

## FROM THE WORD TO LIBERATION – LITERACY, AWARENESS AND PAULO FREIRE'S TRANSFORMATIVE PRAXIS



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## ABSTRACT

Paulo Freire is one of the main theorists of critical education, having developed a method that transcended borders and influenced pedagogical practices in several countries. His thinking is based on the principle that the construction of knowledge occurs through dialogue and the exchange of experiences, in which the "other" plays an essential role. For Freire, literacy is not restricted to the technical domain of reading and writing, but is an emancipatory process that enables the individual to see beyond what is imposed on him, allowing him to question and transform reality. In view of this, the theorist outlined that only from literacy is it possible to reach a level of critical awareness that allows the subject to perceive "the unknown". Only after this awareness, the human being, as a historical and social subject, becomes capable of developing a transformative praxis. Thus, we question: how can Freire's literacy be understood as an act of liberation that drives processes of awareness and social transformation? To analyze this relationship between literacy, awareness and praxis, we turn to the works of Paulo Freire (1967; 1974; 1979; 2000; 2011) and other authors who dialogue with his perspective. Methodologically, we used a qualitative approach based on Minayo (2006), with a descriptive character based on Gil (2008) and a comprehensive perspective based on the thought of Weber (2009). The results of the study indicate that literacy, when conceived from Freire's perspective, is not reduced to the simple decoding of words, but is configured as a process of awareness capable of breaking with oppressive structures. Transformative praxis thus emerges as a necessary unfolding of the critical reading of reality, enabling the construction of

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autonomous subjects engaged in social transformation. In this way, the relevance of liberating education in the fight against alienation and marginalization is reaffirmed, reinforcing the need for pedagogical practices that promote the emancipation of students.

**Keywords:** Liberating Education. Awareness. Critical Literacy. Transformative Praxis.

## INTRODUCTION

### FROM COMMODIFICATION TO EMANCIPATION: THE CHALLENGES OF EDUCATION UNDER THE NEOLIBERAL LOGIC - INTRODUCING

Education, when guided by the interests of the capitalist system, assumes an instrumental character, aimed at maintaining the current order and reproducing established power relations. In this model, knowledge is not treated as a right, but as a commodity that must be acquired by the subjects due to its economic utility. Thus, the school becomes a space of conformation, where students and teachers are trained to passively accept the structures imposed by neoliberalism<sup>18</sup>. Paulo Freire (2011, p. 67) already warned of this perverse logic when he stated that "[...] banking education, instead of problematizing the world and reality, aims at the adaptation of students to a social structure that oppresses them". Christian Laval (2019, p. 45) denounces that "[...] The new capitalism transforms the school into a space for the formation of human capital, where learning becomes a private investment, not a public right". Therefore, this educational logic does not aim at the emancipation of the subjects, but at their adaptation to the demands of the market.

In the realm of capital, education is itself a commodity. Hence the crisis of the public education system, pressured by the demands of capital and by the crushing of cuts in public budgets. Perhaps nothing better exemplifies the universe established by neoliberalism, in which 'everything is sold, everything is bought', 'everything has a price', than the commodification of education (Mészáros, 2005, p. 34).

Thus, school curricula, therefore, are structured in such a way as to privilege technical and pragmatic content to the detriment of critical and humanistic training. This is because the market demands specialized workers, but alienated from their role in society. As Cortella (2017, p. 92) points out, "[...] the school that bows to the interests of the market ends up creating technically competent individuals, but socially irresponsible, oblivious to the contradictions of the world in which they live". Mészáros (2005, p. 34) also criticizes this

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<sup>18</sup> Paulo Freire deeply criticized the structures imposed by neoliberalism on education, highlighting how this model transforms teaching into a mechanism for the reproduction of social inequalities. For him, the neoliberal conception of education reduces the school to a technicist institution, aimed at training qualified labor for the market, ignoring its emancipatory function. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire denounces "banking education", characterized by the mechanical accumulation of content without critical reflection, favoring passivity and adaptation to the current system. This neoliberal logic also transforms knowledge into a commodity, encouraging a culture of competition and individualism, to the detriment of an education based on solidarity and the collective construction of knowledge. For Freire, overcoming this vision requires a liberating education, based on dialogue and awareness, allowing subjects to become agents of social transformation. See: FREIRE, P. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. 1. Ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1974; LAVAL, C. *The school is not a company: neoliberalism in attack on public education*. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2019.

perspective when he states that "[...] the system of capital not only regulates the content of education, but also defines the logic of its application, so that the school becomes an apparatus that reproduces structural inequalities."<sup>19</sup> Therefore, teaching is shaped to perpetuate the productivist logic and prevent any possibility of critical reflection. For Laval (2019: 105):

'Technological' knowledge that is not intended for professionalization, but has or can have a much broader social use, ends up being reduced to a utilitarianism that prevents young people from seeing any interest in what does not seem to be marketable in the labor market. With the diffusion of this ideology, there is a real risk of reducing general and vocational education to skills useful to companies, denying the value of technical culture and many of its social uses.

