


## CRITICAL PEDAGOGY: FREIREAN HUMANIZING EDUCATION AND THE EXERCISE OF CITIZENSHIP

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### ABSTRACT

This text discusses the relationship between Freirean humanizing education and citizenship through human rights on a theoretical basis. It aims to present the potential and challenges of Freirean Education as a concept of knowledge construction and a working method in the relationship between education and citizenship. It uses a methodological approach of a documentary and bibliographic nature. Human rights are the result of struggles for the recognition and guarantee of human dignity, which resulted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Children, as subjects of rights and integral parts of society, must be prepared to exercise their rights and to exercise citizenship. Education cannot be understood only as the transmission of content, but within a context of comprehensive education that must prepare future citizens, protagonists of a pluralistic society that requires respect, solidarity, and otherness, among other values. In addition to educating children and adolescents based on values, it prepares them to exercise citizenship as a right of all in social coexistence. Education is, above all, a commitment to others, individuals, and human beings, playing a fundamental role in the awareness and importance of citizenship. We conclude that, based on educational theoretical references, the limits, and possibilities of constructing knowledge that can meet the demands of individuals and overcome exclusionary and naive views present in society, a legacy of educational perspectives that have silenced other aspects of knowledge production, teaching, and learning, are evident.

**Keywords:** Citizenship. Human Rights. Humanizing Education. Paulo Freire. Critical Pedagogy.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the global context, there is currently great concern in various sectors of society about social, cultural, religious, political, economic, environmental, and educational relations and their impact on the future of humanity and the planet. This is because, until now, these relations have not occurred in situations of equality, mutual respect, solidarity, cooperation, ethics, and citizenship among most peoples and countries. On the contrary, in human history, domination, exploitation, and competition have prevailed.

Humankind is the holder of dignity. This is a quality or attribute inherent to all men, resulting from the human condition itself, which makes them worthy of equal consideration and respect from their fellow men. Dignity therefore presupposes equality among human beings. This is one of its pillars. It is from ethics that we derive the principle that men should have their interests equally considered, regardless of race, gender, ability, or other individual characteristics. Therefore, at the center of the law is the human being. The foundation and purpose of all law is the human person, in any of its representations. It is worth mentioning that all rights are made for humanity.

In turn, citizenship is the concept that refers to an objective and subjective condition of the human being. Subjective, in the sense of the feeling of belonging to a community, and objective, insofar as it requires the recognition of human and political participation. The individual/species ethic requires the mutual control of society by the individual and of the individual by society, that is, democracy. Ethics cannot be taught through moral lessons. It must be formed in minds based on the awareness that the human is, at the same time, an individual, part of society, and part of the species. We carry this triple reality within us. Thus, all truly human development must include the joint development of individual autonomy, community participation, and the awareness of belonging to the human species.

Human Rights are the result of many struggles and the need to guarantee the dignity of the human person and their social coexistence. They are the result of the search for the recognition, realization, and universalization of human dignity. They were historically and socially constructed through political and economic revolts and demands, a process of recognition of rights in the face of transformations that occurred in different social, historical, and political contexts.

Starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and continuing through the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, a long path has been taken to understand and guarantee the child as a subject of rights.

Paulo Freire, author of dense and original theories, and references for education over decades, re-signifies concepts to strengthen Critical Pedagogy and to consolidate democratic relations in the educational act. The expression critical education or critical pedagogy comes largely from the academic knowledge of Henry Giroux, Ira Shor, Michel Apple, Paulo Freire, Antonio Gramsci, John Dewey, Michel Foucault, and Pierre Bourdieu, among others. These theorists were involved in studies related to issues of power, domination, oppression, justice, equality, identity, knowledge, and culture.

Critical education seeks to establish connections between educational and cultural practices and the struggle for social and economic justice, human rights, and democratic society, so that critical understandings and liberating practices can be expanded, to seek progressive social and personal transformations (Teitelbaum, 2011).

