From Peirce’s Speculative Rhetoric to Educational Rhetoric

SÉBASTIEN PESCE
École, Mutations, Apprentissages, University of Cergy-Pontoise

Abstract

My aim in this article is to examine ways of designing a new ‘educational rhetoric’ based on C.S. Peirce’s speculative rhetoric, the ‘doctrine of the general conditions of the reference of Symbols and other Signs to the Interpretants which they aim to determine’ (CP 2.93). This analysis is based on a general idea that has been investigated by several educators, teachers and researchers mainly within the context of critical pedagogy and educational semiotics: school life is regulated by what may be called a classical dispositio, which is a certain way of organising speech in the classroom.

My analysis of dispositio is based on the ‘rhetorical turn’ that Colapietro sees in Peirce’s later semiotics and pragmaticism and defines as an integrated analysis of signs’ effects. This ‘rhetorical turn’ offers educators resources that allow them to rethink how students’ epistemological activity, understood as a series of semiosic events, leads them to develop new knowledge and modes of conduct. In this paper, I will consider the way such an integrated analysis of signs’ effects may support the design of a new educational rhetoric.

First, I investigate ‘ordinary’ educational rhetoric (the way semiotic resources are chosen and used) and the dispositio (the way in which speech is organised) that expresses it. More precisely, I question the way teachers ‘arrange’ their own speech, which is not only a technical issue, but also an ethical one. By ‘educational rhetoric’, I am referring to the specific organisation of discourse and speech in educational contexts, in addition to questioning the strategies implemented by teachers and students when they produce speech acts and cultural forms within the classroom.

This perspective on classical educational rhetoric leads to the conclusion that a new educational rhetoric should be designed as a way of replacing ‘directive knowledge’ with a ‘dialectical mode of inquiry’. One goal of such self-reflexive rhetoric would be, among others, to develop students’ critical skills and reflexivity.

In this context, Peirce’s rhetorical turn is a fundamental resource. Indeed, Peirce may suggest a radically new conception of teaching by stressing the function of mediation performed by signs and by undermining the dualist conception of cognition; speculative rhetoric is a useful analytical tool when one is trying to instil semiotic consciousness in the classroom, because it makes the relationship between meaning-making and knowledge-making explicit.

Finally, I consider ‘Institutional Pedagogy’ to be an instance of this new dispositio, a pragmaticist one, which meets certain conditions, such as the following: the existence in the classroom of particular communication patterns; the use of multimodal semiotic resources; and a set of semiotic tools and functions, which are organised along the lines of a specific structure.
I emphasise the part played by such a dispositio in the semiotic life of a classroom on a macro level (organising experience, crisis and inquiry), on a meso level (referring to cultural forms, speech acts and rituals) and on a micro level (concerning the relations between teachers and students).

Keywords: educational semiotics, pragmatism, rhetoric, critical pedagogy, institutional pedagogy

Introduction

In the context of French educational research, attention to Peirce remains scant: some French authors have seen in Peirce a way of rethinking cognitive processes (Denoyel, 1999; Denoyel & Pesce, 2009; Moro & Rickenmann, 2004), but the difficulties of Peirce’s writings somehow frighten French educationalists. Nevertheless, researchers and practitioners in Institutional Pedagogy (a French trend in critical pedagogy) have been investigating peircean semiotics for some time. In the context of what could be described as a pedagogy of meaning-making, it has appeared significant for ‘institutionalists’ to explore the connections between what they have roughly read as a philosophy of action (pragmaticism) and a philosophy of meaning. From the perspective of these analyses, Peirce’s later works, and what appears to constitute his rhetorical turn at the time of the integration of pragmaticism, phenomenology and semiotics, can be seen as the main sources of the educational research led by institutionalists.

In the following pages, my main aim is to investigate the basis for an alternative educational rhetoric that employs double perspective: a theoretical viewpoint as opened up by Peirce’s speculative rhetoric and a practical viewpoint as proposed by the actual experiments of ‘institutionalists’. To clarify the latter point, let us note that the words ‘Institutional Pedagogy’ refer to a French pedagogical trend that began in the 1940s. This form of critical pedagogy was founded by practitioners first inspired by Freinet who based their practices on psychoanalysis, social psychology and critical approaches to mental health.¹ Institutional Pedagogy, through its links with psychoanalysis, developed a strong interest in meaning-making processes in educational settings². Incidentally, the main authors involved did specific work on the role that Peirce’s semiotics and pragmatics might play in institutional pedagogy (Oury, 2003; Balat, Oury, & Depussé; 2004; Delion, 2006). As we will see, the main element of Peirce’s later works as offering a new perspective on educational settings lies in the way in which they integrate pragmatics and semiotics. This integration offers a new way of thinking about cognitive processes and social conduct.

I will first propose a short presentation of Peirce’s semiotics from the standpoint of speculative rhetoric, emphasising the transition from pragmatism to pragmaticism, before considering the need for a ‘new educational rhetoric’, i.e. a new way of organising speeches and discourse in the classroom. I will show the relevance of Peirce’s pragmaticism in such a project and will finally describe the French pedagogical trend of ‘Institutional Pedagogy’ as an instance of a new dispositio in educational contexts.
Peirce’s Semiotics from the Standpoint of Speculative Rhetoric

From Pragmatism to Pragmaticism

The words ‘rhetorical turn’, used by Colapietro to describe Peirce’s later semiotics and pragmaticism, refer in first place to the development in Peirce’s writings of an integrated analysis of signs’ effects (based on his semiotics) as part of his pragmatic theory:

On my view, at least, this amounts to nothing less than a rhetorical turn, for it concerns a critical assessment of the suasive power of various signs, in diverse contexts—the power of signs to move agents and to change the habits so integral to their agency.³

If the term ‘pragmatism’ first appears in the context of the ‘Metaphysical Club’, Peirce chooses to use an alternative word, ‘pragmaticism’, along the lines of his ethics of terminology (CP 2.219-226).⁴ This new term serves to emphasise the distinction between his own philosophy and those of other philosophers, including James:

So then, the writer, finding his bantling ‘pragmatism’ so promoted, feels that it is time to kiss his child good-by and relinquish it to its higher destiny; while to serve the precise purpose of expressing the original definition, he begs to announce the birth of the word ‘pragmaticism’, which is ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers.⁵

Pragmaticism must be understood, in Peirce’s later philosophy, as intended ‘to illustrate the general course of thought’, a system ‘by means of which any course of thought can be represented with exactitude’.⁶ The main element of what Colapietro describes as Peirce’s rhetorical turn is the way in which this pragmaticism is connected to and integrated with his semiotics. In the context of Peirce’s later analysis, pragmaticism is an approach built on the basis of semiotics. Pragmaticism aims to understand the sources of conduct in the production of meanings (Semiosis), and the theory of signs is the foundation for Peirce’s global analysis:

I understand pragmatism to be a method of ascertaining the meanings, not of all ideas, but only of what I call ‘intellectual concepts’, that is to say, of those upon the structure of which arguments concerning objective fact may hinge.⁷

The Prolegomena to an Apology of Pragmaticism defines this discipline not only as an epistemology grounded in semiotics but also as a science dedicated to the semiotic processes that leads to the appearance of conduct through Semiosis:

The Immediate Object of all knowledge and all thought is, in the last analysis, the Percept. This doctrine in no wise conflicts with Pragmaticism, which holds that the Immediate Interpretant of all thought proper is Conduct. Nothing is more indispensable to a sound epistemology than a crystal-clear discrimination between the Object and the Interpretant of knowledge.⁸

