

CRITICAL EDUCATION AND STUDENT PROTAGONISM: CURRICULAR TRANSFORMATIONS AND EMANCIPATORY PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES



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ABSTRACT

The article addresses the historical evolution of education and the transition from traditional pedagogical models to critical and emancipatory practices, with a focus on student protagonism. Initially, it examines primitive educational practices, linked to survival and cultural transmission, until the emergence of formal schools centered on hierarchy and memorization. The traditional education model, characterized by the centrality of the teacher and rigid curricula, is analyzed in its limitations, such as the reproduction of social inequalities and the absence of autonomy and creativity in the learning process. Based on the criticisms of authors such as Paulo Freire, Dermeval Saviani, Moacir Gadotti and Edgar Morin, the article presents critical education as a transformative alternative. This approach emphasizes dialogue, the contextualization of contents, and the appreciation of students' experiences, promoting the formation of autonomous subjects capable of transforming their realities. Student protagonism emerges as a central element of this paradigm, as it recognizes students as active agents in the process of knowledge construction. The text also explores innovative pedagogical practices, such as project-based learning, the flipped classroom, and the use of digital technologies, which strengthen students' autonomy. Finally, the article reaffirms the relevance of critical education and student protagonism as

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pillars for the construction of a more just, democratic and inclusive society, highlighting the central role of the school and the teacher in this process of educational transformation.

Keywords: Student Protagonism, Curricular Transformations, Critical Education.

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of education reflects social, cultural, and economic transformations throughout history. This work proposes an analysis that ranges from traditional educational practices, marked by the centrality of the teacher and the transmission of pre-established contents, to contemporary approaches that defend a critical and emancipatory education. The historical context of traditional liberal schools is explored, highlighting their function of preparing students for the job market and perpetuating a hierarchical structure, often alien to the experiences and needs of students.

On the other hand, the limitations of this model have driven the emergence of progressive pedagogies, which place the student at the center of the educational process. These proposals value individual experience, promote autonomy and encourage critical thinking, positioning education as a tool for social transformation.

The text also presents the evolution of curriculum generations, analyzing how structural changes in educational models reflect a continuous movement from memorization and reproduction of knowledge to the active construction of knowledge. In this trajectory, student protagonism emerges as a central element, redefining the role of the student as a co-author of the learning process and a transforming agent of their reality.

In this way, this study seeks to connect past and present, investigating how pedagogical practices can promote a more inclusive, critical, and meaningful education, aligned with the challenges of an ever-changing society.

DEVELOPMENT

THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF EDUCATION: FROM PRIMITIVE ORIGINS⁹ TO TRADITIONAL LIBERAL SCHOOLS

Education follows the evolution of humanity, reflecting the needs and contexts of each historical period. In the beginning, educational practices were directly linked to the survival and perpetuation of essential knowledge for life in society. For Gadotti (2003), the reproduction of knowledge occurred spontaneously and practically, through observation, imitation and orality, usually within the family or community nucleus.

⁹ The use of the term reflects terminology found in historical sources and classical literature. It is not used with the intention of disqualifying or inferiorizing the societies described, but rather to preserve the original context of the works cited. The expression should be understood within its historical use, and not as an evaluative representation of the cultures mentioned.

These societies lived in constant interaction with nature, which shaped their way of teaching. Hunting, fishing, cultivation, making utensils and religious rituals were transmitted from generation to generation without any systematization or separation between education and daily life. In this model, everyone was an apprentice and a master, and the transmission of knowledge was linked to experience and coexistence.

With the advent of the first organized civilizations, such as in Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, and China, the need to systematize knowledge arose. The development of writing and more complex social structures gave rise to a more formalized education, focused on specific functions, such as the training of scribes, priests and administrators. This process of formalization marked the beginning of the transition from a community education to a centralized system, with the creation of schools in which access to knowledge was restricted to the elites.

The consolidation of formal education intensified in Ancient Greece and Rome, where models were developed that inspired traditional liberal schools. In Greece, education aimed to form citizens capable of actively participating in the polis¹⁰, with an emphasis on disciplines such as philosophy, rhetoric, and ethics. On the other hand, Rome adapted this model, emphasizing preparation for practical functions, such as administration and law, consolidating the idea of organized teaching in formal spaces.

With the rise of Christianity in the Middle Ages, educational practices were largely influenced by the Church. Monasteries and cathedrals became the main centers of learning, where the objective was to preserve and transmit classical knowledge, as well as to spread religious doctrine. Medieval education was hierarchical, with strong control by the Church, and focused on moral and spiritual formation, perpetuating a structure that favored the maintenance of the *social status quo* (Freire, 1970).