In this context, the role of the teacher is also redefined. If before the educator was seen as a mediator of knowledge, now he becomes a mere executor of standardized content. Pedagogical practices are increasingly regulated by external guidelines, often imposed by financial organizations and private companies interested in the commodification<sup>20</sup> of education. Freire (2005, p. 44) warns that "[...] the teacher, when he loses his autonomy and is reduced to a simple transmitter of information, becomes a technician of instruction, prevented from acting as an agent of social transformation". Dermeval Saviani (2011, p. 23) reinforces this idea by stating that "[...] teaching, when disconnected from critical reflection, becomes a mechanism of domination, preparing

<sup>19</sup> The school, under the logic of capitalist society, assumes the role of an apparatus that reproduces structural inequalities, consolidating the social division of labor and perpetuating the hierarchy of classes. For Paulo Freire, banking education reinforces this structure, as it transforms students into mere receptacles of knowledge, preventing the development of the critical awareness necessary for social transformation. In this context, teaching does not emancipate, but trains, promoting the passive acceptance of the conditions imposed by the dominant system. Similarly, Laval (2019) points out that the commodification of education and the exacerbated competition between schools accentuate social segregation, privileging students from more advantaged classes while reinforcing the exclusion of the poorest. This logic transforms the school into a space for the legitimation of inequalities, where social mobility becomes increasingly restricted and knowledge is instrumentalized for the maintenance of power relations. See: FREIRE, P. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. 1. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1974; LAVAL, C. *The school is not a company: neoliberalism in attack on public education*. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> International financial organizations and private companies play a central role in the commodification of education, promoting the logic of the market in the definition of educational policies. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), for example, argues that education should operate under principles of competition, allowing greater participation of the private sector in the management and financing of educational institutions. This model favors the progressive privatization of education, transforming schools and universities into service providers subject to economic interests. In addition, large corporations, such as educational holdings, invest massively in the expansion of private higher education, making education a highly profitable sector and reinforcing inequalities in access to knowledge. This scenario shows a trend of financialization of education, where teaching becomes a consumer good regulated by market dynamics, compromising its public character and its role in critical and citizen education. See: LAVAL, C. *The school is not a company: neoliberalism in attack on public education*. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2019.

students for the passive acceptance of social reality". Therefore, teachers, as well as students, are subjected to a logic that prevents them from exercising their intellectual autonomy.

The standardization of objectives and controls, decentralization, the mutation of 'educational management' and teacher training are reforms 'focused on productivity' [...]. However, the neoliberal school also intends to improve the quality of the workforce as a whole without increasing taxes and, as far as possible, reducing public spending. Hence the campaigns and policies implemented at the same time – both nationally and globally and at all levels of educational activity – to diversify the financing of the educational system (calling much more openly for private spending), to manage the school more 'effectively' (as companies do), to reduce the culture taught in school to the skills indispensable for the employability of wage earners, promote the logic of the market in school and competition between families and students for the 'scarce good' (and, consequently, expensive) of education (Laval, 2019, p. 37).

However, this teaching logic not only devalues the role of the teacher, but also imposes a standardization of teaching methods, making the educational process a control mechanism<sup>21</sup>. Neoliberalism, by promoting a vision of efficiency based on quantitative indicators, imposes evaluation models that reduce learning to numbers and statistics. Freire (2011, p. 112) criticizes this approach by stating that "[...] education, when measured only by tests and rankings, loses its formative dimension and becomes an exclusionary selection mechanism". In the same sense, Gentili (1998, p. 89) points out that "[...] the neoliberal school is increasingly oriented towards the evaluation of performance as a function of the market logic, disregarding the subjective and critical processes of learning". In this way, the school ceases to be a significant learning space to become a training center for the market.

In addition, the discourse of meritocracy<sup>22</sup>, widely disseminated in neoliberal educational policies, reinforces the idea that academic success depends exclusively on

<sup>21</sup> The educational process, within the neoliberal and authoritarian logic, becomes a mechanism of social control, promoting the adaptation of individuals to the current order instead of fostering critical awareness. Paulo Freire criticizes this structure by stating that "banking education" conditions students to the passive acceptance of reality, perpetuating unequal power relations and preventing social transformation. In this sense, the school, instead of being a space of liberation, becomes a disciplinary institution, which normalizes obedience and hierarchy as fundamental aspects of social life. The pedagogy of liberation, on the other hand, proposes a dialogical and emancipatory education, capable of breaking with this cycle of domination and enabling the construction of a new horizon of social justice and autonomy of the subjects. See: FREIRE, P. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. 1. Ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1974; FREIRE, P. *Education as a practice of freedom*. 1. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1967.

<sup>22</sup> The discourse of meritocracy, widely disseminated in neoliberal educational policies, reinforces the idea that academic success depends exclusively on individual effort, ignoring the structural inequalities that limit students' access and permanence in educational institutions. This logic transforms education into a field of competition, where individuals are encouraged to compete for resources and opportunities unequally, favoring those who already have accumulated economic, social, and cultural capital. As Laval (2019) points



individual effort, ignoring the structural conditions that determine access to knowledge. This discourse disregards the historical and social inequalities that affect school performance and relieves the State of responsibility for guaranteeing quality public education. Freire (1985, p. 76) warns that "[...] the myth of meritocracy serves to justify exclusion and inequality, attributing to the individual the blame for the failure that is, in fact, produced by the system". Pablo Gentili (1998, p. 121) adds that "[...] The discourse of individual excellence is an ideological artifice that masks structural inequality, holding individuals responsible for failures that result from the perverse logic of the market." Therefore, meritocratic education ignores social factors and reinforces systemic oppression.

Neoliberalism did not create this phenomenon, it only aggravates it and justifies it ideologically: the competition to have access to this rare good, at once more acute and more unequal, seems evident. [...] Every society is led to this search for the best study and the best institution, and the school, more than ever, becomes a great terrain of competition. Neoliberalism not only accepts this reality as inevitable, but uses it as a tool for the reproduction of inequalities, masking them under the discourse of individual excellence and freedom of choice (Laval, 2019, p. 114).

