. Of those analysed so far, error is the first negative experience that does not refer to an emotion or sensation, but rather has an epistemological nature: error implies a mistaken judgement and is evidenced through its contrast with criteria of correctness and truth. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that error, or awareness of it, opens up the rest of the emotions presented so far: upon realising that they are wrong, learners feel irritation, disappointment, frustration or surprise. Therefore, all these experiences necessarily refer to something outside the experience, they refer to an external system of evaluation or review of the result of our knowledge or actions. Based on this system, which can be internalised, we assess or judge our own performance. Therefore, all these negative experiences depend on an authority: whether it is the scientific system in which knowledge is framed, the teacher or the moral framework that governs our society.

The last experience to be mentioned here is *failure*. Failure relates to the image we have of ourselves or the one others have of us, since it is a judgement about the achievement of an objective that is linked to a notion of success. As Rödel

correctly shows, the experience of failure not only comes from the certainty of not having achieved an objective, but also of knowing that one was responsible for this achievement (Rödel, 2019, p. 83). Besides, this experience is marked by the repeated sensation of impotence and the disappointment it implies. In failure, these emotions are framed within a reflexive structure, since they take the one who is learning to question the fact of not being able to do something and therefore to produce a certain image of himself as someone who has not achieved the objective (Rödel, 2019, p. 84). This shows that the experience of failure is not only mediated by an expectation, but also by a clear objective in a way that allows to evaluate whether this objective was achieved or not. From this feeling of not having achieved what we desired and had contemplated as possible comes the experience of failure as a judgement of oneself and of others about oneself.

We could surely mention varieties of the experiences named so far, and this would add to a detailed analysis of the plurality of negative experiences that occur in the learning process. However, having considered the phenomena of irritation, disappointment, surprise, mistake, and failure has served the purpose of analysing the possible effects of negative experiences and their *pathic* character. The next question is, then whether negative experiences can be productive and how.

3. THE PRODUCTIVITY OF NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES AND THE *PATHIC* CHARACTER OF LEARNING

As stated in the first part of this article, both Gadamer and those who read him from a pedagogical perspective insist in the productive character of negative experiences. Buck summarizes this in a very simple way by claiming that a true experience is the one from which we learn by paying a price, so what is positive about it is having learned something even if it came at a cost (Buck, 2017, p. 12).

Mitgutsch summarizes Buck's position as follows: "the productive sense of negation is not to gain better knowledge of the object but to have a new experience of our own experience and of ourselves" (Mitgutsch, 2009, p. 49). In this sense, experience's reflexive character is underlined, that is, it comes back to itself: experience is an experience of experience because when we undergo the negation of a previous knowledge we also make an experience about our way of making experiences. This reflexive nature of experience leads Buck to claim that "the work of negative experience is a becoming-aware-of-oneself" (Buck, 2017, p. 80). Mitgutsch argues this again in *Lernen durch Enttäuschung*:

The negativity of experience – experiencing resistance and disappointment is a productive part of experience itself. Because our failure instructs us about our own experience and, thus, paves the way for new and unexpected experiences. Those who experience are not only having a new experience of an object, rather, a new experience about their previous experiences and about themselves as experienced [*Erfabrenden*] occurs to them (Mitgutsch, 2009, p. 80).

From this we can conclude that the first productive aspect of negative experiences is to experience how we live this process and, therefore, becoming aware of ourselves, as Buck mentions. In fact, this idea was already present in Gadamer, who spoke of becoming aware of experience and turning into someone “experienced” (Gadamer, 2017, p. 427). Buck goes beyond this and speaks of a transformation of the self, inasmuch as each negative experience also changes the way in which we can make experiences (Buck, 2017, p. XXV).

Thus, the negativity of experience turns into an opening element of experience and of increase in learning, as Buck mentioned in the introduction of his book. This separates Buck from the understanding of learning as a sum of knowledge or of acquired abilities and rather underlines the importance of the consequences of our experiences which according to him have a pedagogical effect (Buck, 2017, p. 11). This provides experience with the potentiality to keep growing through new experiences, which would also increase knowledge.

Gadamer had also already expressed this conviction that the productive character of experience is not exclusively based on the correction of our previous experiences or knowledge, since he spoke of the acquisition of a comprehensive knowledge (Gadamer, 2017, p. 427). Thus, Gadamer means that it is not a specific or isolated knowledge about an object, but that experience transforms “one’s whole knowledge” (Gadamer, 2017, p. 427). Although the focus here is not the transformation of the self but of its knowledge, it is interesting to see how the potentiality of experience in this interpretation is also found in its transformative character.