Only in the Renaissance and, later, in the Industrial Revolution, did education undergo significant transformations. The emergence of traditional liberal schools in the eighteenth century was driven by economic, social, and political changes that demanded a new class of skilled workers to meet the needs of emerging capitalist economies. These schools, according to Saviani (2018) introduced a systematic and disciplinary approach, centered on the figure of the teacher as the highest authority.

¹⁰ The word "polis" originates from ancient Greek (πόλις), meaning "city" or "city-state". Etymologically, it is related to the concept of political and social organization of the Greek communities, which constituted autonomous units with their own government. The root of this term has also given rise to modern words such as "politics" and "public policy."

In this model, education was seen as a tool to mold obedient, productive individuals prepared for specific roles in the labor market. Traditional schools were based on rigid curricula, with pre-established content, and emphasized memorization and the reproduction of knowledge. This system, although efficient for the needs of the time, also reflected and reinforced social inequalities, privileging a few and excluding many.

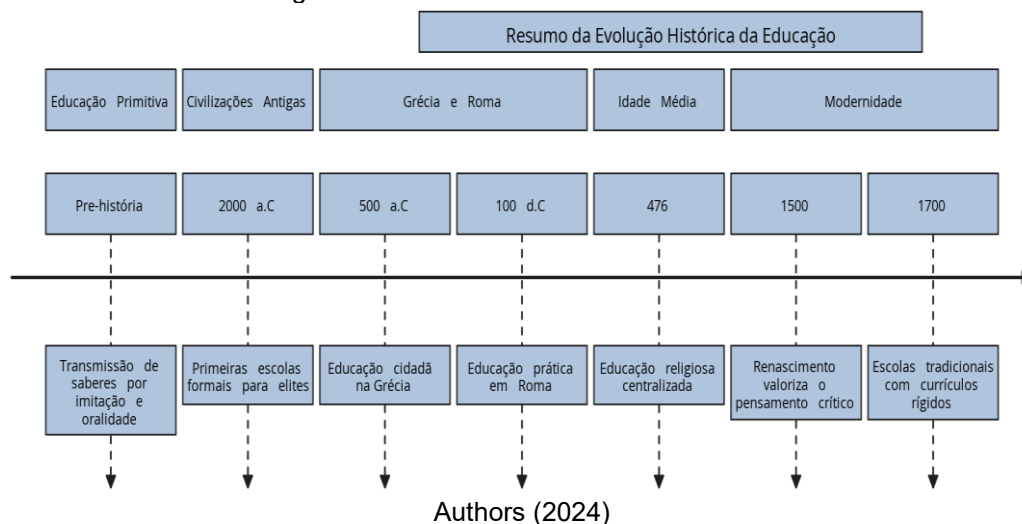
The transition from primitive practices to formal education reveals how education, as a social practice, reflects the economic, cultural and political dynamics of each era.

The school we have today was born with the hierarchization and economic inequality generated by those who took over the surplus produced by the primitive community. The history of education, since then, has been an extension of the history of economic inequalities. Primitive education was unique, the same for all; with the social division of labor also appears the inequality of education, one for the exploiters and the other for the exploited, one for the rich and the other for the poor (Gadotti, 2003, p.23).

In this historical path, the bases for understanding the criticisms that questioned the limits of traditional schools and proposed new approaches, such as critical and emancipatory pedagogy, are found in the roots of pedagogical models structured to respond to the social and economic demands of their respective historical periods. These transformations were shaped by the specific needs of each era, configuring scenarios that gradually highlighted the centrality of the student in the educational process.

Next, the table presents in a schematized way the main moments of the historical evolution of education, from primitive practices to modern schools, highlighting their central characteristics and the social contexts that shaped them.

Figure 1 - Historical Evolution of Education



With the emergence of traditional liberal schools, formal education began to play a fundamental role in the formation of individuals to meet the economic and social demands of the society in force. These schools, established especially between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were designed to prepare students for the job market by emphasizing the acquisition of specific technical and intellectual skills. To do so, they assumed characteristics that marked educational practice, many of which still influence contemporary educational systems.

One of the most evident marks of traditional liberal schools was the centrality of the teacher in the educational process. The teacher occupied the position of maximum authority in the classroom, being the holder of knowledge and responsible for transmitting it in a unidirectional way to students. This approach reflected a hierarchical view of the pedagogical relationship, in which the student was seen as a passive receiver of information.