The influence of the private sector in education is also manifested in the growing adoption of public-private partnerships and the entry of companies in the formulation of educational policies. These initiatives aim to transform the school into a profitable space, where teaching materials, digital platforms and methodologies are marketed as products. As Gadotti (2008, p. 39) observes, "[...] The privatization of education not only compromises its social function, but also reduces education to a service provided according to the logic of the market, restricting access to knowledge to those who can afford it." Marx and Engels (2011, p. 57) already denounced this logic when they stated that "[...] education under the bourgeois regime is neither free nor neutral, but rather an instrument for the reproduction of the existing relations of production." Thus, education becomes more and more a tradable commodity, excluding those who do not have enough capital to acquire it.

However, this exclusionary logic is also reflected in the absence of critical debates within the school. Issues such as social justice, inequality, labor exploitation, and human rights are often relegated to the background or addressed in a superficial way. Freire

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out, this conception is central to the commodification of education, as it naturalizes school segregation and justifies the privatization of education, legitimizing a system that concentrates opportunities in the hands of a few while maintaining the exclusion of large portions of the population. See: LAVAL, C. *The school is not a company: neoliberalism in attack on public education*. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2019.

(1974, p. 89) emphasizes that "[...] Education that does not promote the questioning of reality is a domesticating education, which serves the interests of those who hold power." Similarly, Ivo Tonet (2016, p. 112) argues that "[...] the neoliberal school, by excluding critical thinking from the curriculum, reinforces the alienation of students and deprives them of the ability to understand the contradictions of the capitalist system". Thus, the contents taught are selected to keep students within the logic of passivity and conformism.

The neoliberal school promotes a systematic process of silencing political and social discussions. In the name of 'neutrality', critical reflection is restricted, content that challenges the current order is eliminated, and popular and historical knowledge is marginalized. The education of the student, in this context, is reduced to adapting to the demands of the market, making him unable to understand the structures that determine his own reality (Laval, 2019, p. 113).

Therefore, the relationship between educator and student, in the neoliberal context, is marked by hierarchization and methodological rigidity, distancing itself from the Freirean ideal of education as a practice of freedom. The teacher, overwhelmed by bureaucratic demands and performance evaluations, has his creativity hindered and his capacity for reflection reduced. Freire (2011, p. 54) argues that "[...] when the teacher is forced to comply with a pedagogical script imposed from top to bottom, he becomes incapable of building a dialogical relationship with his students". Laval (2019, p. 214) adds that "[...] The neoliberal school reduces teaching to an automated process, in which the teacher is a mere executor of a curriculum defined by the interests of capital." Therefore, neoliberal pedagogy weakens teacher autonomy and hinders the development of critical education.

Consequently, the impact of this educational logic on the formation of subjects is profound, as it compromises their ability to think critically and act in the world as active citizens. Education that is limited to preparing for the labor market does not stimulate intellectual autonomy or social commitment, perpetuating an unequal and excluding model of society. Freire (2009, p. 118) states that "[...] Only a problem-solving education, which challenges students to reflect on their reality, can contribute to the construction of a more just and democratic society". Mészáros (2005, p. 62) reinforces this view by endorsing that "[...] As long as education remains subordinated to capital, its function will be to guarantee the reproduction of dominant structures, and not to promote the emancipation of subjects." Therefore, as long as education is at the service of capital, it will never be liberating.

That said, from this perspective, our object of study focuses on Freirean literacy, which is a process that goes beyond the simple act of learning to read and write; it is an



essential tool for the emancipation of historically marginalized subjects. For Paulo Freire, literacy is a political act, as it allows the individual to develop a critical consciousness capable of breaking with oppressive structures and transforming society. Thus, we question: how can Freire's literacy be understood as an act of liberation that drives processes of awareness and social transformation in the context of neoliberal education? This issue becomes central in a society marked by deep social inequalities, where the school often reinforces the logic of exclusion instead of promoting critical thinking. As Freire points out, "[...] Awareness cannot exist outside of 'praxis', or rather, without the act of action – reflection. This dialectical unity constitutes, in a permanent way, the way of being or transforming the world that characterizes men" (1979, p. 15). Thus, literacy, from Freire's point of view, is not reduced to the acquisition of mechanical skills, but is a means of critical reading of reality and active participation in the historical process.

Thus, the relevance of this approach for students, especially those belonging to the working class, lies in the fact that it breaks with the traditional view of the school as a space for the reproduction of inequalities. Critical literacy enables students to understand their position in society and identify the mechanisms that perpetuate their condition of exploitation. As Freire points out, "[...] When men are taught to read and write, it is not an intranscendent subject of ba, be, bi, bo, bu, the memorization of an alienated word, but a difficult learning to 'name the world'" (1979, p. 20). This means that literacy should allow the subject to recognize himself as a historical agent, capable of transforming his own reality. Thus, education ceases to be an instrument of domestication and becomes a means of resistance and emancipation.

### **METHODOLOGICAL PATHS: QUALITATIVE, DESCRIPTIVE AND COMPREHENSIVE RESEARCH IN THE ANALYSIS OF LITERACY, AWARENESS AND TRANSFORMATIVE PRAXIS**

Qualitative research, according to Minayo (2006) was characterized by its interpretative and comprehensive approach to reality, emphasizing the meanings attributed by social subjects to the phenomena they experienced. Unlike quantitative approaches, which prioritized the measurement and generalization of data, qualitative research was based on the understanding of social relations and structures, analyzing them in depth. Minayo pointed out that "[...] qualitative research works with the universe of meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values and attitudes" (2006, p. 22). In addition, according to

the author, "[...] qualitative interpretation requires a careful look at the multiple dimensions of reality, without reducing it to mere numbers and statistics" (Minayo, 2006, p. 42). Thus, this method enabled a critical analysis of Freire's literacy, by considering the processes of awareness of the subjects within an educational system marked by neoliberalism.