Maybe the concept that better represents the transformative character of experience in phenomenological and hermeneutical pedagogy is that of *Umlernen*, which was already mentioned above. Through the repositioning that occurs in *re-learning* we respond to the experiences of disappointment, frustration, or mistake that we undergo in the process of learning and the horizon of experience of the one who is learning is transformed (Mitgutsch, 2009, p. 76). Again, with this concept Buck insists on the non-linearity of the learning process, which is no longer understood as a successive process of integration of knowledge, but as a process of confrontation (Meyer-Drawe, 2019, p. 278).

Following this idea, English claims that the concept of *re-learning* “implies that all genuine learning involves struggle, disillusionment or suffering, because it involves encounters with something new, such as a new concept, a different perspective, or an unfamiliar activity that we are trying to get to know and understand” (English, 2012, p. 210) This claim opens the possibility of interpreting the nature of learning from its passivity, since it is considered the result or effect of experience. According to this interpretation, the one who learns is affected by an experience and responds to it by reorienting his knowledge or practice, which is precisely what it means to *re-learn*.

Having said this, it is possible to go back to Waldenfels’s distinction between strong and weak experiences. If Buck insisted in the price we pay for experiences

and, therefore, for learning, it is because he associates it to a certain kind of suffering, irritation, or discomfort. These would be moments of experience that are passively structured, which happen to us, and which have an effect on us. Precisely because of this, Buck insisted on the idea that experiences are made, not had. Larrosa also insists on this idea that experience is not what happens, but what happens *to us*, that is, it is something that befalls us (Larrosa, 2003, p. 168). From this we can deduce the *pathic* character of experience, that is, the fact that it disrupts and moves us.

It is worth wondering now if this *pathic* character of experience can occur in the acquisition of a skill through exercise and practice, since Buck claimed precisely that in this case experience and learning are not synonymous. Does this mean that in practice (*Übung*) there is no experience similar to the one which has been described so far in this article? Is practice at large doomed to be a weak experience where habitualization becomes automatism, as Waldenfels warned?

4. PRACTICAL LEARNING AS EXPERIENCE

Although there is no doubt that in the learning process of a skill, the negative experiences described in the first part of this article take place, practice (*Übung*), in the sense of something that is exercised, is usually seen as a secondary form of learning due to its reproductive character (Brinkmann, 2021, p. 11).⁵ In fact, Buck even mentions that practice is not a form of learning that can be considered as experience (Buck, 2017, p. XXV). This is probably due to the fact that exercise is characterized by repetition, and this does not seem to leave much room for the emergence of novelty or the transformation of the subject.

According to Bönsch, “practice is the human capacity to develop a skill through repetition, reiterated action, and then perfect it” (Bönsch, 1993, p. 53). For this to be possible, it is essential to understand that the repetition that happens in practice or exercise is pedagogically planned and contains variations, that is, practicing is not merely repeating (Treml, 2008, p. 304). This observation clarifies that repetition implies a certain variability and, therefore, it is not a mechanization of gestures or movements. Besides, it is necessary to distinguish between the repetition that takes place in practice with the purpose of learning from the repetition of a practice once it has become habitualised, that is: the difference between the musician who is practicing a piece and the one who can already perform it professionally. We can also distinguish between complete and partial practice, since sometimes the exercise is not repeated in its entirety but, rather, the practice focuses on a passage

⁵ Brinkmann points out that, comparing the subject of learning and training, practice and exercise have been subjects that receive far less attention in psychology, didactics, pedagogical theory, and philosophy of education (Brinkmann, 2008, p. 141).

or a point that requires greater attention. That is what happens in the cases where there is good pedagogical planning directing practice and dividing it in different, progressive exercises. Besides, there is also the possibility of introducing preparatory exercises before the practice itself, as it happens when we warm up before playing an instrument.