The role of the teacher, in this model, was not only to teach, but also to maintain order and discipline the students (Freire, 1970), promoting a structured and controlled environment. The figure of the teacher as an "absolute master" reinforced the idea that learning depended exclusively on their ability to transmit content, while students were evaluated by their ability to accurately reproduce what they had received.

This centralization, although efficient for the organization of large-scale teaching at the time, limited the autonomy of students, making it difficult to develop critical and creative skills. The focus on the figure of the teacher as the only source of knowledge ignored the experiences, experiences and coexistence of the students, restricting their active participation in the educational process.

According to Edgar Morin (2000), the figure of the traditional teacher is marked by his position of central authority in the classroom, where he is seen as the main source of knowledge. This teacher tends to use expository methods, transmitting information in a unidirectional way, with little interaction from students. Additionally, he values discipline and compliance, frequently employing control strategies to maintain order.

Another central aspect of traditional liberal schools is related to the rigid and pre-defined curriculum. The disciplines and contents were selected based on criteria that met the demands of the economic and political context of the time, prioritizing the development of technical and intellectual skills necessary for specific functions in the labor market.

According to Edgar Morin (2000), the traditional curriculum is characterized by its rigidity and segmentation, where the disciplines are treated in isolation, without considering their interconnections. This curricular model does not adapt to the needs and interests of students, limiting the exploration of themes in a broader and more integrated way. The emphasis is on memorizing content, rather than promoting a deep and contextualized understanding, which results in an education that does not adequately prepare students to face the complexity of the contemporary world.

This model valued the teaching of subjects such as reading, writing, arithmetic, and basic sciences, which were seen as fundamental to the formation of productive workers and obedient citizens. Libâneo (2012) infers that the curriculum aimed to transmit universal knowledge, considered neutral and timeless, but which, in practice, reflected and perpetuated dominant values, often to the detriment of local or cultural knowledge.

The pedagogical approach focused on memorizing and reproducing information, rather than encouraging critical reflection or creativity. The evaluation was based on standardized metrics, such as tests and exams, which measured student performance through objective and homogeneous criteria. This structure made education a mechanical and instrumental process, in which learning was evaluated by the amount of information that the student was able to retain and reproduce.

Technical training was another priority in this model, especially in contexts such as the Industrial Revolution, when education came to be seen as a mechanism to prepare specialized workers. Workshops, practical classes and technical subjects complemented the curriculum, reinforcing the utilitarian character of traditional education.

The expansion of formal education had significant limitations. Teacher-centricity and an emphasis on pre-established curricula created an educational environment that often neglected students' individuality, experiences, and needs. According to Edgar Morin (2000), students are instructed to disconnect objects from their context, to fragment disciplines instead of perceiving their interrelationships, and to dissociate problems instead of grouping and integrating them.

In addition, by focusing on technical training and memorization, these schools prepared students for specific roles. This approach also reinforced social inequalities by excluding marginalized groups and limiting access to education that could transform their circumstances.

These characteristics formed the basis for later critiques of the traditional model, which gave rise to progressive and critical pedagogical movements. These movements proposed a new conception of education that placed the student as the protagonist of the educational process, breaking with the centralization of teaching in the teacher and promoting more inclusive and transformative pedagogical practices.

LIMITATIONS OF TRADITIONAL EDUCATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF CRITICAL EDUCATION

Traditional liberal schools, despite representing a significant advance in the organization of formal education, began to be the target of criticism from the twentieth century onwards.

The teacher-centricity, the focus on pre-established content, and the emphasis on memorization were seen as factors that limited the autonomy, creativity, and critical sense of the students. This critical view was widely explored by authors such as Paulo Freire, Dermeval Saviani, Moacir Gadotti and Edgar Morin, who pointed out the limitations of the traditional model and proposed alternatives that placed the student at the center of the educational process.

Paulo Freire, one of the greatest exponents of critical pedagogy, introduced the concept of "banking education" to describe the traditional model of teaching. According to Freire, banking education is characterized by the mechanical transmission of content, in which the teacher deposits information in the students, as if they were empty containers. This model dehumanizes the educational relationship, as it does not recognize students as active subjects in the learning process.

Freire criticized the passivity of students in this system, where knowledge was presented as something finished and detached from their experiences. For him, this approach reinforced structures of power and oppression, keeping individuals in a position of social subordination. In contrast, Freire proposed a liberating education, based on dialogue, problematization and valuing the experiences of students. In this model, learning would be built collectively, allowing students to become agents of social transformation.