According to Oliveira (2005), Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy highlights the political and dialectical nature of his educational thought, as well as its Marxist and personalist foundations. This combination of different theoretical references can be seen as a strength in his thought or as a weakness by some critics of his work. Gadotti (1998) considers that Freirean education dialectically relates education to the social, political, and cultural determinants of society. Thus, Paulo Freire opposes traditional, non-critical, and non-historical pedagogy and announces a critical, dialectical, political, historically constructed, and humanizing pedagogy.

What do we understand by humanizing education? In unequal processes, education reproduces the world, the hierarchical, oppressive, and exclusionary society. The so-called traditional education (in Freire's words, banking education) makes a big mistake, among many others. It strives to transmit knowledge in the classroom but rarely comments on how this knowledge is produced. Information and knowledge should have a face, an identity. What does this mean? It means humanizing knowledge and telling the story of the subjects who produced the ideas that teachers teach. It also means reconstructing to destroy the emotional climate that students and teachers experienced while they were doing their research. It also means reporting the anxiety, mistakes, difficulties, and discrimination they suffered. Some thinkers have died defending their ideas. Therefore, the best way to produce people who do not think is to nourish them with lifeless, depersonalized knowledge. Humanizing knowledge is essential for a true revolution in education.

The present research aimed to reflect on the theoretical foundations found in Freirean humanizing education and the relationship with human rights through citizenship

processes. Bibliographic and documentary approaches were used to guide the theoretical foundation but without the intention of exhausting the debate. Thus, this study involved a bibliographic review of books on the aforementioned topics and also of scientific articles searched on Google Scholar in a free manner, that is, not fully systematized, and also using these keywords: Humanizing Education, Paulo Freire, Human Rights, and Citizenship, identifying authors, concepts, and works present in the studied theme and that promote citizenship, the autonomy of the individual and learning in the face of the uncertainties and challenges of the 21st Century.

## **THEORETICAL BASIS**

### **HUMAN RIGHTS**

Human rights are the result of the search for the recognition, realization, and universalization of human dignity. They were constructed historically and socially by political and economic revolts and demands, a process of recognition of rights in the face of transformations that occurred in different social, historical, and political contexts. According to Bobbio (1992, p. 2),

(...) however fundamental they may be, they are historical rights, that is, they were born in certain circumstances, characterized by struggles in defense of new freedoms against old powers, and they were born gradually, not all at once and not once and for all.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, instituted by the United Nations on December 10, 1948, contains 30 articles that explain the fundamental rights of human beings. These are fundamental rights and freedoms that enable a dignified life for human beings, guaranteed to all, without distinction, regardless of creed, ethnicity, social status, or others. It is proclaimed not as a legal document, but as “a common ideal to be achieved by all peoples and all nations” (UN, 1948, p. 1).

It represents inspiration and guidance for the growth process of the entire international community, as a community of free and equal individuals in search of the goods necessary for life in society: “Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, among many others. Everyone deserves these rights, without discrimination” (UN, 1948, p. 1).

Human rights have a universal character that seeks the dignity of the human person and the pacification of social coexistence. It is essential to understand that the rights

established by the declaration affect all dimensions of life in society, the individuality of the subjects, and their social relations.

## HUMAN RIGHTS: THE CHILD, SUBJECT OF RIGHTS

Children's rights are parallel to human rights. These rights are based on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity that were propagated in the French Revolution (1789-1799) through various philosophical currents.

There have been and continue to be many challenges for children's rights to be enforced. At the international and national levels, we can mention the regulations that seek to establish children as subjects of rights: the Geneva Declaration (1924), the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959), the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Brazilian Federal Constitution (1988), the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (1990) and Law No. 11,525 (2007).