The qualitative research answers very particular questions. In the social sciences, it is concerned with a level of reality that cannot or should not be quantified. That is, it works with the universe of meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values and attitudes. This set of human phenomena is understood here as part of social reality, as human beings are distinguished not only by acting, but by thinking about what they do and by interpreting their actions within and from the reality lived and shared with their peers (Minayo, 2006, p. 21).

However, descriptive research, according to Gil (2008), has as its primary objective to describe the characteristics of a given phenomenon, population or context, establishing relationships between variables. This type of study, often used in educational investigations, enabled a detailed view of the pedagogical practices that reinforced the mercantilist logic of education. As Gil pointed out, "[...] descriptive research has as its primary objective the description of the characteristics of a given population or phenomenon or the establishment of relationships between variables" (2008, p. 50). In addition, the author pointed out that "[...] descriptive studies allow us to highlight patterns and trends without, however, directly interfering in the observed social dynamics" (Gil, 2008, p. 52). Thus, by describing the impact of neoliberal education on Freire's literacy, it was possible to show how teaching was transformed into a commodity and teachers into mere applicators of standardized content.

Among the descriptive researches, those that aim to study the characteristics of a group stand out: its distribution by age, sex, origin, level of education, income level, physical and mental health status, etc. Other studies of this type are those that propose to study the level of service provided by the public agencies of a community, the housing conditions of its inhabitants, the crime rate that is registered there, etc., (Gil, 2008, p. 52).

However, beyond the description of educational phenomena, comprehensive analysis, based on Weber, proved to be essential to capture the subjective meanings attributed by social actors to their actions. Weber argued that "[...] all human behavior is included as the actor attributes subjective meaning to it" (1969, p. 110). Additionally, Weber highlighted that "[...] understanding social action implies capturing the motives and intentions of the subjects, seeking the meanings they attribute to their own action" (1949, p. 90). In the context of Freire's literacy, this approach allowed us to understand how the

subjects involved in the educational process interpreted their reality and resisted neoliberal impositions, seeking to transform their condition through critical education.

However, when considering Freire's literacy as a practice of liberation, it became evident that the qualitative method was the most appropriate to understand the contradictions present in the educational process. As Minaya pointed out, "[...] qualitative research requires a sensitive and critical look at reality, seeking to understand the phenomena from the perspective of the subjects involved" (2006, p. 31). Furthermore, the author reinforced that "[...] understanding literacy as a political act requires a methodology that goes beyond the mere description of data, incorporating the experience lived by the students" (Minayo, 2006, p. 44). Thus, by investigating how literacy was appropriated by the students, it was possible to highlight the tensions between banking education and the liberating education proposed by Freire.

Therefore, in the educational field, qualitative research proved to be fundamental to analyze how the commodification of education affected teaching and learning. Laval (2019) criticized this logic by stating that "[...] the neoliberal school reduces the training of subjects to adaptation to the demands of the market, ignoring its critical and emancipatory dimension" (p. 37). In addition, Freire emphasized that "[...] critical education needs to break with the utilitarian logic of teaching, allowing students to develop their historical and social awareness" (Freire, 2011, p. 67). In this sense, the qualitative research made it possible to capture the strategies used by teachers and students to resist this logic, promoting more humanizing educational practices.

However, descriptive research was essential to demonstrate how the curricular structure of schools was shaped to meet the interests of capital. As Gil pointed out, "[...] school curricula are organized in such a way as to privilege technical and pragmatic content, to the detriment of a critical and humanistic education" (2008, p. 51). In addition, Laval warned that "[...] the reduction of education to a technicist model prevents the construction of critical thinking, limiting the ability of students to understand their social reality" (2019, p. 105). Thus, by analyzing the curricular organization, it was possible to evidence how neoliberal education reinforced social inequalities and limited access to transformative knowledge.

Therefore, the comprehensive analysis allowed us to interpret how the research subjects attributed meaning to their educational experiences. Weber stressed that "[...] the understanding of the subjective meaning of social actions is essential for any analysis"

(1969, p. 110). Still, Minayo highlighted that "[...] the subjectivity of social actors cannot be disregarded, as it is what gives meaning to their practices and interactions" (2006, p. 90). Thus, by analyzing the discourses of educators and students, it was possible to identify the contradictions and resistances present in the Freirean literacy process.

Consequently, the triangulation between qualitative, descriptive and comprehensive research enabled a broader and more in-depth analysis of literacy, consciousness and praxis in Paulo Freire's view. As Minaya pointed out, "[...] the complexity of social phenomena requires multiple and complementary approaches, capable of apprehending their various dimensions" (2006, p. 42). In addition, Gil added that "[...] the combination of different methodologies strengthens the validity and comprehensiveness of the research results" (2008, p. 176). In this way, the combination of these methodologies allowed a richer and more detailed understanding of the challenges and possibilities of critical education today.

In this way, qualitative research, by privileging the interpretation and understanding of educational phenomena, proved to be the most appropriate to investigate the implications of Freire's literacy, awareness and praxis in the struggle against oppression and alienation. As Freire argued, "[...] awareness cannot exist outside of praxis, or rather, without the act of action-reflection" (1979, p. 15). Thus, by analyzing their experiences from a critical point of view, qualitative research enabled the construction of knowledge committed to social transformation.