Pragmatics, Semeiotics and the Interpretant

To clarify these introductory comments, I must recall here some of the main concepts of Peirce’s semiotics. The first step is to emphasise the fact that Peirce explores semiotics
mainly because investigating this ‘doctrine of signs’ is a necessity for the progress of logic. Understanding how signs may be signs and how meanings come to appear is necessary to establish a solid epistemology: ‘Logic, in its general sense, is, as I believe I have shown, only another name for semiotic, the quasi-necessary, or formal, doctrine of signs’ (CP 2.227); and elsewhere, ‘I extend logic to embrace all the necessary principles of semeiotic’ (CP 4.9). As compared to the French ‘semiology’, Peirce’s semiotics can be conceived of overall as a science of Semiosis rather than a science of signs: ‘... I am, as far as I know, a pioneer, or rather a backwoodsman, in the work of clearing and opening up what I call semiotic, that is, the doctrine of the essential nature and fundamental varieties of possible Semiosis’ (CP 5.488). Semiosis can be described, in simple terms, as the process by which meanings are produced through an authentic triadic relation between a representamen (or sign), an object (what the representamen refers to) and an interpretant (the effect of a representamen in a specific mind, as it appears in Peirce’s later works at least): ‘... by “semiosis” I mean ... an action, or influence, which is, or involves, a cooperation of three subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs’ (CP 5.484).

The triadic Sign described here is an essential aspect of Peirce’s Semiotics that becomes, in the later integration of Peirce’s phenomenology (or phaneroscopy), pragmatics and semiotics, a key to understanding how semiosic processes are related to the process of inquiry on the one hand and the emergence of meaningful conduct on the other hand. The third part of the triadic sign is thus the interpretant, ‘the latter being that which the Sign produces in the Quasi-mind that is the Interpreter by determining the latter to a feeling, to an exertion, or to a Sign, which determination is the Interpretant’. This aspect of the sign is what constitutes the most obvious distinction between Saussure’s dyadic sign and Peirce’s triadic sign. Not only is the existence of the interpretant itself important, but so is the role it plays in the connection between meaning and conduct and the integration of pragmatics and semiotics, mainly through the distinction between the three kinds of interpretants:

... the Immediate Interpretant, which is the interpretant as it is revealed in the right understanding of the Sign itself, and is ordinarily called the meaning of the sign; ... the Dynamical Interpretant which is the actual effect which the Sign, as a Sign, really determines. Finally there is what I provisionally term the Final Interpretant, which refers to the manner in which the Sign tends to represent itself to be related to its Object.

In a letter to James, Peirce precisely articulates the status of the final interpretant: ‘The Final Interpretant is the sum of the Lessons of the reply, Moral, Scientific, etc.’. The final interpretant thus plays down the relativity of the meaning for a specific interpreter by exploring the emergence of laws and habits:

The Final Interpretant does not consist in the way in which any mind does act but in the way in which every mind would act. That is, it consists in a truth which might be expressed in a conditional proposition of this type: ‘If so and so were to happen to any mind this sign would determine that mind to such
and such conduct’. By ‘conduct’ I mean action under an intention of self-control. No event that occurs to any mind, no action of any mind can constitute the truth of that conditional proposition.  

A ‘Re-Psychologisation’ of Semiotics as a Fruitful Tool for Rethinking Education

The result of Semiosis is not a mere thought or idea or a particular action but rather general conduct: ‘... under given conditions, the interpreter will have formed the habit of acting in a given way, whenever he may desire a given kind of result. The real and living logical conclusion is that habit; the verbal formulation merely expresses it’. In the context of Peirce’s rhetorical turn, the reader notes what has been called a ‘re-psychologisation’ of semiotics (Chauviré, 1995), as the previous quote indicates. Peirce’s choice to eventually consider psychological processes so clearly is characteristic of his late semiotics. Let us first consider this definition of speculative rhetoric:

... I extend logic to embrace all the necessary principles of semeiotic, and I recognize a logic of icons, and a logic of indices, as well as a logic of symbols; and in this last I recognize three divisions: Stecheotic (or stoicheiology), which I formerly called Speculative Grammar; Critic, which I formerly called Logic; and Methodeutic, which I formerly called Speculative Rhetoric. Speculative rhetoric is the branch of logic on which Peirce more fully comments in the context of the integration of pragmatics and semiotics as I indicated above. In Colapietro’s words, ‘it seems not unreasonable to propose that the move from speculative grammar to speculative rhetoric roughly corresponds to the move from the level of abstract definition to that of pragmatic clarification, such that the third branch of semeiotic is not only the most vital but also the most pragmaticist’. Speculative rhetoric indeed focuses on sign effects, and we may describe it as a science of interpretants, as may be noted at the end of the following passage:

Logic is the science of the general necessary laws of Signs and especially of Symbols. As such, it has three departments. Obsistent logic, logic in the narrow sense, or Critical Logic, is the theory of the general conditions of the reference of Symbols and other Signs to their professed Objects, that is, it is the theory of the conditions of truth. Originalian logic, or Speculative Grammar, is the doctrine of the general conditions of symbols and other signs having the significant character. It is this department of general logic with which we are, at this moment, occupying ourselves. Transuasional logic, which I term Speculative Rhetoric, is substantially what goes by the name of methododology, or better, of methodeutic. It is the doctrine of the general conditions of the reference of Symbols and other Signs to the Interpretants which they aim to determine.

Midtgarden (2005b, p. 242) comments on the distinction between the three branches of Logic, insisting on a task devoted to speculative rhetoric, that of exploring the way scientific representations are built in the context of scientific inquiry. The issue of ‘scientific representations’ that speculative rhetoric invites us to investigate is the same
one in which we will be interested in observing cognitive processes if we consider that ‘learning’ entails implementing an epistemology to develop scientific representations of physical and social worlds—or, in other words, to establish beliefs:

The conception of a scientific intelligence is hereby put to use in three different ways: briefly, speculative grammar is to study concrete applications of signs conditioning learning from experience in a prescientific and pre-theoretical sense, while logic in the formal sense is to study ‘the conditions of the truth of scientific representations’, and, lastly, speculative rhetoric is supposed to analyse how ‘scientific representations’ develop in scientific inquiries and scientific communities. What I would like to address in particular is the division of semiotic labour suggested between, on the one hand, speculative grammar dealing with signs of various kinds, and, on the other, formal logic and speculative rhetoric concerned with so-called scientific representations.  

What may surprise Peirce’s readers in his late semiotics—for instance, in his essay on pragmaticism—is the way Peirce describes phenomena of communication between individuals, which at first glance seems very close to Saussure’s scheme: ‘So much for the object, or that by which the sign is essentially determined in its significant characters in the mind of its utterer. Corresponding to it there is something which the sign in its significant function essentially determines in its interpreter’. This can be considered a strong expression of a ‘re-psychologisation’ of semiotics, a characteristic of speculative rhetoric and Peirce’s later semiotics that helps to make the American philosopher more accessible to educationalists. Peirce himself defends this new stance on the actual analysis of human processes and analyses this stance as proper to his speculative rhetoric:

In coming to Speculative Rhetoric, after the main conceptions of logic have been well settled, there can be no serious objection to relaxing the severity of our rule of excluding psychological matter, observations of how we think, and the like. The regulation has served its end; why should it be allowed now to hamper our endeavors to make methodeutic practically useful? But while the justice of this must be admitted, it is also to be borne in mind that there is a purely logical doctrine of how discovery must take place, which, however great or little is its importance, it is my plain task and duty here to explore. In addition to this, there may be a psychological account of the matter, of the utmost importance and ever so extensive. With this, it is not my business here to meddle; although I may here and there make such use of it as I can in aid of my own doctrine.