The International Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) consolidates the comprehensive protection of children and was incorporated in 1990 in Brazil through the Statute of the Child and Adolescent. This established children as subjects of rights, the result of an important historical social struggle. In article 100, the sole paragraph: (...) the status of children and adolescents as subjects of rights: children and adolescents are holders of the rights provided for in this and other laws, as well as in the federal constitution (BRAZIL, 2007).

For Gonçalves (2016, p. 2),

The recognition of children as subjects of rights in a specific law is the result of many years of struggle, debates, and clashes by social movements, in forums, congresses, and discussions so that children have their rights guaranteed by the State. However, the effective achievement of children's rights will only occur in conjunction with broader issues, related to political transformations, ethical, cultural, and economic aspects of society, and it can be said that children's rights remain more on paper than in practice.

The emerging discussion about children as subjects of rights is linked to the social, political, and historical context. As subjects of rights and an integral part of society, children must be prepared to exercise their rights and to exercise citizenship. In this sense, education plays an important role in forming children with values capable of exercising their rights so that they can respect the rights of others.

## EDUCATION IN HUMAN RIGHTS: A RIGHT FOR THE EXERCISE OF CITIZENSHIP

Education that seeks the full development of the human person and guarantees their fundamental rights, also aiming at the exercise of citizenship, permeates human rights. In this sense, Schütz and Fuchs (2017) understand that such rights must be promoted and propagated through education since education has much to contribute to the promotion of human rights.

For Benevides (2000, p. 1), education in Human Rights has its essence in three specific points:

(...) first, it is an education of a permanent, continuous, and global nature. Second, it is an education necessarily aimed at change, and third, it is an inculcation of values, to reach hearts and minds and not just instruction, merely transmitting knowledge. It should be added, and no less important, that either this education is shared by those who are involved in the educational process – the educators and the students – or it will not be education, much less education in human rights. These points are premises: continuing education, education for change, and comprehensive education, in the sense of being shared and reaching both reason and emotion.

Education is, above all, a commitment to the other, to the person, and the human being, playing a fundamental role in the development of a consciousness of citizenship.

The ECA - Statute of Children and Adolescents (BRAZIL, 1990), in article 53, outlines the fundamental rights to be trained for citizenship:

Children and adolescents have the right to education, aiming at the full development of their person, preparation for the exercise of citizenship and qualification for work, ensuring them: I - equal conditions for access to and permanence in school; II - the right to be respected by their educators; III - the right to challenge evaluation criteria, being able to appeal to higher school authorities; IV - the right to organize and participate in student organizations; V - access to a free public school near their home.

The Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education - LDB (1996), in article 2 (BRAZIL, 1996) determines:

Education is the duty of the family and the State, inspired by the principles of freedom and the ideals of human solidarity, with the purpose of the full development of the student, their preparation for the exercise of citizenship, and their qualification for work.

Human rights education is not related to a prescriptive, imposing, or doctrinal moral education; it is an integral part of children's right to education. According to the World Education Programme (UN, 2008, p. 8),

As stated by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in its general observation No. 1, the education to which every child is entitled aims to prepare him or her for everyday life, strengthen his or her capacity to enjoy all human rights, and foster a culture in which appropriate human rights values prevail. This education offers every child an indispensable tool so that, through his or her efforts, he or she can achieve throughout his or her life a balanced and respectful response to human rights to the difficulties that accompany a period of fundamental change driven by globalization, new technologies, and related phenomena.

A humanizing education that, based on human rights, is capable of humanizing relationships in the exercise of rights, enabling the experience of citizenship with value-laden attitudes towards others in a process of humanizing relationships.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Here, we aim to establish the relationship between Freirean humanizing education and citizenship through human rights, presenting the potentialities and challenges of Freirean Education as a conception of knowledge construction and a working method in the relationship between education and citizenship.