## **FROM THE WORD TO LIBERATION: LITERACY, AWARENESS AND PAULO FREIRE'S TRANSFORMATIVE PRAXIS**

Paulo Freire's philosophy is intrinsically linked to the problematization of the world and the need for critical thinking that enables the liberation of oppressed subjects. For Freire, literacy is not restricted to the technical learning of reading and writing, but constitutes a process of awareness and transformation of reality. Therefore, education, when linked to the dominant system, can reinforce structures of oppression; however, when liberating, it allows subjects to become aware of their own condition and engage in transformative praxis. Freire emphasizes that "[...] Awareness cannot exist outside of 'praxis', or rather, without the act of action-reflection<sup>23</sup>. This dialectical unity constitutes, in a

<sup>23</sup> For Paulo Freire, the act of action-reflection is a fundamental element of liberating educational practice, as it allows individuals to critically understand their reality and act to transform it. According to Freire, awareness

permanent way, the way of being or transforming the world that characterizes men" (1979, p. 16). Still, the author adds that "[...] if men continue to adhere to a 'made' world, they will find themselves submerged in a new obscurity" (Freire, 1979, p. 31), showing that critical education is an essential path to social emancipation.

Awareness is not based on consciousness, on the one hand, and the world, on the other; on the other hand, it does not want a separation. On the contrary, it is based on the relationship between consciousness and the world. Taking this relationship as the object of their critical reflection, men will clarify the obscure dimensions that result from their approach to the world (Freire, 1979, p. 4).

Thus, the worldview within Freire's proposal is based on the assumption that reality is not something immutable or imposed, but rather something that can be understood and re-signified by the subjects. Therefore, education must promote the unveiling of reality, allowing students to perceive the structures that determine their existence and develop a critical reading of the world. Freire explains that "[...] Awareness implies that we go beyond the spontaneous sphere of apprehension of reality, to reach a critical sphere in which reality is given as a knowable object and in which man assumes an epistemological position" (1979, p. 18). In addition, he reinforces that "[...] Awareness is a historic commitment. It is also historical consciousness: it is critical insertion in history, it implies that men assume the role of subjects who make and remake the world" (Freire, 1979, p. 19), which demonstrates that critical literacy not only prepares subjects for the reading of the world, but also for its active transformation.

Paulo Freire urged us to read the world. We read the world from space, from the place where we 'live' [...]. Our point of view always determines our view of the world. It is not for nothing that our points of view are so diverse and even antagonistic. We 'biked' in many places. This diversity is the richness of humanity. Without it there would be no change; the world would be static, eternally immutable, meaningless, without perspective (Gadotti, 2012, p. 104).

In this way, the main ideas<sup>24</sup> that structure Freire's thought revolve around the concept of education as a practice of freedom, dialogue as a pedagogical tool, and

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does not occur only at the intellectual level, but requires a praxis, that is, a fusion between action and reflection that makes it possible to overcome oppressive structures. This process is essential for the learner not only to learn content in a mechanical way, but to develop a critical awareness of their position in the world and of the possibilities of social change. Thus, education, instead of being an instrument of domestication, becomes a means of liberation and collective construction of knowledge. See: FREIRE, P. *Consciousness: theory and practice of liberation*. São Paulo: Cortez & Moraes, 1979.

<sup>24</sup> The key ideas that structure Freire's thought are anchored in principles such as dialogicity, problematization and praxis, essential elements for an emancipatory education. Paulo Freire argues that education should be a dialogical process, in which educator and student build knowledge together,

awareness as an emancipatory process. Thus, literacy, for Freire, should be closely linked to the concrete experience of students and their ability to critically reflect on their living conditions. He argues that "[...] it is not a matter of teaching how to repeat words, but of teaching how to say one's own word about the world" (Freire, 1979, p. 22). In line with this view, the work "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" emphasizes that "[...] no one educates anyone, no one educates himself, men educate themselves, mediated by the world" (Freire, 2011, p. 32), demonstrating that banking education<sup>25</sup> needs to be overcome in favor of a dialogical<sup>26</sup> and participatory model.

The starting point for the work in the circle of culture is to assume freedom and criticism as man's way of being. [...] The circle thus constitutes a working and debate group. Its central interest is the debate of language in the context of a free and critical social practice. Freedom and criticism that cannot be limited to the internal relations of the group, but that are necessarily presented in the awareness that it makes of its social situation (Freire, 1967, p. 29).

For Paulo Freire,

Literacy is more than the simple psychological and mechanical mastery of writing and reading techniques. It is the mastery of these techniques, in conscious terms. It is understanding what you read and writing what you understand. It is to communicate graphically. It is an incorporation. It implies not a visual and mechanical memorization of sentences, words, syllables strayed from an existential universe – dead or semi-dead things – but an attitude of creation and recreation. It implies a self-formation that may result in an interfering posture of man over his context. Hence, the role of the educator is fundamentally to dialogue with the

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overcoming the vertical logic of banking education. In addition, the problematization of reality is a central aspect of Freire's method, as it enables subjects to critically read the world and become aware of their social condition. Another fundamental pillar is praxis, which unites reflection and transformative action, allowing individuals to become agents of change in society. In this way, Freire proposes a liberating education, committed to the autonomy of subjects and to the transformation of oppressive structures. See: FREIRE, P. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. 1. Ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1974; FREIRE, P. *Consciousness: theory and practice of liberation*. São Paulo: Cortez & Moraes, 1979.