Together with the difficulty of considering all these varieties of practice, there is the element of negativity: when we are learning and exercising a practice, it is often that at first our body does not respond as we expect, that the gestures do not render the expected results, and that irritation and frustration appear from the experience of not being able or know knowing how to do it. According to Brinkmann, negative experiences are lived in the exercise of a practice as a rupture that is so strong that can even lead us to abandon the practice (Brinkmann, 2021, p. 26). At the same time, Brinkmann acknowledges a productive aspect of these negative experiences, because it is precisely at moments like these when it becomes possible to change a custom, or to transform behaviours that were already settled (Brinkmann, 2021, p. 26): someone who is used to learning by heart the keys that he must play in the piano when performing a piece, can suddenly have a negative experience by forgetting the order of the keys, which can lead to changing a settled habit and start checking the scores in longer or more complex pieces. This example shows that, even though practice and exercise are repetitive activities, they are also open to passive affection through negativity and planned or unexpected varieties. Therefore, practice and exercise are also learning experiences with negative productivity, and they can be analysed with the concepts used throughout this article.

It is also worth mentioning that, as Brinkmann mentions, learning a practice not only leads to the acquisition of a skill, but also to the formation of an *ethos* (Brinkmann, 2021, p. 24). It is precisely negative experiences that will greatly contribute to develop patience, tolerance to frustration, perseverance, and other virtues whose education comes through repeatedly facing frustrating and disappointing moments. In this sense, it is interesting to notice Brinkmann's distinction between primary virtues, which are the specific objectives of the practice, such as learning to play the piano, and the mentioned secondary virtues, which are simultaneously practiced despite not being the main objective of the learning process. Even if these secondary virtues are not what the exercise is looking to produce, they are still acquired in a parallel way through practice (Brinkmann, 2017, p. 31).

In the development of these secondary virtues, we can see to what extent the exercise of a practice has a transformative effect in the subject, since the experiences lived in the process lead to a clear increase in learning, to use Buck's concept. Thus, we can claim that practices teach us much more than what we aimed to learn and that, besides, they change our *ethos*, our way of being in the world. To conclude, it is clear that practice and the learning of a practice are experiences that have a

pedagogical character and great potential for the transformation of the subject and her understanding of the world.

5. POTENTIALITIES AND LIMITS OF THE UNDERSTANDING OF LEARNING AS EXPERIENCE

Now that we have analysed experience and its pedagogical character, it is time to consider if that relationship can be inverted and if it is possible to think of learning as experience to, finally and as a conclusion, consider its potentialities and its limits within pedagogy.

Käte Meyer-Drawe is the main advocate of the idea that learning does not occur from an experience, but that it occurs as experience (Meyer-Drawe, 2008, p. 206). To argue this, she first states that learning is not the result of a resolution, in the sense that nobody can decide to learn but is rather something that happens, a *pathic* experience. In this sense, Meyer-Drawe characterizes learning as an inchoative act, that is, it has an initiating character, it implies the opening of a process (Meyer-Drawe, 2010, p. 7). She also adds that, when learning opens a new horizon, it is lived as a painful change, since it questions the subject and not only what we know, so it leads us to review ourselves and our worldview (Meyer-Drawe, 2010, p. 13). This is because any experience can lead to a restructuring of our horizons of meaning. In connection to this, Meyer-Drawe considers that in learning there is always a risk that we will have to restructure ourselves or the way we relate to the world (Meyer-Drawe, 2008, p. 214).

As we can see, Meyer-Drawe's position is informed by Buck's analysis of experience and Waldenfels's idea of the passivity of experience, as well as the insistence on learning's transformative potentiality for the subject. However, her arguments do not show in detail how learning occurs as experience, but rather refer to certain aspects of the process which she observes in a general way. In her texts we find several examples of this, such as when she claims that learning is equivalent to the story of the one who learns, since in this process there are changes in the learner under a dynamic that consists in the renunciation of the self (Meyer-Drawe, 2008, p. 190). With this, Meyer-Drawe shows that there is an estrangement of the self that is marked by discomfort and the feeling of uneasiness that implied in the interruption of the new or the unknown. As we can see in this case, the German pedagogue departs from the assumptions analysed in this article and widens them with some specific ideas of her own that help to dig a little deeper into the concepts. However, Meyer-Drawe generalises these elements of the structure of experience by using them as criteria to define learning, leaving aside the forms of learning that do not imply an experience of interruption, irritation, or estrangement, such as memorization.