### **PAULO FREIRE AND HUMANIZING EDUCATION AS A PROMOTER OF CITIZENSHIP**

What can we understand by "mirantes"? Wouldn't they be places to observe, pause, or rest? Places for reflection? We can think of them in this way. Relating to these thoughts, we can see the authors who comment on and write about Paulo Freire's works as "mirantes." They are important for allowing us to see, understand, and appreciate Freire's legacy in humanizing education from different perspectives. Freire states that knowledge requires communication and expression; we are not islands, which is why dialogue is not just a pedagogical strategy but a criterion for common truth. The truth from my perspective needs the other to reach a common truth; otherwise, it is a naive truth, without purpose, and transforms nothing. In this sense, to understand Freire's works, the exercise of looking through the lenses of others is essential. As Gadotti (2002, p. 17) states:



Freire's work has been globally recognized, not only as a response to Brazilian problems of the past or present but as an original and outstanding contribution from Latin America to universal pedagogical thought. It cannot be said that his thought only addresses adult education or the issues of the so-called Third World.

Freire is an example of a universal educator; his thought stands as a renewed testimony of his profound understanding of the meaning of education in the context of the social and individual existence of human beings (humanizing education). Freire produced his works by thinking and rethinking his practice and experiences. This is because, according to Gadotti (2002, p. 8):

Reading the word is always preceded by reading the world. Understanding how to read the context of the world in a dynamic relationship that links language and reality. Moreover, learning to read and literacy are acts of education, and education is fundamentally a political act. Education must be experienced as a concrete practice of liberation and the construction of history.

We must all be subjects, united in this joint task, which fosters solidarity among subjects (citizen relationships) and seeks paths to achieve a society where the relationship between the exploited and the exploiters is discussed and overcome. Paulo Freire often used the expression that education should be reinvented, meaning transforming education from being tied to market interests, exploitation, and human domination into a humanizing education that allows the knowing subject and the subject who enables knowledge, in a dialectical relationship of knowing and enabling knowledge, to be protagonists of their history—an education lived for liberation, for overcoming the oppression they face, for human rights, and citizenship. This is the great legacy of the education proposed by the patron of Brazilian education.

According to Gadotti (2002, p. 16-18), the universal validity of Paulo Freire's theory and praxis is linked to four original elements:

1. **\*\*The emphasis on the gnoseological conditions of educational practice\*\***: For Gadotti (2002), the humanizing education proposed by Freire is fundamental for the conception of human rights education that leads to citizenship, as it starts from the sociocultural reality of each community or social group, resulting in a lived and transformative humanizing education that generates principles of autonomy and freedom for the group.



2. **\*\*The defense of education as a dialogical act\*\***: Knowledge requires expression and communication. Gadotti (2002) states that knowledge is not a solitary act; it is an instrument for understanding the other. Human rights are privileged spaces for different dialogues among diverse people and groups, which, in turn, produce various and diverse knowledge that promotes citizenship and social justice.

3. **\*\*The notion of science open to popular needs\*\***: Paulo Freire criticized capitalist logic for not valuing free pleasures and replacing them with pleasures that are bought and sold, pleasures that generate profit. Gadotti (2002) comments that capitalism needs to replace free happiness with bought and sold happiness, which is, above all, the need for capital. Freirean humanizing education perceives the school and local culture as vital spaces for the transmission and reflection of diverse knowledge. The knowledges produced by the local community often emerge from a solidarity economy, based on sharing, mutual aid, respect, and love for nature.

4. **\*\*Community-based, participatory planning\*\***: Paulo Freire's recognition is transdisciplinary. According to Gadotti (2022), the new school space is the planet because the Earth has become our address. Freirean humanizing education, supported by human rights, seeks to contribute to the formation of responsible beings who are aware of their relationships with the environment in which they live—true citizens. This education arises from the need to reflect on the problems of people and contributes to the formulation of questions of autonomy and self-management, the valorization of specific cultures, interculturality, and differentiated global formation.