Why We Need a New Educational Rhetoric

Peirce’s rhetorical turn as seen above offers educationalists resources to rethink how epistemological activity as experienced by pupils, itself understood as a series of semiosic events, leads them to develop new knowledge and modes of conduct. Indeed, we may sum up the preceding comments by saying that the effect of any educational
setting is to allow the production of new interpretants, each one the result of semiosis. In the following pages, I will investigate ‘ordinary’ educational rhetoric (rhetoric being considered in the broad sense of the way semiotic resources are chosen and used) and the dispositio that expresses it (dispositio understood, first, as the way in which speech is organised).

The Ordinary Educational Rhetoric and its Dispositio

Teachers continually deal with ‘semiotic’ issues. This should entail the use of signs in a very common sense as well as the consideration of semiotic processes: i.e. the fact of dealing with semiotic and semiosic issues (if we assume Peirce’s meaning). However, in most cases, the effort to address semiotic issues comes down to a choice between certain semiotic resources. The latter are mainly words, sentences, and teachers’ speech; i.e. the tools and practices related to verbal language. Teaching is generally reduced to the transmission of knowledge via verbal statements. Teachers implement specific rhetoric, a specific way of organising their speech: classical teaching is defined not only by teachers’ use of mainly verbal language (i.e. the fact that they neglect other sign systems) but also by the way they use such language. These rules define schools’ ordinary dispositio: according to Thomas Wilson, in his 1560 ‘Arte of Rhetorique’, dispositio ‘is nothing else but an apt bestowing, and orderly placing of things, declaring where every argument shall be set, and in what manner every reason shall be applied for confirmation of the purpose’.

In their training, teachers are taught to use a specific rhetoric, one that is assumed to favour the transmission of knowledge. The rules associated with this classical teaching rhetoric involve, for instance, certain turn-taking patterns. The quality of teachers’ rhetoric depends on the words they choose, the way in which they construct sentences and their ability to link different lessons and illustrate their ideas using examples. Good communication guarantees good transmission. Many researchers working on classroom talk have described such a dispositio. Analysing ‘the unwritten rules of classroom dialogue’, Lemke (1990, pp. 5–11) shows what ‘classical dialogue in the classroom’ is: the teacher asks a question, a student gives a response, and then this binary pattern is implemented again. Measures et al. (1997, p. 26), following Lemke, consider ‘the triadic dialogue’ to be an improvement. This pattern adds a third step to the first two (Initiation and Response). This third step is ‘Follow-up’. However, the ‘IRF’ model remains a very weak form of interaction because it minimises the role played by interaction between students: it is simply another dispositio focused solely on verbal language, and such patterns are dominant today in the classroom.

The Underlying View of Learning and Teaching Behind Ordinary Educational Rhetoric

Young, considering the critical trends in educational research, helps us to understand that the type of dispositio (the way teachers ‘arrange’ their speech) used in teaching is not merely a practical issue. Overall, the dispositio says something about the way we consider the process of cognition experienced by pupils. Three assumptions underlie classical teaching rhetoric:
1. Knowledge is defined from a scholastic perspective: the whole of knowledge is considered to be available and recorded in books, and it is possible to split up this whole into its simplest components accordingly with a Comtian positivist conception of science.

2. This knowledge is considered from the viewpoint of its verbal aspects. From a body of idealised global knowledge (as described in d’Alembert’s project, L’Encyclopédie), one can extract specific pieces of knowledge (for example, Archimedes’ principle or a specific rule of grammar) that may be communicated via verbal statements: knowledge is, in essence, verbal.

3. Eventually, the functioning of learning is considered as psychological and mentalist. This mentalist standpoint is accompanied by a dualist view of the world: on the one hand, there is a distinction between mind and body; on the other hand, there is a distinction between the individual and the world. A mere correspondence is supposed to link objects in the world and the conceptual images of those objects that people are supposed to share. Words are useful (and sufficient) vehicles for linking things (in the world) and concepts (in anyone’s mind). One may sum up this specific view of learning and teaching with reference to Cunningham (1992):

   Educational psychology is currently dominated by a curious mixture of neo-behaviorial and cognitive information-processing psychology ... . The task of the teacher or instructional developer under such assumptions is essentially to create learning environments that allow the efficient communication of this knowledge to the learner. The textbook or teacher is the ‘sender’ of the ‘message’ and the student is the ‘receiver’. We check to see if the message has been received by testing to see if the learner can remember the message ... . We teach teachers those techniques that have been ‘scientifically’ shown to efficiently and effectively communicate this knowledge to students: classroom organization and management, questioning techniques, lecturing, discussion, preparation of materials, etc. All are geared toward effective communication.

‘Phantasm of Control’ and the Obsession with Curriculum

Within the scope of this ‘positivistic view’ of teaching and learning, cognitive processes are supposed to be predictable phenomena and for this reason imply a ‘phantasm of control’: teachers are under the illusion that they can predict (and thus control) the effects of their own speech in the way that a physicist can control the trajectory of a moving object. All teachers have to do this to find good teaching aids, to offer stimuli that allow the human computer (the brain) to operate in a predictable manner at the least. There is no doubt about the outcomes of this process: good inputs (utterances) result in the expected outputs (knowledge). Classical school rhetoric is applied far beyond the limits of the classroom. Indeed, this phantasm leads the authors of public policy to exercise considerable ingenuity in designing every step of the learning process: that is how standardised curricula or assessment tools are developed. According to this monopolistic rhetoric imposed by public policy, teachers are seen overall as talented communicators: ‘Traditionally teachers have been charged with the task of covering “the
curriculum”, the body of knowledge and skills contained in the textbooks and teachers’
guides (which often prescribe the “best” way to teach the material) .... Education is seen
as a process of information transmission, largely from the teacher to the students’.31

Teaching is fully designed as a communicative activity in a context distinguished by its
semiotic poverty:32 i.e. the restricted number of sign systems used in the classroom. If
other sign systems than verbal language are present (music, painting, songs ...), the role
that they play remains generally limited. This view of pedagogy leads teachers to deny
themselves many semiotic resources that are essential to the learning process. Neverthe-
less, the phantasm of control and semiotic poverty are problematic not only because of
the effects that teachers expect without allowing them; but also because of negative
effects that teachers do not expect and cannot deal with for the obvious reason that they
are generally unaware of their existence. These effects are mainly related to phenomena
of ‘ideological imposition’. Beyond the content of the knowledge it is supposed to convey,
classical teaching rhetoric carries messages of an ideological nature: a certain view of
society, knowledge and power. Several examples of this exist in the French school system,
mainly in the way in which the transmission of knowledge is organised through the
choice of specific methods: reference to skills (compétences), projects, and goal-oriented
pedagogy is, in the French system, emblematic of the connection between corporate
models and education.33 A similar phenomenon is visible not only in the methods but
also in the contents of knowledge itself in US curricula. This is particularly the case for
the social sciences and the treatment of economic issues as part of these standards. The
curriculum is more than a mere ‘program of study, a classroom text, or a course syllabus’
(McLaren, 1989, pp. 211–12). It entails an ‘introduction to a particular form of life; it
serves in part to prepare students for dominant or subordinate positions in the existing
capitalist society’.34 How is it that classical educational rhetoric allows such phenomena?

Following Giroux, McLaren (2003, p. 71) stresses teachers’ obsession with the diffusion
of knowledge itself. The faithful implementation of classical rhetoric implies that com-
munication, teaching aids and methods occupy the whole of thought about teaching.
However, the status and sources of the contents of teaching themselves are hardly
questioned: what are they? Where do they come from? Who chose these contents rather
than others? What is their epistemological foundation? As long as these epistemological
and political issues are neglected, teachers leave ideology an open field. What I call
‘ideology’ here is nothing more than knowledge and beliefs themselves as seen from the
standpoint of their meanings and sources rather than from a technical and verbal
viewpoint. To McLaren, it seems that some of the schools’ goals are being ignored: for
instance, training students to question the status of knowledge is a critical goal that is
neglected under this rubric.