Dermeval Saviani also made scathing criticisms of traditional education, highlighting its reproductive character. For him, the traditional model not only transmitted knowledge, but also reproduced existing social inequalities, legitimizing relations of power and domination. Saviani argued that education, by being restricted to memorization and

technical training, lost its potential for transformation and contributed to perpetuating the current social structure.

He emphasized that access to formal education was not enough to promote equality, as the traditional model ignored the historical and cultural conditions of students, especially those from the lower classes. Saviani defends a historical-critical pedagogy, which recognizes the role of education in the formation of a critical consciousness and in the transformation of social conditions. For him, the school should be a space of emancipation, in which students could understand and question the structures that determine their lives, preparing themselves to act actively and consciously in society.

Moacir Gadotti, another important representative of critical pedagogy, expanded on Freire's and Saviani's reflections, highlighting education as an essential instrument for social transformation. For Gadotti, the traditional teaching model was limited to preparing individuals for the job market, neglecting their potential for integral and civic education. He saw education as a dynamic and continuous process, which should promote not only the learning of content, but also the development of ethical values and the ability to act in favor of a more just and democratic society.

He emphasizes that the school cannot be neutral, it always acts according to certain interests, whether they are the maintenance or transformation of society. In this sense, the author defends a critical education that questions the imposed norms and values, encouraging students to think autonomously and to build a worldview based on social justice and solidarity.

Likewise, the author Edgar Morin criticized the traditional educational system, pointing out that education is fragmented, with a rigid curriculum that separates disciplines and ignores their interrelationships, prioritizing memorization to the detriment of critical thinking. The author advocates an education that goes beyond the simple transmission of content, promoting an integrated understanding of human realities and allowing students to connect different knowledges in a broader context.

He also criticizes the overadaptation of teaching to economic demands, which marginalizes the humanist culture and compartmentalizes knowledge, compromising the creativity of students. For him, true education must be a process of integration and contextualization, preparing students for the complexity of today's world converging with human complexities.

The criticisms of Freire, Saviani, Gadotti and Morin to the traditional model converge on the need for a critical and emancipatory education, which breaks with the limitations imposed by the centrality of the teacher and the rigid curriculum. This new paradigm values student protagonism, promoting pedagogical practices based on dialogue, the active participation of students and the collective construction of knowledge.

Critical education stands out as a response to the contradictions of the traditional model, by recognizing that learning is a process connected to the cultural, social, and historical situations of individuals. It does not seek to transmit knowledge, but to develop a critical awareness that allows students to understand and transform the world around them. (Freire, 1970).

This approach breaks with the mechanistic view of education, replacing the logic of memorization with problematization and reflection. The student ceases to be a passive receiver and assumes the role of protagonist, actively participating in the construction of knowledge and in facing social issues. Thus, critical education presents itself as a way to overcome the limitations of the traditional model, promoting a transformative and emancipatory pedagogical practice.

The emergence of critical education as a counterpoint to the traditional model represents a paradigmatic rupture in the way of understanding the role of the school and educational processes. This approach places the student at the center of the teaching-learning process, recognizing their ability to build knowledge in an active and participatory way.

One of the main characteristics of critical education is its connection with the student's reality. Unlike the traditional model, which often detaches school content from the social and cultural context of students, critical education is based on the principle that learning is only meaningful when it dialogues with the students' life experience.

Paulo Freire emphasized the importance of "reading the world" before reading words, arguing that the school should consider popular experiences, stories and knowledge as fundamental elements in the educational process. This approach seeks to transform knowledge into something alive, capable of dialoguing with the concrete challenges faced by students in their daily reality.

By valuing the context of each learner, critical education also promotes a multicultural and inclusive vision, recognizing and respecting the diverse identities and perspectives present in the classroom. This connection with the environment contributes to

learning going beyond the limits of the classroom, becoming an instrument for understanding and transforming society.

Critical education argues that the main function of the school is not only to transmit technical knowledge or prepare individuals for the job market, but also to foster the intellectual and social emancipation of students. It implies forming citizens capable of questioning, reflecting and acting on the reality in which they are inserted, breaking with oppressive structures and promoting significant social changes.

The emergence of critical education also demands a transformation in pedagogical practices. The teacher is no longer just a transmitter of content and assumes the role of mediator, facilitator and co-constructor of knowledge. The traditional class, centered on exposure and memorization, gives way to participatory, investigative and collaborative activities, which encourage students to apply what they learn in real contexts.