<sup>25</sup> Banking education, a concept formulated by Paulo Freire, is characterized as a pedagogical model in which the teacher assumes the role of knowledge holder and the student is seen as a passive container who must store and repeat the information received. This conception, according to Freire, reflects the oppressive structure of society, as it prevents the development of students' critical consciousness and reinforces passivity in the face of social injustices. By depositing content without enabling a dialogical reflection, this educational practice maintains the established order and hinders the emancipation of the subjects. In contrast, Freire proposes problem-solving education, which values interaction and the collective construction of knowledge as a way to overcome alienation and promote social transformation. See: FREIRE, P. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. 1. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1974.

<sup>26</sup> Paulo Freire's dialogic model is based on the horizontal interaction between educator and student, promoting the collective construction of knowledge. Unlike banking education, which imposes content unilaterally, the dialogic model is based on the problematization of reality and dialogue as an essential method for raising awareness. For Freire, "[...] the dialogue begins in the search for the programmatic content", which is a process of shared construction, in which the subjects of education share experiences and critically understand the world. In this way, the dialogic model becomes a tool for emancipation, enabling individuals to recognize their ability to intervene in society and transform their conditions of existence. See: FREIRE, P. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. 1. Ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1974.



illiterate, about concrete situations, simply offering him the instruments with which he becomes literate. For this reason, literacy cannot be done from top to bottom, as a donation or an imposition, but from the inside out, by the illiterate person himself, only with the collaboration of the educator (Freire, 1967, p. 111).

Literacy, in Freire's perspective, cannot be reduced to a simple mechanical mastery of reading and writing, since its main objective is the construction of critical consciousness. For Freire, the reading of the world precedes the reading of the word, so that literacy should enable the understanding of the social and historical reality of the subject. He emphasizes that "[...] literacy should allow students to discover themselves as historical subjects, protagonists of their own emancipation" (Freire, 1979, p. 29). Likewise, Freire states that "[...] The literacy process cannot be a neutral experience. It needs to be anchored in the lives of the subjects and in the critical reading of their realities, allowing them to understand their conditions and transform their existences" (1982, p. 14). This approach breaks with the traditional logic of banking education, which sees the learner as a passive recipient to be filled by formal knowledge, rather than an active subject in the learning process.

In addition, critical literacy promotes an active posture of the subject about his own context, allowing him to understand his position within social and economic relations. As Freire points out, "[...] the process of literacy as a cultural action for freedom is the act of a 'knowing subject' in dialogue with the educator" (1979, p. 15). Similarly, he reinforces this perspective by stating that "[...] Education needs to be a liberating act and not a domesticating one. Teaching someone to read and write without allowing them to understand the word in its context is to perpetuate the culture of silence" (Freire, 1967, p. 44). Thus, the educational process should not only provide technical training, but also encourage reflection on reality and awareness of oppression.

Thus, the relationship between literacy and self-education is also central to Freire's thought. The act of learning to read and write should not be imposed from top to bottom, but should emerge from the student's own experience, making him the protagonist of learning. As Freire points out, "[...] learning cannot be done from top to bottom, as a donation or an imposition, but from the inside out, by the literacy student himself, only with the collaboration of the educator" (1967, p. 111). Still from this perspective, he adds that "[...] the reading of the word must always be linked to the reading of the world, because it is in the world that the subject understands himself as a historical and cultural being" (Freire,

1982, p. 17). In other words, liberating education must be dialogical, leading the student to realize that he himself is capable of producing knowledge and transforming his reality.

That said, the emphasis on the creation and recreation of language, proposed by Freire, reinforces the idea that literacy is a political and cultural act. It is not a technical exercise of decoding words, but a process of understanding and resignifying the world. As Freire points out, "[...] literacy is not only learning to read the word, but learning to read the world" (1982, p. 14). In consonance, he states that "[...] when literacy students realize that their words have meaning in their lives, they become agents of their own history" (Freire, 1979, p. 20). This understanding rescues the importance of the context and the life experience of the students, contrary to the traditional view that treats them as mere receivers of information.

Consequently, another fundamental point in Freire's approach is the relationship between literacy and awareness. It is not enough to teach the written code; It is necessary to promote a critical reading of reality. According to Freire, "[...] the illiterate is not a man on the margins of society, but a representative of the dominated strata who, through critical literacy, comes to understand their condition and their possibility of transformation" (1979, p. 20). In addition, Freire adds that "[...] the critical consciousness of the literacy student must be awakened during the learning process, because only then will he be able to break with oppression and transform his context" (1967, p. 55). Literacy, therefore, should be seen as an instrument of empowerment, enabling subjects to break with the logic of oppression.

In this sense, educational practice should be problematizing, leading students to question the social and economic structures that determine their living conditions. As Freire explains, "[...] true education does not consist in transferring knowledge, but in creating possibilities for its construction" (1974, p. 47). In addition, he reinforces that "[...] the educational practice has to be rooted in the experience of the students, so that learning is meaningful and contributes to their emancipation" (Freire, 1979, p. 23). Therefore, the role of the educator is to act as a mediator of knowledge, encouraging dialogue and critical reflection among students.

Dialogic literacy also implies a political commitment to social transformation. Freire argues that "[...] assuming freedom as a way of being a man is the starting point of the Culture Circle" (1979, p. 31). In addition, he adds that "[...] a liberating education needs to

question the structures of power and not just adapt them" (Freire, 1979, p. 36), reinforcing that the pedagogical commitment needs to be aimed at the transformation of society.

The starting point for the work in the Culture Circle is to assume freedom and criticism as man's way of being. And learning (extremely fast, since it does not take more than 30 days to teach an adult to read and write, according to the Brazilian experience) can only take place in the free and critical context of the relationships that are established between the students, and between them and the coordinator. The circle thus constitutes a working and debate group. Its central interest is the debate of language in the context of a free and critical social practice. Freedom and criticism that cannot be limited to the internal relations of the group, but that are necessarily presented in the awareness that it makes of its social situation (Freire, 1967, p. 7).