‘Discourse’ and Speeches, Educational Rhetoric and dispositio

Besides techniques, pedagogical methods and teaching aids, classical educational
rhetoric implies a certain kind of ‘discourse’ as defined by Foucault.35 ‘Discourse’ is
not another word for speech or talk but instead defines a set of rules that have been
historically constructed and provide the conditions under which statements (as indi-
vidual stances) and speeches (as composed of several statements) must be built. For
McLaren, a particular discourse can be defined as a ‘regulated system of statements’ imposed by institutions and governing institutions in a circular way. The turn-taking example is quite meaningful: in the classroom, discursive patterns seem to ignore the relevance of immediate interactions between students: the Q/R or the IRF pattern calls for the teacher’s systematic approval of what has been said by a student. The right to talk is rarely granted between one student and another without interjection by the teacher’s voice. Group talk is systematically replaced in the classroom with a series of interactions between one teacher and one student. Any given school rhetoric actuates at a practical level (how we actually speak) what has been (consciously or not) defined at a theoretical level: i.e. a discourse, conceived of as a set of rules that organising speeches and comments and convey a specific ideology. This ideology concerns the status of individuals in the classroom, the status of knowledge and the character of educational settings.

We may now have a better understanding of the respective functions of educational rhetoric and dispositio, two words that we must not see as synonymous. Dispositio is the concrete actuation of rhetoric; it consists of the technical arrangement of speeches and takes its sources from a specific rhetoric that more broadly describes the status of language, meaning-making processes, and links between language and knowledge and between knowledge and power. The dispositio of classical teachers’ speeches is simply a sign of their adherence to a particular rhetoric, to some logic of discourse. Rhetoric refers to a set of ideas and dispositio to a set of techniques.

The above indicates why critical educationalists encourage us to develop a new dispositio as a way of promoting an alternative rhetoric in a broader sense. One thus would have to design new patterns of interaction to let individuals and school groups question the status and sources of pieces of knowledge recorded in curricula and their legitimacy. People within the school would be able to decide on new content and question existing content. There is no whole body of complete knowledge available and recorded in books. Knowledge remains to be built, but it should be built in a reflexive way, as evoked above: we must question the discourse that is organised for us, the way in which we perceive the world and the way in which schools, teachers and books show the world to us. In short, knowledge ‘is not “out there” waiting to be discovered. The world as we know it is culturally coded. What we experience as reality is really prior cultural codings, prior structures that have been invented by our culture’. For instance, the way we experience relationships and authority in school is entirely determined by specific rules, rites, modes of interaction, and the experience of asking questions or answering them. Teachers should offer students new semiotic filters to replace ‘prior codings’ that impose upon them a specific view of the world. The concept of ‘codings’ invites us to take into account a phenomenon stressed by critical educationalists: educational settings not only impart meanings conveyed by words, but also communicate a set of potential or actual meanings via cultural forms, rituals and rules. For McLaren (1989, p. 202), cultural forms are ‘those symbols and social practices that express a culture’: TV, dance, music and education itself. Educationalists are concerned with cultural forms as long as they help us to question the sources and meanings of knowledge. In the context of Institutional Pedagogy, the notion of ‘cultural forms’ refers more precisely to the cultural patterns that organise social life in
schools. These patterns can be specific forms of assessment, master-words, rituals, structures of meetings, or systems of godfathering.

What is at Stake in Designing an Alternative Educational Rhetoric?

I will now sum up the reasons why a new educational rhetoric should be designed. First, such rhetoric should be considered as implementing a new conception of teaching and learning. Within this scope, pedagogical engineering is an activity concerned with knowledge-making processes—an epistemological-educational activity: ‘The task of those educators who espouse a semiotic view of education is to detail how pedagogical practice will change when the emphasis of education shifts from what we want our students to know to how students know’. The teacher is expected to organise group discussion and improve the semiotic resources available in the classroom: for instance, rites, master-words, innovative forms of assessment, and sanctions may sometimes be hardly present and at other times be present but not be considered semiotic tools. The teacher will seek to empower students by making them capable of observing rhetorical patterns used in their social environment and questioning sources and their relevance. A new educational rhetoric would involve tools allowing their own analysis. We should replace ‘directive knowledge’ with a ‘dialectical mode of inquiry’.

The goals of such self-reflexive rhetoric would be 1) to develop students’ critical skills and reflexivity; 2) to allow the use of this critical skills as tools for questioning the sources, the status and the meaning of knowledge; 3) to rethink cognition by minimising dualist and mentalist conceptions; and 4) to develop greater semiotic richness in the classroom rather than continuing to use a mere words-centred model.

Peirce’s rhetorical turn offers many elements that would be useful in designing the new rhetoric that we are seeking. Peirce’s speculative rhetoric is a philosophy intended to produce scientific knowledge; we may implement it in the classroom to pursue a similar goal with students and allow them to produce their own knowledge in a critical manner via a socioconstructivist approach. This idea has been proposed by several scholars. For instance, Ventimiglia (2005, p. 291) describes something very similar to the ‘open curricula’ defended by critical educationalists: ‘a form of resistance to the narrowing ends of business-minded educational institutions’. Peirce thus would help us to maintain the critical educational tradition but present it in a new way. Indeed, critical pedagogy is mostly based on political, ideological and militant considerations. I am not trying here to reject this approach but instead to show that critical pedagogy can build new foundations thanks to Peirce’s speculative rhetoric. Peirce’s pragmaticism and semiotics invite us to justify this critique by considering the stakes related to epistemology, meaning-making, cognition and the construction of the self.

Peirce’s Rhetorical Turn as a Basis for Designing a New Educational Rhetoric

I will now try to connect the resources we identified in Peirce’s rhetorical turn with the issues related to the need for an alternative educational rhetoric. We may recall here a peircean definition of rhetoric quoted by Colapietro (2007, p. 17): ‘The adaptation of the forms of expression of [a piece] of writing [or other modes of symbolization] to the
accomplishment of its purpose’. Thus, when I talk of an educational rhetoric, I refer to the specific organisation of discourse and speech in educational contexts. My aim is to analyse the strategies implemented by teachers and students when they produce speech acts and cultural forms within the classroom.

Is There a Peircean View of Education?

As several researchers have shown, we can hardly say that Peirce developed a theory of education. Few of his texts focus on schools and universities. The appropriation of material from one intellectual context for use in another context is necessary if we hope to develop a peircean perspective on education. Thus, Peirce may suggest a radically new conception of teaching by stressing the function of mediation performed by signs. Knowledge can be defined as the result of semiotic processes: i.e. processes by which interpretants are produced. These interpretants may be thoughts, feelings, actions, laws or ‘habits’, and in this way, a semiotic perspective offers a broader conception of cognition. This conception is particularly fruitful when linked to Peirce’s pragmatics. Learning is a process by which ‘beliefs’ are construed, handled as objects, commented upon and challenged. A new metaphor of cognition thus comes to light. The ‘phantasm of control’ must be abandoned insofar as a sign gives rise to interpretants that are never fully determined; multimodal aspects of teaching situations become an essential issue; and as seen above, the part played by teachers’ speech must be strongly questioned and the function of group talk reconsidered. Peirce, through the different viewpoints summed up here, offers a way of investigating the quest for a new rhetoric.