Morin (2000) emphasizes the need for a transformation in pedagogical practices so that education can adequately respond to the challenges of the contemporary world. He argues that the reform of thought is essential for this transformation, as it allows for a more integrated organization of knowledge. For him, education must go beyond the mere transmission of information, promoting an approach that connects different knowledge and contexts, favoring the development of critical thinking and the ability to contextualize. This change in pedagogical practices must seek an integral vision, which prepares students to deal with the complexity of reality, integrating the various areas of knowledge.

This change is not without challenges, especially in educational systems still strongly influenced by the traditional model. However, the proposal of a critical education opens up new possibilities for a school that values student protagonism, autonomous thinking and social transformation, reaffirming the central role of education in the construction of a more conscious and supportive world. Thus, critical education emerges as a response to the limitations of the traditional model, by recognizing the student as an active subject in the educational process and the school as a space for dialogue and emancipation.

PROGRESSIVE PEDAGOGY AND THE CENTRALITY OF THE STUDENT

The student is no longer seen as a passive receiver of content and assumes the role of an active subject in learning. This approach considers that learning is most effective when it starts from the interests, needs and experiences of students. Paulo Freire, in his criticism of banking education, emphasizes that the student should not be treated as a

deposit of information, but as an author of knowledge, someone who contributes with his experiences to the collective construction of knowledge. In this model, the curriculum becomes flexible, adapted to the realities of the students and connected to the social context in which they are inserted.

Student centrality also implies the development of skills that go beyond memorization, such as critical thinking, creativity, and the ability to solve problems. Freire (1970) infers that the school is transformed into a space of discovery and dialogue, where knowledge is built in partnership between students and teachers.

According to Morin (2000), the teacher must go beyond being a simple transmitter of knowledge, assuming a multifaceted role as a facilitator, mentor and agent of transformation. It should promote wisdom by helping students convert information into knowledge and wisdom, and foster human understanding by promoting a global citizenship that values cultural diversity.

In addition, the teacher must be an agent of change, reforming pedagogical practices to integrate different knowledge and prepare students for the complexity of the world. It is important that he incorporates an artistic dimension into his teaching, engaging emotionally with students, and adopts an integral approach, connecting disciplines and contexts to facilitate the application of knowledge in real situations.

This change in attitude requires the teacher to be sensitive to identify the potential of each student and create conditions for learning to occur in a participatory and collaborative way. The teacher also assumes the responsibility of stimulating critical thinking, promoting situations that challenge students to question, reflect and propose solutions to real problems.

Libâneo (1999) emphasizes the importance of the interaction between teacher and student. For him, the pedagogical relationship should be dialogical, based on mutual respect and cooperation. This interaction does not eliminate the teacher's authority, but redefines his function as a guide that promotes the integral development of the student.

Progressive pedagogy marks a significant break with the traditional model by placing the student at the center of the educational process. Based on theoretical contributions, this approach transforms the relationship between teacher and student, promoting a pedagogical practice that values dialogue, interaction and protagonism.

By recognizing the potential of each student as a builder of knowledge, progressive pedagogy not only enriches the teaching-learning process, but also contributes to the

formation of critical and engaged citizens, capable of understanding and transforming the reality in which they live.

GENERATIONS OF CURRICULA: FROM MEMORIZATION TO STUDENT PROTAGONISM

The evolution of pedagogical practices in the history of education can be analyzed through the generations of curricula (Silva, 1999), which reflect changes in the conceptions of teaching and learning. Each generation brings with it a set of principles and objectives that mark different ways of thinking about the relationship between knowledge, teacher and student, from a focus on the transmission of knowledge to the valorization of student protagonism.

Curriculum theory, as discussed by Silva (1999), encompasses a variety of approaches that influence the way educational content is structured and taught. Among the main theories, the traditional one focuses on the transmission of fundamental knowledge, prioritizing content and discipline. In contrast, critical theory, in turn, analyzes power dynamics and social influence on the curriculum, encouraging a reflection on educational practices and identity formation.

The traditional curriculum, as exposed above, has its predominant roots in the technicist liberal schools, is characterized by an approach that prioritizes the transmission of content in large quantities. This conception of teaching understands knowledge as something finished and universal, to be passed on from the teacher – seen as the holder of the truth – to the student, treated as a passive receiver.

In this model, according to Gadotti, the focus is on the memorization of facts and concepts, often disconnected from the student's reality. The assessment focuses on measuring the ability to reproduce knowledge, through standardized tests and tests.