Thus, literacy, from Paulo Freire's perspective, cannot be dissociated from the struggle against oppression. As he states, "[...] education has a political character, because it either serves to maintain the *status quo* or to transform it" (Freire, 1979, p. 27). Furthermore, he reiterates that "[...] it is not enough to teach reading and writing; it is necessary to teach how to critically read the world so that students become agents of change" (Freire, 1982, p. 20). Therefore, literacy means much more than teaching reading and writing; It means enabling subjects to understand and intervene in the world, becoming active agents in the construction of a more just and democratic society.

Paulo Freire's method is based on the problematization of reality and the use of generative words<sup>27</sup> that emerge from the students' vocabulary universe. This methodological process starts from the concrete experience of the subjects and aims at the collective construction of knowledge. As Freire states, "[...] One cannot think of a method of literacy that is disconnected from the social reality of the literacy students. The reading of the world precedes the reading of the word" (1979, p. 25). Furthermore, in his work "The importance of the act of reading", he reiterates that "[...] learning to read, to write, to become literate is, above all, to learn to read the world, to understand its context, not in a mechanical manipulation of words, but in a dynamic relationship that links language and

<sup>27</sup> The method of generative words, developed by Paulo Freire, is a fundamental instrument for awareness-raising literacy, as it is based on the vocabulary universe of the students and the sociocultural reality in which they are inserted. This method is based on the selection of words that have a strong semantic load and existential relevance, allowing literacy students to recognize them as part of their experience and, based on them, expand their linguistic and critical repertoire. From this approach, Freire breaks with the mechanical and repetitive teaching of traditional primers and proposes an active and dialogical learning, where students decode words and resignify them in their own experience, promoting a literacy that not only teaches reading and writing, but also critically understanding the world. See: FREIRE, P. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. 1. Ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1974; FREIRE, P. *Consciousness: theory and practice of liberation*. São Paulo: Cortez & Moraes, 1979.

reality" (Freire, 1982, p. 14), showing that the educational process should not be mechanical, but transformative.

A minimum of words, with maximum phonemic versatility, is the starting point for the conquest of the vocabulary universe. These words, originating from the very vocabulary universe of the literacy student, once transfigured by criticism, return to him in action that transforms the world. How do they leave their universe and how do they return to it? A previous research investigates the universe of spoken words in the cultural environment of the literacy student. From this are extracted the words with the richest phonemic possibilities and the greatest semantic load – those that not only allow a quick mastery of the universe of the written word, but also the most effective engagement of those who pronounce it, with the pragmatic force that establishes and transforms the human world (Freire, 1974, p. 44).

It can be inferred from the text that the method developed by Paulo Freire is based on the assumption that literacy should be a critical and dialogical process, in which the learner becomes the protagonist of the construction of knowledge. Instead of a mechanical teaching and detached from reality, Freire's proposal uses a set of words taken from the linguistic universe of the students to facilitate the learning of reading and writing. However, the appropriation of these words does not occur passively, but rather as an instrument of critical analysis of reality. As Freire points out, "[...] literacy should not only teach reading and writing, but also enable the understanding of the subject's own social condition, allowing him to transform it" (1982, p. 14). Thus, the word emerges as a mediator between thought and action, leading to awareness and social emancipation.

In addition, the vocabulary selected for teaching should be chosen based on its semantic and phonetic relevance, ensuring that learners can identify with the terms and use them in a meaningful way. This process goes beyond the simple decoding of graphic symbols, as it involves the critical analysis of the context in which these signs are inserted. Freire argues that "[...] learning cannot be just a memorization of words; it must be a creative act, capable of generating other creative acts" (1979, p. 20). In this way, literacy ceases to be a mechanical exercise and becomes a political act, in which the learner becomes capable of naming the world and reinterpreting it from a new perspective.

However, traditional education often ignores this critical dimension, reducing literacy to technical training that does not promote autonomous thinking. The conventional approach imposes a vocabulary disconnected from the student's reality, reinforcing alienation and passivity. In contrast, the Freirean method seeks to value popular knowledge and the life experience of learners, establishing a dialogical relationship between educator and student. As the pedagogue states, "[...] when teaching reading and writing, we cannot

separate the word from its context, because it is through the relationship between language and the world that the subject recognizes himself as an agent of his own history" (Freire, 1967, p. 111). Therefore, literacy should be an emancipatory process, and not an instrument of adaptation to the *status quo*.

Thus, another fundamental aspect of Freire's proposal is the importance of the active participation of the student in the construction of knowledge. Instead of being a mere receiver of information, he becomes a knowing subject, capable of questioning his reality and proposing transformations. This approach challenges the logic of banking education, which treats students as storehouses of knowledge. As the author emphasizes, "[...] the word, when critically appropriated, not only expresses thought, but also transforms it" (Freire, 1979, p. 18). Thus, critical literacy enables students to develop a historical and political awareness, becoming active agents in the construction of a more just society.

In addition, the learning process should take place in an environment of dialogue and collective reflection, where students can share their experiences and build knowledge collaboratively. In the Culture Circle, for example, the word is not only a teaching tool, but a means of problematizing reality. As Freire explains, "[...] the Culture Circle is not a space for the transmission of information, but for the exchange of experiences, where educator and student educate each other" (1974, p. 32). Therefore, dialogic literacy not only develops language skills, but also strengthens critical awareness and the capacity for social intervention.