By investigating the way signs allow the production of interpretants and physical effects, semiotics asks an essential educational question. Rhetoric may be described as dealing with ‘the general secret of rendering signs effective’, the ‘efficacy of signs’, signs-action or the power of symbols. These are the very questions teachers ask (or should ask) themselves every day. Education from a semiotic standpoint appears no longer to be a process by which existing pieces of knowledge are transmitted from one mind to another; instead, it is a process by which beliefs are critically manipulated and reconstructed by students or by a ‘community of inquirers’. From this perspective, educational processes could be based on the epistemological process through which experience leads to new interpretants; in Kevelson’s words, ‘... a mode of analysis which would be capable of accounting for, that is, of describing, the actual processes that do occur in the discovery of new truths or facts in the experiential world which lead to a reinterpretation of former judgments, and to the development of a new idea’. The very aim of semiotics is the study of semiosis (as processes of interpretant-making) rather than the study of signs (as objects). I will now emphasise new aspects of peircean theories by considering the links between critical pedagogy, reflexivity, and Peirce’s critical common-sensism.

Critical Common-Sensism and Pragmatics in the Construction of Knowledge

Peirce defines ‘critical common-sensism’ as ‘a variety of the Philosophy of Common Sense’ (CP 5.439); the primary character of critical common-sensism is described as follows:
Critical Common-sensism admits that there not only are indubitable propositions but also that there are indubitable inferences. In one sense, anything evident is indubitable; but the propositions and inferences which Critical Common-sensism holds to be original, in the sense one cannot ‘go behind’ them (as the lawyers say), are indubitable in the sense of being acritical. The term ‘reasoning’ ought to be confined to such fixation of one belief by another as is reasonable, deliberate, self-controlled. A reasoning must be conscious; and this consciousness is not mere ‘immediate consciousness,’ which (as I argued in 1868) is simple Feeling viewed from another side, but is in its ultimate nature (meaning in that characteristic element of it that is not reducible to anything simpler), a sense of taking a habit, or disposition to respond to a given kind of stimulus in a given kind of way.47

For Strand (2005a), there is a connection between ‘liberal education’ and ‘critical common-sensism’, a connection we may perceive by considering the ‘first rule of reason’, which could be described as a principle of ‘curiosity’ and of ‘intense desire to find things out’. On the basis of this intense desire, critical common-sensism is an intellectual stance that manifests itself as the very opposite of ‘a will to believe’. The individual who practices such common-sensism is never fully satisfied with what he/she already knows or thinks he/she knows: “To avoid the dogmatic effects of “shamming”, a liberal education should educate critical thinkers who are able to debunk authority, question collective beliefs, and reveal common myths and fables”.48

To fully understand this idea in an educational context, we must imagine children manipulating ideas and beliefs and questioning the validity of the knowledge transmitted to them. That is, children should precisely experience the process described in 1877 and 1878 by Peirce in two articles: ‘The Fixation of Beliefs’ and ‘How to Make our Ideas Clear’.49 The analysis of methodological and epistemological processes in these papers is characteristic of Peirce’s pragmaticist project. Furthermore, this way of thinking was broadened by Peirce when he developed connections between pragmatism and semiotics, the latter becoming a powerful tool for fulfilling his pragmaticist ambition. If the construction of knowledge requires that we question our own ‘habits’ (i.e. final interpretants, thoughts, principles, laws), we may do this thanks to semiotic tools: ‘We can review and reform our semiotic habits of communication, although only by making abstractions and temporal projections within the process itself ... . [Peirce’s conception of communicative semiosis] can be construed as a complex process that involves the possibility of reflective understanding, self-control, and inwardness’.50

From Peirce’s Speculative Rhetoric to Educational Rhetoric

For Bergman, developing a reflexive approach entails refining our semiotic position: ‘... adopting a common-sensist position, we can admit as a fact that we are always in semiosis—that we are born into a universe full of meaning—without thereby reducing our semiotic role to nothing but that of a passive receiver of a ready-made world’.51 This is one way for a student to deal with knowledge: critical common-sensism makes us
aware of the ongoing process of meaning-making that we experience. Such an awareness is what Tochon (2002, 2003) calls semiotic consciousness.

Speculative rhetoric is a useful analytical tool when one is trying to instil this consciousness in the classroom because it makes explicit the relationship between meaning-making and knowledge-making. Peirce’s later semiotics makes pragmatics and semiotics consistent, with speculative rhetoric as the interface between these two dimensions. Peirce does not theorise about the construction of scientific speeches for mere aesthetic or communicational reasons. Speculative rhetoric implies an epistemological approach that aims to assess the foundations of knowledge. It aims to favour the reflexive construction of knowledge by the philosopher him/herself (and, by extension, by any individual—a student for instance) and functions as ‘that kind of common sense which has become critically aware of itself’. Peirce’s critical common-sensism can be seen as a solid justification of Young’s project. The latter defends a ‘critical pragmatic curriculum’; ‘the appropriate form that critical theory should take in the curriculum is broadly that of methodological reflection and the encouragement of critical agency through rational dialogue’.

Young (1997, p. 15), like Bergman, insists that a critical approach in the classroom means that students and teachers see knowledge not as an impartial given but rather as something that must be built up and questioned:

While from an individual standpoint both the language and the culture of our birth appear as givens, from the standpoint of ‘geological time’, or history, these are always being reformed by the incremental erosions of change, and at times, by cataclysms. From a critical theory standpoint what is at issue is the study of the methodology through which we can understand and guide these processes of self-formation—the methodology whereby we can, collectively, write the programs, rather than merely seek to survive amid the detritus of the accidental fracturing of the past.

A pragmaticist approach using the tools of semiotics constitutes a perfect example of such a methodology. It is a way of implementing a ‘reconstructive science’ seen by Young (1997, p. 17) as characteristic of the critical-pragmatic curriculum. The critical-pragmatic curriculum is not merely about the status or content of knowledge (the syllabus) but also concerns a whole process whose aim is the production of knowledge. Such a curriculum is not a static list of contents but rather a dynamic communicative process: ‘The critical-pragmatic classroom is characterised by communicative structures in which teachers guide students into practicing the full range of communicative forms found in mature inquiry participants in the sciences and at the highest political levels’. What Young aims to advocate is, essentially, what one may call a pragmatic-critical rhetoric of learning and teaching. I mentioned above the concept of semiotic consciousness, referring to the critical and reasonable use of signs. Critical common-sensism implies a reflexive use of signs through which we evoke, produce, question and ‘use’ knowledge. Semiotics must be considered in addition to pragmaticism because it offers a series of concrete solutions that are useful in implementing a general analysis of teaching and learning settings.
Critical common-sensism and reflexivity, the latter an individual’s critical analysis of the processes by which he/her deals with facts and speeches and produces his/her own knowledge on this basis, are the major elements that we should consider in designing an alternative educational rhetoric. Another element is the role played by collective inquiry in such rhetoric. Here, we may remind the reader of two main differences that we expect to see in an alternative rhetoric: 1) the function of this rhetoric would be not to transmit knowledge but to build it up; and 2) this rhetoric would characterise not the teachers’ speech but rather the classroom talk.