While the traditional curriculum has contributed to the structuring of large-scale education systems, it has faced criticism for failing to prepare students for critical thinking or complex problem-solving. This approach also limits the ability of students to recognize themselves as active subjects in the construction of knowledge (Freire, 1970), reinforcing a hierarchical model centered on the figure of the teacher.

On the other hand, the relevance of a critical curriculum is consonant in the literature, which, unlike the traditionalist one, seeks to examine and question the power relations and social influences that shape the educational process. This theory proposes a reflection that

highlights pedagogical practices, emphasizing the need to consider the social and cultural context of students, is not limited to the mere transmission of content, but seeks to promote an education that develops students' critical awareness. It encourages students to question the norms, values and social structures that surround them, promoting training that goes beyond technical knowledge, aiming at social transformation.

Silva (1999) highlights that this approach is fundamental for the formation of individuals who not only absorb information, but who also become agents of change in their communities. It is like a tool to empower students, allowing them to understand and act on the social realities they face.

In the same way, Morin (2007) corroborates a new structuring of the curriculum, in the sense of removing the shackles of traditionalism, which preaches the following characteristics for a critical curriculum. The first is the integration of knowledge, an interdisciplinary perspective, as it refers to the union of sciences and knowledge of the humanities, promoting a scope that allows students to understand the complexity of the human condition and the world in which they live.

Transdisciplinary education, the second characteristic of the aforementioned author, defends a transdisciplinary approach, in which it breaks down the barriers between disciplines (curricula), providing students with significant connections between different areas of knowledge. It prepares the subject to face complex problems that cannot be solved from a single perspective.

The third characteristic tends to focus on the Human Condition, since the curriculum must include teaching about the human condition, earthly identity and the ethics of the human race, promoting an education that not only informs, but also forms conscious and responsible citizens.

More recently, the emergence of the post-critical curriculum has brought a new perspective to the educational debate, proposing a plural, interdisciplinary and inclusive view of teaching. This generation of curricula recognizes the complexity and diversity of human experiences, arguing that knowledge cannot be reduced to a single perspective or approach.

The post-critical curriculum integrates elements from different areas of knowledge, promoting a broad and connected view of reality. This approach values cross-cutting themes such as sustainability, human rights, and cultural diversity, which encourage students to develop a global and interdependent understanding of the world.

Student protagonism is a central element in this approach, as students are encouraged to participate actively. The teacher, in turn, acts as a mediator who facilitates the collective construction of knowledge, promoting an inclusive and democratic learning environment.

The analysis of the generations of curricula reveals a gradual but significant movement towards pedagogical practices that value student protagonism. This transition process reflects a paradigmatic change in the role of education, which is no longer an instrument of social reproduction to become a space for emancipation and transformation. Valuing student protagonism not only enriches learning, but also contributes to the formation of critical, creative, and engaged individuals, capable of acting meaningfully in their communities and in the world.

By incorporating elements from different generations of curricula, the contemporary educational model, according to Gadotti (1992), has the potential to overcome the limitations of the past and to build a more inclusive and equitable future, where education plays a central role in human and social development.

Student protagonism emerges as a central point in curricular evolution, especially in the most recent pedagogical proposals, which seek a more authentic and transformative education for students. The idea that students should be active agents of their own learning challenges the traditional teaching model, where the figure of the student is often reduced to a passive receiver of information. In contrast, in the context of the most current pedagogical approaches, the student is seen as a subject who participates, questions, builds and, above all, plays a leading role in his or her learning process.

This movement to place the student at the center of the educational process reflects a significant transformation in pedagogical practices. When students are encouraged to be the protagonists of their own education, they not only become more motivated and engaged, but also acquire the autonomy necessary to make informed choices about their educational and professional path. This protagonism, therefore, is not only limited to active participation in classes, but also to the ability to engage in a critical and reflective way in the social, political, and cultural issues that affect their context.

One of the most effective ways to foster student protagonism is through pedagogical practices that promote the autonomy of the student (Freire, 2006). These practices, rather than prescribing a single path to learning, offer students the tools and freedom to develop their own study and problem-solving strategies.

Autonomy is essential for the student to become an independent thinker and, at the same time, a critical and responsible citizen. The development of skills such as decision-making and self-management of learning are fundamental in this process. For this, according to Morin (2010), an educational environment is needed that favors students' exploration and curiosity, instead of restricting their possibilities to the simple fulfillment of mechanical or repetitive tasks

Practices such as collaborative work, interdisciplinary projects, and the use of active methodologies (such as project-based learning, flipped classroom, among others) are examples of how autonomy can be promoted in everyday school life. These practices challenge the traditional model and offer the student a more active and responsible role in their learning, allowing them, for example, to decide on the topics they want to investigate, how to organize their time and with whom to collaborate in the research process.