Paulo Freire did not limit himself to these four original intuitions. His humanizing education can be understood through the following constituent elements of learning:

- **\*\*Reading the World\*\***: Freire (1989) insisted throughout his life on this key concept of his thought. The first step in appropriating knowledge is reading the world. Curiosity is highlighted as a precondition for knowledge. Generative words, generative themes, thematic complexes, codification, and decoding—it is the learner who knows. The school must be understood as a privileged space for the affirmation and revitalization of culture, the development of critical consciousness, and citizenship.

- **\*\*Sharing the Reading of the World\*\***: Freire (2018) states that I cannot know if my reading is correct unless I compare it with the reading of the world by others. Dialogue is not just a pedagogical strategy; it is a criterion of truth. The veracity of my point of view depends on the perspective of the other, on communication and intercommunication.

- **\*\*Education as an Act of Production and Reconstruction of Knowledge\*\***: For Freire (1996), knowing is not about accumulating knowledge, information, or data. It implies changing attitudes and establishing relationships. Humanizing, citizen education contributes to forming and having consciousness; changing form, and creating form.

- **\*\*Education as a Practice of Freedom (Liberation)\*\***: Paulo Freire (1999) states that education must instill hope—nothing is more relevant than this thought in a time when many educators are fueled more by disillusionment than by hope. Freirean humanizing education is a space for inserting children into community life through citizenship processes in school, through collective tasks, to guarantee the collective rights of the people and value local culture.

In summary, to understand Paulo Freire's thought, one must know that for him, education is a socio-political process for liberation, in a dynamic that unlearns traditional pedagogical ideology—that is, educators and learners mediated by the same object they seek to know, no longer objects of each other but all subjects.

The construction of a better world involves historically and culturally constructed beings—beings capable of perceiving this construction as a process and possibilities, not as beings submissive to fatalistic determination. In this sense, Freire (1996) comments that only utopian beings can have hope, as hope arises from the perception that human beings are incomplete and seek to be more. The transformation and overcoming of this world into another possible world, more human and welcoming, will begin through a process of humanizing education, guided by ethics permeated with love for life and respect for different cultures, happening not only in schools but in many different places simultaneously.

Thus, education is the cultural action related to the process of critical consciousness as humanizing education, which aims to be an instrument of political organization for the oppressed and implies the act of knowing among knowing subjects. Consciousness-raising is both a logical possibility and a historical process, linking theory with praxis in an indissoluble unity in true and profound processes of citizenship.

Paulo Freire starts from the premise of culture as the result of human work or as a creative and re-creative act of human beings to help people in the process of being and being in the world. For him, culture is the addition that humans make to the world they did not create. Culture is the result of their work and their creative and re-creative effort. The transcendental sense of their relationships. The humanistic dimension of culture. Culture is

the systematic acquisition of human experience. Consciousness-raising presents itself as one of the main tasks of liberating education.

Freire's educational praxis starts from the lived and experienced reality (reading the world) and emphasizes the fundamental importance of education as an act of knowledge—not only of content but of the reason behind economic, social, political, ideological, and historical facts—that is, of citizenship.

The educator, while announcing a new educational perspective, also denounces the class interests of this pedagogical practice of consensus, denying the abstract, isolated man and woman, disconnected from the world, as well as the denial of the world as a reality absent from men and women (Freire, 2007, p. 102).

Paulo Freire (1999) directs his work to all those who, through consciousness-raising, fight for the liberation and humanization of man, his autonomy, and citizenship. Therefore, he starts from the premise that from the moment one becomes aware of their history, the subject also becomes conscious. For the formation of democratic citizenship, he presents a broader conception of education, proposing that it go beyond the classroom and the walls of the school, connecting life in society with its responsibilities—an education for citizenship.