The problems of considering that learning always happens as a passive experience of interruption or crises had been already mentioned in the introduction of this article. This would make it very difficult to establish pedagogical criteria on how

to teach or, in other words, how to bring about this kind of experiences so learning happens. From this understanding, we could conclude that teaching and learning are two experiences without any possible planning or generalization, because they would be seen as dependant on how they can affect each subject and this is not measurable or demonstrable in general. As Rödel points out, *pathic* experiences cannot be induced in learning in a controlled way, just as it is impossible to predict what the response to them will be (Rödel, 2019, p. 222). From this we can conclude that making experience exclusively responsible for learning due to its pedagogical value implies a problem for the current educational system, which is based on the planning of objectives and the measuring of its fulfilment through evaluations.

Understanding learning as an experience would imply assuming the impossibility of predicting and calculating the effects of any pedagogical action and, therefore, accepting that it cannot be a controlled or directed activity. If any learning is necessarily an experience, there is no way to predict how it will affect each individual, so no standardized practice could guarantee its success, since it would be conditioned by the individual and his circumstances in each case. Assuming this would imply the necessity of changing the formal system of education, promoting a great variability and flexibility in pedagogical practice and other ways to evaluate the success or failure of pedagogical processes to promote a particular approach to each individual and a biographical reading of the effects of learning in each person.

Another limit in the search for a transformation of the subject and his practices understood as the effect of a negative experience in learning is that one does not necessarily follow the other. As Benner and English describe, it can happen that the negation of previous knowledge does not immediately lead to finding something new. In other words, disappointment is not necessarily followed by its overcoming -whether in the form of a transformation of the subject, his knowledge, or the *re-learning* mentioned by Buck-, but sometimes after a negative experience there is only a suspension of experience, a pause (Benner & English, 2004, p. 415).

One last limiting aspect of this interpretation is the matter of the subject's involvement in his own practice. Although in the case of the exercise of a practice the subject can be considered its agent -since it is the subject who consciously initiates the practice-, in Meyer-Drawe's interpretation it seems that there is no room for such considerations, because the subject is expectant of the passive experience that will affect him. If learning is something that happens and that is considered a response or an effect to something that does not depend on the subject, where is then the responsibility for one's own learning? The insistence on the passivity of experience has as its counterpart this disempowerment of the subject. It could even be claimed that pedagogical responsibility is partially eliminated, because neither the educational institution nor its members can have strategies that ensure the acquisition of certain knowledge or skills, since this would depend on the experience that each subject makes. Such a strong factor of variation has, as a consequence, the impossibility of homogenization or standardization of pedagogical practices, so the responsibility

of the docents would be limited to prompting pedagogical experiences and accompanying the students to overcome them in a kinder way. The subject of learning would then be not only in a passive but also vulnerable position, at the expense of experiences and awaiting them arrive so that they produce something in him.

After seeing all these limits to the conception of learning as experience, one must ask about the possible contributions of this interpretation to pedagogical theory: what would be the worth of a theoretical position that manifests the radical impossibility of its application in the educational environment? To begin with, one must clarify that the fact that the passivity of experience as a pedagogical element is not applicable does not mean that it does not effectively occur in the educational process. The description of experience and the learning that can derive from it indeed corresponds to some educational moments, even if these cannot be included in the syllabus as objectives to achieve. That we learn from our mistakes and that experiences of frustration, irritation, and failure teach us to better overcome these emotions in the future is an evidence supported by both common sense and our own experience. In this sense, phenomenology would be contributing, with this theory, a description of experience's educational effect and this can enrich future analysis of the latter, since it shows aspects that had not been at the centre of pedagogical research.

The current reappraisal of the role of mistakes in learning is an example of how a different view of the educational phenomenon can show aspects of it that had remained in the background. In this sense, bringing up the productivity of the negativity of experience can lead us to the mistake of wishing to eliminate or sweeten these negative moments through their overcoming or solution in the form of acquired knowledge. However, there is also the much better possibility of pointing to the gap where not knowing and knowing coexist. In other words, the purpose is to underline an understanding of learning as a process and not only in relation to its objectives, which means to see negativity as a part of the effective story of learning without judging it or valuing it as either correct or incorrect.

Lastly, by focusing on negative experiences within the learning process we point to the non-linearity of this process, which allows for criticism of the understanding of learning as a succession of elements that one overcomes and, therefore, accepting that setbacks and relapses are also part of it. Although we tend to forget or ignore those moments due to their ephemeral, transient, and often unpleasant character, it is important to accept them as part of the learning process so pedagogy can make room for them and find better ways to respond to them.⁶

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