In addition, formative assessments (Luckesi, 2002), which seek to track student progress over time rather than focusing on a single final exam, are also a way to promote autonomy. These assessments encourage students to reflect on their own learning, identifying their difficulties and outlining strategies to overcome them. Continuous and constructive feedback, in this context, becomes an essential tool for the development of autonomy, as it allows the student to adjust their study methods and improve their skills.

According to Bacich & Moran (2018), there are several innovative practices that can be observed in schools that adopt student protagonism as central to their pedagogical proposal. The project-based learning (PBL) method, for example, is a strategy that places students as protagonists by involving them in solving real and complex problems. In this model, students are challenged to work collaboratively, apply their knowledge creatively, and research solutions to issues that have an impact on their daily lives and their community. The focus is not only on disciplinary content, but on the development of competencies and skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and decision-making.

Another innovative practice is the flipped classroom, which reconfigures the traditional learning space. In this model, students have early access to theoretical content, usually through videos or online readings, and classroom time is dedicated to the practical application of this content. During classes, students participate in activities such as discussions, problem-solving, and group work, while the teacher acts as a facilitator, helping

students understand and apply the concepts. This format allows students to become responsible for their learning and develop an active attitude towards the content studied.

The use of digital technologies, such as online learning platforms and interactive resources, when used as didactic support, has proven to be a tool to promote student protagonism. Through these technologies, students can access diverse content, collaborate with peers from different regions, and even create their own educational materials. The use of these tools expands the possibilities of learning and offers the student a greater degree of flexibility and control over their educational process.

In addition, entrepreneurial education is an area that has gained prominence in the context of student protagonism. By teaching students to identify opportunities, create innovative solutions, and work independently, this approach prepares them to face the challenges of the contemporary world, encouraging them to take on leadership roles and actively engage in the transformation of their reality. In the school environment, entrepreneurial education can manifest itself in projects that encourage the creation of social businesses or in initiatives with community impact.

The innovative practices above have in common the idea that the student should be the protagonist of their learning. They seek to develop an active and reflective posture, encouraging the student to make choices, to question, to dialogue and to collaborate, creating an environment in which learning is a continuous and collective construction. In this sense, student protagonism goes beyond simple participation in school activities, it is a transformation in the way of thinking about education, where the student is, in fact, the center of the teaching-learning process.

By integrating these innovative and student-centered pedagogical practices, the contemporary curriculum not only aligns with the challenges of the twenty-first century, but also contributes to the formation of more critical, autonomous citizens capable of acting in a transformative way in society. Student protagonism, therefore, is not only a teaching strategy, but a fundamental posture for the full development of the student as a subject of his own learning and social transformation.

CRITICAL EDUCATION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF STUDENT PROTAGONISM

In this critical context, student protagonism emerges as a fundamental principle, representing the ability of students to become active subjects in the process of knowledge construction, rather than mere content receptors. The relationship between critical

education and student protagonism is interconnected, as both seek to enable students to understand and transform the reality around them, promoting meaningful learning that values students' experiences and experiences.

Student protagonism refers to the active role of the student in the construction of his own learning, in which he assumes responsibility for his educational trajectory, not only as a receiver of content, but as a transforming agent of his own reality and that of the community. Protagonism, therefore, is not restricted to participation in school activities, but involves the development of a critical, reflective and autonomous attitude in the face of challenges and learning.

Within a critical approach, student protagonism is more than a simple exercise of autonomy, it is configured as a continuous process of engagement and empowerment, in which the student not only acquires knowledge, but also learns to question, analyze and interact critically with the world around him (Morin, 2007). The student, in this sense, ceases to be a passive subject who only responds to what is imposed on him, becoming the active subject, capable of deciding, reflecting and acting according to his own experiences and interests.

The active construction of knowledge is a central concept within critical education and is linked to student protagonism. Unlike an educational model that sees the student as a mere receiver, the active construction of knowledge considers the student as a co-participant in learning, in constant interaction with the content, with the teacher and with his colleagues. This process implies an approach in which the student explores, questions, reflects and applies knowledge, being encouraged to make informed decisions, solve problems (Freire, 1970) and create solutions based on their own experiences and experiences.