Peirce’s theories help us to consider common-sensism and reflexivity as mechanisms engaged by a group (and not merely by individuals) in the context of an inquiry, a quest for knowledge. Colapietro (2005) insists on the pertinence of Peirce’s pragmatic theory as connected to the process of investigation when one is dealing with educational issues. Here again, peircean scholars offer a model that meets the conditions expressed by critical educationalists. When Hinchey proposes a type of schooling aimed at ‘participative citizenship’, she defends Young’s idea of dynamic group-talk in the classroom and insists on the central role of questioning in this process. Students are expected to wonder about certain aspects of their own experience (a clear reference to reflexivity), and education must be designed to allow ‘critical inquiry for social change’.56

Peirce sheds light on the role played by a ‘community of inquirers’, a stance investigated recently by peircean scholars.57 The first argument is epistemological and methodological; indeed, this justification refers to the processes by which knowledge about knowledge is produced:

... Peirce’s philosophy comes forward as a fruitful contribution to the ways of reading educative processes, meaning the conflicting processes of learning and discovery’.58 Peirce indeed rejected any ‘individual knowing self’, and ‘required, in his system of thought, that what we perceive as individual encounters are stages of conflict that are becoming rationally resolved at some later, ideal time, within a framework of an intradialogic community.59

We see students as a group of ‘researchers’ rather than passive receivers of speeches. However, a fundamental stake is related to the dialogical aspects of thinking. Building knowledge is not the only goal of schools. In a classroom, students not only learn maths and grammar but also become autonomous individuals; they build social skills and learn to become the citizens that they will have to be in a democratic society. Processes analysed via pragmatics and rhetoric help us reconsider how we attain such goals. This is the analysis proposed by Colapietro (2007, p. 31), commenting on Kenneth Burke: ‘... rhetoric in the peircean sense is concerned as much with identity as with communication. Identity itself must however be linked to those discursive and other processes of identification in and through which the self-understanding of self-critical agents is formed, solidified, and indeed transformed’.

It is through dialogical processes and signifying interactions that any subject is capable of ‘becoming’. This requires that we accept identity as neither given nor transparent but instead as developed in an active and interactive way: ‘This involution of
the other within the self (or psyche) is a necessary condition for the emergence of a humanly recognizable self. And this division within ourselves is, paradoxically, constitutive of our identity. In its distinctively human form, then, identify is reflexive.\textsuperscript{60} In this tradition, we cannot conceive of the production of knowledge about the world and the production of knowledge about oneself as two independent processes. Both are made possible via pragmatic/reflexive activity. They are two aspects of the same process, two interrelated phenomena. Collective inquiry is the context within which each individual experiences the interactions underlying the construction of the self. This ‘process of identify’, if we follow Colapietro, has different sources: a series of experiences of identification with others within norms/ideals and the internalisation of norms and ideals are related to processes of identification.\textsuperscript{61} Norms and ideals are meanings and values manipulated by the group as a community of inquirers. Because subjects are involved in a collective quest for knowledge and are developing meaning-making activity, they come to deal with norms and ideals, themselves at the same time the result and sources of ‘individual reflexive criticism’. In educational settings, and within a Deweyan tradition, this is an essential idea about how semiotic resources help individuals to develop a reflexive relationship to their past experiences. The interest of Peirce’s analysis in an educational context is limited neither to the exploration of a strategy (a pragmaticist one) nor to a list of tools (those offered by semiotics). Peirce describes rhetorical resources within the framework of a global theory concerning the construction of the self and the sources of knowledge, and this is precisely what we are seeking.

\textit{Construction of the Self}

Critical common-sensism within a pragmaticist framework constitutes another element of the new rhetoric that we aim to suggest. An additional element is the way in which Peirce conceives of the construction of the self. This is precisely what Colapietro analyses when he reminds his readers of the dialogical dimension and the meditative function of Peirce’s concept of the sign: ‘Peirce’s relevance to an understanding of education is, thus, partly a function of his subtle and compelling characterizations of subjectivity and agency’.\textsuperscript{62} The recognition of the subject and of how the self may be built up is constitutive of what Colapietro (2007, p. 18) describes as an ethic of rhetorics: one may consider, from this perspective, that the rhetorical choices made by teachers in their classroom constitute a fully ethical issue.

We may build a better understanding of Peirce’s conception of the subject by reading Mead’s \textit{Mind, Self and Society}.\textsuperscript{63} Bakker develops a comparison between symbolic interaction (in the works of Mead and then Blumer) and what he describes as Peirce’s ‘semiotic interpretivism’. ‘There are hints of Peirce’s triadic view in Mead’s writing’.\textsuperscript{64} Within this scope, ‘the idea of a completely isolated personal self is an illusion; the individual being is a kind of cell in the socio-cultural-political-economic “organism” ’.\textsuperscript{65} Reflexivity and semiotic consciousness are individual processes that require a community: ‘[f]or Peirce we are autonomous actors precisely when we fully recognize the way in which semiotic processes are continually being shaped and re-shaped by us and by all other human beings’.\textsuperscript{66}
Mead considers the role played by significant symbols in mediating stimulus and response. In the same way, to fully perceive the relevance of connecting Peirce’s pragmatics, semiotics and conception of the self, we must emphasise the role that the mediative function of the sign should play in any new educational rhetoric. Such rhetoric would keep in mind that the construction of the self is, as much as a cognitive process, a phenomenon that depends on a community’s activity.\(^{67}\)

**Rethinking Cognition by the Means of Pragmaticism and Semiotics**

I have stressed one important prejudice of classical educational rhetoric: the dualist view of cognition. Peirce’s theories undermine this conception and offer educationalists an opportunity to rethink cognition. In mentioning cognition, I do not reduce it to the acquisition of knowledge. First, I have defined cognition as a process by which pieces of knowledge are produced (not acquired); secondly, I have described this production of knowledge as the production of meaning (getting to know something means experiencing semiosis); and thirdly, I have emphasised how the production of knowledge and the production of the self are interrelated. Thus, cognition is as much ‘situated’ as it is ‘distributed’. It is a complex process that is made possible by interactions, and this same process allows cognition to function in a classical sense (learning) and as social cognition.

If one adopts a peircean view of cognition, one sees schooling in a very new way: schooling is not only about communication, but also about hermeneutics.\(^{68}\) It is no longer an individual process but is instead a collective one, and rather than solely considering past, existing knowledge to be presented again, it considers the future of a knowledge that remains to be built. The process of schooling is not seen as passive but instead emerges as dynamic and active. Thus, if our old rhetoric looks backwards, a new educational rhetoric inspired by Peirce’s speculative rhetoric be considered as a way of favouring innovation: ‘While the question of grammar concerns, at bottom, the conditions of meaning or intelligibility, the concern of rhetoric is with ingenuity and innovation .... rhetoric inevitably transgresses established boundaries and instituted patterns’.\(^{69}\) Speculative rhetoric is a way of rethinking cognition. It implies that semiotics is not a mere perspective to be used in understanding educational settings. Instead, it is the process by which knowledge is made out of experience: the way one builds one’s own identity, culture or values in accordance with the logic analysed by speculative rhetoric.\(^{70}\)

**‘Institutional Pedagogy’: An Instance of a New Dispositio in Educational Contexts**

**A Definition of Educational Dispositio**

If dispositio refers to concrete aspects of speech, the concern of speculative rhetoric is a far broader series of issues linking selves, communities, meaning and knowledge. Educational semiotics can help us to develop a new educational rhetoric, design a specific
dispositio and implement a form of schooling that is consistent with a specific view of cognition. A pragmatic dispositio should fulfil certain conditions:

1. It should take the form of particular communication patterns in the classroom and in schools, an arrangement that organises discourses (as general patterns and rules of interaction structuring speech in the Foucauldian sense), the speech itself, and joint communicative activities.

2. Such an arrangement should use multimodal semiotic resources and involve a wide range of sign systems: words, tropes, rites, master-words and so on.

3. Dispositio must be considered from the standpoint of its functions and tools but also from the standpoint of the different steps organising these tools; a dispositio means the existence of a structure and of procedures as much as processes.