Education is part of a broader field, that of culture, defined by Paulo Freire as all human creation. In this perspective, democracy does not strengthen as a practice of life unless it first passes through experiences that have exalted its citizenship; and its participation as an educational experience. In the words of Paulo Freire (1997):

Democracy is not received as a gift. One fights for democracy. The chains that prevent us from being are not broken with well-behaved patience but with the People mobilizing, organizing, and becoming critically conscious. The popular majorities not only feel that they have been exploited since Brazil was invented but also add to this feeling the knowledge that they are being exploited, the knowledge that gives them the "raison d'être" of the phenomenon they predominantly perceive at the level of sensitivity. When I speak of the sensitivity of the phenomenon and the critical apprehension of the phenomenon, I am not, in any way, suggesting a rupture between sensitivity, emotions, and cognitive activity. I have already said that I know with my whole body: feelings, emotions, critical mind. Let us be clear that the People mobilizing, organizing, knowing critically, deepening, and solidifying democracy against any authoritarian adventure are the People also forging the necessary discipline without which democracy does not function. In Brazil, we have almost

always oscillated between the absence of discipline due to the denial of freedom or the absence of discipline due to the absence of authority. (p. 78)

In his pedagogical praxis, he affirms that citizenship is created with an active, critical, and determined presence of all of us concerning public matters, permeated by different needs and interests, and where men and women "come together to transform the world in collaboration" (Freire, 2018, p. 191).

Paulo Freire is a thinker committed to life: he does not think of ideas; he thinks of existence. The educator is aware of the preponderant role that education plays in the process of transforming the social conditions of men and women, and this belief is not based on a certain idealism that does not take into account historical contexts and sociocultural conditions in which human existence is inserted. It is grounded in a pedagogical practice imbued with hope and belief in the transformative role of men and women, in their enchanting capacity to unveil the world and themselves, where they become "subjects of the denunciation of the world, for its transformation" (Freire, 2018, p. 195).

Democratic, liberating, and citizen education would have to be a constant attempt to change attitudes, a replace of participation habits. In this logic, the author perceived a great challenge: overcoming illiteracy and democratic inexperience, reinforced by an education disconnected from life, centered on words, which, consequently, would not form democratic citizenship. In his writings, democratic experience is seen as coherent with an autonomous life; education that fully develops the person through dialogue is no different from that which provides possibilities for the exercise of citizenship.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Human rights were established and guaranteed through much struggle. Ensuring human dignity and the exercise of citizenship was an incessant pursuit of those who led this struggle. Human rights education enables the development of skills, potentialities, and the exercise of critical consciousness. The child, as a subject of rights, becomes a protagonist of values in the exercise of citizenship and social coexistence. Education, in this sense, is an effective instrument in promoting respect, solidarity, diversity, and the ability to put oneself in the other's place with alterity and empathy—essential values for life in society.

Understanding Freirean humanizing education in its practical, political, or social dimension requires clarity on the aspect of freedom and citizenship, which can only be acquired through the concrete struggle of human beings to liberate themselves. Therefore, for Paulo Freire, consciousness-raising is the act in which men and women, recognizing themselves, the other, and the world, become able to understand, think, choose, and decide to act.

The conception of citizenship was historically constructed and is linked to the idea of belonging and participation in political, civil, and social rights and duties, which presupposes a struggle for these rights, highlighting the role of education in the formation of citizens. It is understood that Paulo Freire's conception of education and citizenship contributes to this discussion, as it is also part of the historical process of cultural and historical formation in Brazilian society.

In Paulo Freire's works, the construction of minimum levels for the exercise of citizenship involves an education committed to place, territory, critical reading of reality, historical knowledge, and the encouragement of creativity and inventiveness. The issue of citizenship focuses on the basic notion of rights, whether civil, political, or social, understanding civil rights as individual freedoms of expression, and faith, among others. Political rights belong to the sphere of people's participation in political power or as voters, while social rights include participation in the basic right to economic well-being and security, as well as social heritage.

Reflecting on human rights, education, and citizenship requires an education based on values that prepare children and adolescents in the field of knowledge and for social coexistence. As teachers, we are increasingly called to an integral and humanizing education, as Paulo Freire taught us.

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