The idea that knowledge is constructed in an active and interactive way reflects a pedagogy that has been rooted in the history of education, so that the Piagetinian constructivist conception considers the student not a spectator, but a builder of knowledge. This process involves the student's ongoing interaction with their learning environment, in which they are encouraged to make connections between the content and the real issues surrounding them. Thus, the student not only memorizes or repeats what is taught, but also becomes able to apply this knowledge to solve new, often complex situations that require creativity and critical thinking.

In this context, Vygotsky's sociocultural (sociointeractionist) theory also plays a key role in the active construction of knowledge. By working collaboratively with other students through the zone of proximal development, the student has the opportunity to exchange ideas, reflect on different perspectives, and collectively construct solutions and responses, following Vygotsky's other two levels of development, actual development, what the child does alone, and potential development the child can do with the intervention of the other. This reinforces the idea that learning is not a solitary process, but something that takes place within a social context, in which students' experiences become valuable sources of knowledge and understanding.

Critical education highlights the importance of valuing students' experiences as essential elements in their learning process. Based on David Ausubel's theory of meaningful learning, this approach recognizes that learning becomes more effective when new information is anchored to the student's prior knowledge, known as subsumers. By incorporating these personal, cultural and social experiences into the curriculum and pedagogical practices, the school creates a bridge between what the student already knows and the new content to be learned, using the previous organizers as a strategy to facilitate this connection.

This recognition not only makes learning more meaningful and relevant, but also validates the different forms of knowledge that students bring with them, considering them a fundamental part in the construction of knowledge. Thus, valuing the experiences of students contributes to their emancipation, helping them to perceive themselves as active and autonomous subjects in their own learning process, aligning themselves with the principles of a critical and transformative education.

The valorization of the student's experiences is also related to the idea of contextualization of teaching. Instead of teaching content in a decontextualized way, critical education proposes that knowledge be connected to the student's reality, taking into account their living conditions, interests and concerns. By doing so, the school not only stimulates student engagement, but also prepares them to intervene and transform their reality in a critical and reflective way (Freire, 1970).

The construction of student protagonism, within a critical education, is not only a matter of allowing the student to become an active agent in the learning process. It is also about emancipating the student, that is, enabling him to understand the power dynamics that permeate his life, society and the educational process. By understanding these

relationships, the student can act in an autonomous, reflective and transformative way, seeking new ways to understand and modify their reality.

In this sense, critical education, by placing the student at the center of the educational process and promoting their active participation, becomes a means of liberation. Freedom, in this context, does not only mean the absence of oppression, but the ability to understand and change the social, political, and cultural structures that limit the individual's potential. Critical education seeks, therefore, to awaken the critical consciousness of the student and prepare him to act as a transforming agent in his own life and in society.

Thus, critical education and student protagonism are interconnected in a dynamic that aims to promote not only school learning, but also the formation of conscious, critical citizens prepared to transform the world in which they live.

CONCLUSION

This article covered the trajectory of education, from its origins in primitive practices to contemporary discussions on critical education and student protagonism, highlighting how historical evolution has shaped different pedagogical models. The analysis revealed how pedagogical practices centered on the transmission of content and the figure of the teacher as the highest authority, gave way to more reflective and participatory approaches, with emphasis on the active involvement of students.

Critical education presents itself as a necessary break with conventional models, proposing a pedagogy that prioritizes the autonomous subject and aware of his or her transformative role in society. By integrating the concepts of critical education and student protagonism, this study emphasized the importance of pedagogical practices that recognize students as central agents in the construction of their own knowledge and in facing contemporary challenges.

The historical path also corroborates the limitations of educational models that ignored the experiences and realities of students, perpetuating inequalities and restricting the emancipatory potential of education. Thinkers such as Paulo Freire and Dermeval Saviani criticized these approaches and defended the construction of a pedagogical model based on dialogue, the contextualization of teaching and the appreciation of students' experiences. This transition, from technical and memorized education to a curriculum that

promotes autonomy and critical thinking, symbolizes a change in the role of the school and the teacher.

Student protagonism, therefore, emerges as a central point of this transformation, going beyond mere participation in school activities. It represents a process of empowerment, in which students become co-authors of knowledge and transforming agents of their social realities.

Therefore, this work opens the discussions and ratifies that critical education and student protagonism are indispensable pillars for the construction of a more just and democratic society. By transforming the student into the protagonist of their own education, these approaches not only challenge the *status quo*, but also offer tools for individuals to understand, question, and transform the world around them. This emancipatory pedagogy is not only an alternative, but a necessity to prepare students for the challenges of contemporary society, contributing to a more equitable and inclusive future.

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