4. These processes are, overall, meaning-making processes—that is, semiosis. Simply put, a pragmatic dispositio is consistent with a hermeneutic rather than a communicative ambition. Promoters of such a dispositio postulate that schooling means construing and questioning knowledge, not acquiring it; being a student amounts to being an epistemologist.

5. If a pragmatic dispositio aims toward an epistemology, it is by the way of a reflexive process and the construction of a critical common-sensist position with fundamental effects on the construction of subjects.

What is Institutional Pedagogy?

Here, I would like to show that behind the theoretical aspects of the pragmatic dispositio, one can observe educational experiences that show ways of implementing such educational rhetoric. Such is the case for Institutional Pedagogy. I will describe some practical aspects of a pragmatic dispositio as it has been put into practice by this movement.

Institutional Pedagogy is a teaching trend that emerged 1958 and is considered a French expression of critical pedagogy. Teachers from this school of pedagogic thought have made many empirical discoveries that happen to be highly consistent with peircean semiotics. They have questioned the classical conception of transmission, exposed the damaging effects of the ‘phantasm of control’ on teaching practices and stressed the dominant role of group. The word ‘institution’ refers to a set of meanings that structure the organisation, which is the school in its physical and technical manifestations. The learning process is seen as the result of collective activity in which teachers and students use signs, institutions and meaning to transform their own environment. The status of ‘institution’ can be assigned to any rule, activity, assembly, or location. These institutions are defined by the meaning they convey rather than by their practical character. Institutions ensure mediation between individuals and meaning. For instance, it may be difficult for young students to establish their own ‘beliefs’ about ‘violence’, ‘citizenship’ or ‘respect’, but many rules allow the group to deal with acts of violence or develop their citizenship. Each of these rules is subject to constant debate. Through this debate, students grapple with meaning regarding their ideas of ‘violence’ or ‘citizenship’ and modify their ‘habits’. Many such ‘assemblies’ provide the opportunity to discuss meaning as it relates to each institution.
Educational Rhetoric on a Macro Level: Experience, Crisis and Inquiry

Within any school, each student has built a set of habits or final interpretants. Reflexivity is a process by which students and teachers analyse their experience to question and produce habits and beliefs. In the school discussed in the following pages, teachers establish a broad range of activities and situations whose function is to ‘cultivate the first rule of reason’ and to organise ongoing collective inquiry. Students and teachers talk about their collective experience and make sense of it. New and varying experiences offer an opportunity to identify habits: i.e. laws, values, concepts and rules. When conflicts appear and must be dealt with, the group seeks to understand their meaning and to come to an agreement about the rules or laws that these conflicts seem to challenge. Certainties may be abandoned; beliefs may be amended. This is the beginning of a pragmatic procedure in the very sense Peirce indicates. This kind of approach already exists in the classroom: Fernand Oury, one of the founders of Institutional Pedagogy, organised what he called ‘research field-trips’ [sorties-enquêtes] in which students would explore the neighbourhood, try to understand how things work and produce their own account instead of using schoolbooks. For students, this was a way of taking control of the world by producing knowledge about it. In addition, there is a weekly assembly gathering the students from the three classes. This is another important place in which the pragmatic process is implemented. Students and teachers talk about any conflict, project or activity, and dealing with these issues leads the group to question their beliefs. Experience unveils a gap between the world and beliefs about the world, and students must figure out a solution to this problem. The gap must be seen as a first crisis that is the source of the production of a second-order crisis, a crisis in the etymological sense, with a decision functioning as an answer to the question being considered by the group. The crisis should not be considered something negative: ‘[l]ife itself is nothing than this: bearing in mind the etymology of the word crises (an inescapable moment of decision), life is a series of crises in which antecedently authoritative ideals tend to be eclipsed by newly emergent ideals’. It is because Institutional Pedagogy takes into account the role played by crises that teachers working on this project offer an educational perspective that is essentially pragmatic.

Educational Rhetoric on a Meso Level: Cultural Forms, Speech Acts and Rituals

During the weekly assemblies, talk is regulated by specific rules. Rituals have been developed by the group. Within these rituals, speech acts are performed, and these speech acts allow conventional effects to be activated. This way of organising group discussion constitutes a specific rhetoric, a dispositio or an arrangement. This rhetoric refers to group talk rather than solely to the teacher’s speech, implies a form of deliberation rather than of transmission and aims to ensure agreement rather than persuasion.

Many rituals are put into practice every week. All of them have been created by the group over the years. For instance, a specific ritual called ‘conflicts’ is implemented every Friday. If a child ‘wrote a conflict against someone’ in the assembly notebook, a short sequence is organised. This sequence is implemented using following several steps, each of these steps associated with a particular statement. 1. The ‘president’, a child in charge...
of leading the meeting, asks ‘Who wrote a conflict and wants to talk about it?’ 2. The child who wrote the note explains it. 3. The whole group debates how the child who is criticised might atone for what he/she did. 4. The decision—the atonement or sanction—is announced by the president, who asks the student who has been lectured if he/she agrees with this decision. 5. The decision is formally announced.

In this instance, as in many others, the group has designed specific linguistic patterns and rituals to help them to deal with problems and to do so in contexts within which debates about meaning and rules are essential.

Educational Rhetoric on a Micro Level: The Relations Between Teachers and Students

One may perceive in the description above two aspects of rhetoric related to the construction of knowledge and the development of social skills. Several semiotic tools rule the way students investigate their own experience and question their beliefs. In a more concrete way, the pragmatic processes involved in Institutional Pedagogy transform the role played by teachers. Their speech is less obviously present. Their job is not to say ‘how things are’ but rather to organise interactions through which the whole group (including the teachers) will produce rational and reflexive knowledge about these things and their meanings and build a specific view of their social environment. Following Young (1997, p. 19), we can say that a teacher becomes a ‘scaffolder of debate’. From the standpoint of rhetoric, the teacher is no longer concerned with the arrangement of his/her own speech but instead considers methods of structuring group talk and the steps involved in interactional processes: ‘The teacher’s authority in such teaching moves away from content authority to methodological authority’.

Grundy (1997, pp. 36–37) comments on Young’s analysis of the new kind of asymmetry that characterises relations between students and teachers in such contexts and refers to the notion of ‘educational teaching’: ‘There is still talk asymmetry in this classroom, but it is a different asymmetry from that in the dominant classroom type. This asymmetry is complementary, since the rights of pupils as rational interlocutors are preserved, while the teacher’s superior knowledge and rational skills may still be employed on the pupils’ behalf in the fostering of the inquiry of the class. Complementary asymmetry of this kind is educational teaching’.

There is a radical change here, not for political or ideological reasons but because of a new perspective on knowledge. The production of knowledge is the result of the inquiry led by a community. The art of rhetoric does not characterise the speech of a sole individual—the teacher—and it is not about monologues; rhetoric is expected to rule processes, procedures and strategies of group interactions. With the ideal of a rhetorical turn in education, a group of students develops conjoint activity ruled by the specific steps of inquiry proposed by the pragmatic project.

Conclusion: Educational Rhetoric on a Meta Level, Producing a Social World

Institutional Pedagogy gives us some clues about the way teachers may implement the perspective offered by speculative rhetoric in educational settings. Let us remember that this ideal is the result of three questions regarding the mentalist view of learning and
teaching as a general theory of cognition; classical educational rhetoric as a ‘discourse’ or a set of rules defining our conception of power, knowledge, communication and relations; and the *dispositio* used by teachers to implement this general rhetoric as a specific arrangement of speech. Peircean scholars have unveiled the stakes implied by Peirce’s speculative rhetoric within educational settings; critical educationalists help us to perceive other aspects of the will to transform schools. These stakes concern the construction of the self, joint activity among communities and interaction between individuals and groups in the making of knowledge. Institutional Pedagogy offers its own answers to these questions by developing a new educational rhetoric on three different levels: a macro-level (educational pragmaticism); a meso-level (educational rhetoric); and a micro-level (educational *dispositio*).

I would like to conclude by revealing another element of this approach related to more general issues regarding schooling models. There is a meta-level of educational rhetoric that connects the three previous levels and allows us to consider the essentially semiotic and pragmatic aspects of cognition. Indeed, by means of the strategies mentioned above, a community of students and teachers comes to construct a critical perspective on the world and to elaborate a shared social view of its environment. We may say, using semiotic terms, that the school community transforms its own *umwelt* by producing semiotic filters. This is a way of describing a phenomenon of social construction from a semiotic perspective that has been perceived for a long time by critical educationalist. Measures *et al.* (1997, p. 21) sum up this process of meaning-making that links theory and practice, meaning and experience: ‘By drawing learners into the discourses that direct, interpret and reflect upon the activities in which they engage together, teachers provide opportunities for learners to appropriate the culture’s linguistic resources for meaning making and thereby to take over the “theory” of experience that is encoded in the language; at the same time, by encouraging learners to take an active part in constructing new meanings, teachers can enable learners to become critical and creative actors and thinkers who also transform cultural practices and knowledge’. In this example, Measures describes a way of organising a community of critical inquirers in the context of classrooms, an approach that is characteristic of the settings favoured by Critical and Institutional Pedagogy projects. On the basis of their teaching experience, some institutionalists have felt that they needed peircean theories to account for the cognitive processes that seemed to take place in the classroom. It is quite interesting to note that, at the same time (though from a different perspective), some Peirce scholars have confirmed a strong connection between Peirce’s late rhetoric and constructivist pedagogies; they have indeed identified ‘pedagogical implications’ that evoke something very similar to what one can observe in critical and institutional classrooms. This is the case, for instance, with McCarthy (2005, p. 174): ‘It is not clear whether, or at what point, or in what way, any persistent wrong answers in the minds of the students are to be corrected. But, clearly, it would be an educational implication of Peirce’s pragmatism that the goal of the learner is not merely to formulate beliefs in a cooperative social manner, but to formulate beliefs that are true, and “true” in an entirely objective sense. Pedagogical methodologies would need to be evaluated by reference to how effectively they contribute to this overarching goal. The judgment as to whether or not any particular
method now considered to be “constructivist” would usefully contribute to the epistemic goal of having true beliefs is a matter to be informed by research’.

Notes
2. See Pesce, 2008a, 2008b.
5. CP 5.414, The Monist, 15, pp. 161–181, 1905. Peirce’s critical stance on the word pragmatism appears in a note in the same excerpt: ‘To show how recent the general use of the word “pragmatism” is, the writer may mention that, to the best of his belief, he never used it in copy for the press before today, except by particular request, in Baldwin’s Dictionary. Toward the end of 1890, when this part of the Century Dictionary appeared, he did not deem that the word had sufficient status to appear in that work. But he has used it continually in philosophical conversation since, perhaps, the mid-seventies’.
7. CP 5.467.
8. CP 4.539.
9. As do several semioticians, I use the adjective ‘semiotic’ in the sense of ‘relating to the process of semiosis’; indeed the adjective ‘semiotic’ remains ambiguous, meaning ‘relating to semiosis’ and ‘relating to the field of semiotics’.
10. As we will see in the following, the integration of meaning-making and inquiry in the context of a peircean view of learning and teaching is an important aspect of research in Educational Semiotics. See for instance Midtgarden (2005b, pp. 239–240) commenting on Garrison and Neimann.
14. CP 8.315.
18. CP 2.93, ‘Minute Logic’, 1902.
22. Other sign systems (music or painting for instance) are rarely considered in schools; even when present, they remain a secondary resource for teachers. In the French school system, such sign systems, which may complete the use of written and oral language, are hardly used in teaching the main aspects of the curriculum. See M.E.N., 2002, 2008.
26. This does not imply that books are the sources of knowledge; they are nothing but a way of recording and transmitting the knowledge that schools consider as pertaining to a world of pure ideas.
27. See Comte, 1848 [1865].
28. See for instance Bakker, 2005 on the mind/body duality in the philosophy of Descartes.
From Peirce’s Speculative Rhetoric to Educational Rhetoric

32. About semiotic poverty, see for instance Stables, 2006.
33. About these methods and the ideological questions to which they relate in French research, see Ollagnier, 2002; Laval, 2003; Le Goff, 1999.
35. Commented on by McLaren (1989, pp. 209ff), among others. Speech must be considered as a particular event and discourse as a system of thought specific to a culture and a period of time that organises speech. Discourse is not speech but is rather a perspective on the social world; discourses are made up of ideas, concepts and forms of conduct; see Foucault, 1971.
38. See, on rites and marks as semiotic resources, Pesce, 2008a, 2009.
40. About Peirce’s comments on the purpose of a university—which takes up most of his analysis regarding education in specific—see for instance Midtgarden, 2005a; Colapietro, Midtgarden & Strand, 2005, pp. 172–175; Strand, 2005a, p. 309; Dahlin, 2007, p. 332.
44. Liszka, 2000, pp. 440, 468.
45. Kevelson, 1984, p. 16; see also Strand, 2005b.
46. Peirce has used the words as another expression for ‘pragmatism’; see his comments on this point in CP 5.494.
47. CP 5.440.
52. See for instance this definition given by Peirce: ‘... Speculative Rhetoric is substantially what goes by the name of methodology, or better, of methodetic. It is the doctrine of the general conditions of the reference of Symbols and other Signs to the Interpretants which they aim to determine’ (CP2.93, ‘Minute Logic’, 1902).
63. Mead, 1934.
64. Bakker, 2005, p. 75.
68. The word ‘Hermeneutics’ is used here to describe a process of meaning-making in comparison with communication, a process by which existing meanings are transmitted.
71. L’Ecole de la Neuville, inspiring the trend of Institutional Pedagogy.
72. Measures et al. (1997, p. 25) describe a very similar experience of research during a school fieldtrip in Arizona: children describe their home and their experience, which mediate learning. It is quite interesting to note that educationalists with similar critical backgrounds develop the same kind of pedagogic strategies.

74. I refer to the specific definition of rituals developed by Institutional Pedagogy on the basis of Fernand Oury’s work (Oury & Vasquez, 1967); for details about this definition of ritual, see Pesce, 2008a.
75. This is part of the definition of ‘new rhetoric’ by Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1958/1969.
76. ‘Writing a conflict’ is a metonymy used in this school; the word ‘conflict’ refers to the conflict itself, and also to the note describing it in the assembly notebook.
77. One may note that the previous statement, summing up the propositions made by the group (‘We said you could perhaps offer a soda to the child you have insulted’) does not have the conventional value that the last statement has (‘Pierre will offer a soda to Paul’). There is a specific convention accepted by every member of the group; based on this convention, the latter statement is a speech act, indicating that a valid decision has been made and recorded by the group.
78. The presentation of Institutional Pedagogy that I propose here is mainly centred on the use of words, though I stressed in this article the part that other sign systems must play. Actually, Institutional Pedagogy favours the use of several types of sign systems (for instance rites or ‘behaviour belts’), an aspect I cannot consider further here. For a broader presentation of this consideration, see Oury & Vasquez, 1967.

References


Mead, G. H. (1934) Mind, Self, & Society. From the standpoint of a Social Behaviorist (Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press).


Downloaded by [EBSCO Publishing Distribution] at 23:12 26 February 2016