In this way, the Freirean method does not only seek to teach the codes of writing, but to stimulate reflective thinking and the autonomy of learners. Thus, learning should be an act of unveiling reality, in which students can understand their living conditions and act to transform them. As the educator points out, "[...] to become literate is not to learn to repeat words, but to say one's own word" (1979, p. 22). This principle differentiates Freire's approach from traditional methodologies, as it places the subject at the center of the educational process, allowing him to recognize himself as the protagonist of his history.

Consequently, Freire's pedagogical proposal shows that literacy cannot be dissociated from the struggle against oppression. The appropriation of written language should not be an end in itself, but a means for students to question social structures and exercise their citizenship in a full way. As he points out, "[...] Education must have a commitment to the transformation of the world, because if it is not to change, then what is it

for?" (Freire, 2000, p. 45). This political commitment to critical literacy reaffirms the role of the school as a space of resistance and construction of new social possibilities.

Therefore, the teaching of reading and writing must start from the concrete experience of the students, promoting their critical insertion in the world. This process of humanization occurs through dialogue, reflection and transformative action, allowing subjects to free themselves from the structures that keep them in a condition of submission. As Freire states, "[...] the reading of the Word must always be linked to the reading of the world, because it is in it that we find the paths to our liberation" (1982, p. 17). Thus, critical literacy is not only a pedagogical technique, but a political act of emancipation and resistance.

That said, the phases of elaboration and application of the Freirean method involve the identification of the vocabulary universe of the students, the choice of the generating words, the coding and decoding of the words and the problematization of reality from the dialogue. This allows students to appropriate knowledge in an active way, breaking with the passivity characteristic of traditional teaching. According to Freire, "[...] literacy cannot be a neutral practice, as it either contributes to the domestication of individuals or to their liberation" (1979, p. 27). On the other hand, the author also points out that "[...] the democratization of culture as a dimension of fundamental democratization must be central to any pedagogical practice that intends to liberate" (Freire, 1979, p. 29), reiterating the need for a critical approach in education.

The conception of freedom is the matrix that gives meaning to an education that can only be effective and effective to the extent that the students take part in it freely and critically. This is one of the essential principles of the organization of the Circles of Culture, a teaching unit that replaces the traditional school and brings together a coordinator with a few dozen men of the people, in a common work of conquering language. The coordinator does not perform the functions of a 'teacher', the essential condition of the task is dialogue: 'Coordinate, never impose your influence'. Respect for the freedom of students – who are not qualified as illiterate, but as men who learn to read – existed long before the creation of the Culture Circle. In the stage of searching for popular vocabulary, during the preparation phase of the course, the intervention of the people in the elaboration of the program and the definition of the generating words is sought as much as possible, the discussion of which will allow those who learn to read to appropriate their language while expressing a real situation – a 'challenge-situation'. Literacy and awareness are inseparable. All learning must be closely associated with becoming aware of a real situation experienced by the student (Freire, 1979, p. 23).

The conception of freedom, as defended by Paulo Freire, is essential for education to be carried out effectively and effectively. However, this freedom cannot be understood in isolation, but rather in its relationship with pedagogical practice. According to Freire (1979),



"[...] Awareness is not based on consciousness, on the one hand, and the world, on the other; on the other hand, it does not want a separation. On the contrary, it is based on the relationship between consciousness and the world" (p. 35). Therefore, the educational act is not limited to the transmission of knowledge, but must engage the subject in the critical construction of reality. In addition, Freire reinforces that "[...] education must be an act of knowledge, a creative act, a political act" (1982, p. 22).

Consequently, the Culture Circles are established as an alternative to traditional teaching, promoting a dialogical and critical educational practice. This structure allows students to be protagonists of learning, actively participating in the construction of knowledge. As Freire (1979) states, "[...] assuming freedom as a way of being a man is the starting point of the Culture Circle. Learning – very fast, because, according to the experience of Brazil, it only takes 45 days to teach an adult to read and write – can only be effective in the democratic context of the relationships established between students and coordinators, and between students mutually" (p. 27). In addition, Freire adds that "[...] the educator must realize that teaching is not transferring knowledge, but creating the possibilities for its production or construction" (1996, p. 25). However, this process does not occur spontaneously, but requires a methodology that respects the vocabulary universe of the students and enables the problematization of reality. For Freire (1974), "[...] the techniques of the literacy method, although valuable in themselves, taken in isolation say nothing about the method [...] to read and write is to raise awareness" (p. 34). Thus, literacy must be accompanied by the development of critical awareness, so that students understand their social condition and can transform it. Still from this perspective, Freire points out that "[...] the naïve consciousness passively accepts reality; critical consciousness, on the contrary, implies a process of problematization" (1979, p. 42).

In addition, the use of generative words as a methodological strategy reinforces the connection between learning and the social reality of the students. As Freire (1974) points out, "[...] These words are called generative because, through the combination of their basic elements, they provide the formation of others. As words of the vocabulary universe of the literacy student, they are meanings constituted or reconstituted in their behaviors" (p. 35). Therefore, the educational process is structured on the experience of the subjects, starting from previous knowledge to broaden their understanding of the world. In this way, "[...] literacy should allow the literacy student a new form of relationship with the world and with others" (Freire, 1987, p. 56).

However, awareness cannot be conceived as a simple stage of literacy, but rather as a continuous process of transformation. In this sense, Freire (1979) warns that "[...] The new reality must be taken as the object of a new critical reflection. To consider the new reality as something that cannot be touched represents an attitude as naïve and reactionary as to affirm that the old reality is untouchable" (p. 36). Thus, critical learning does not end with reading and writing, but is prolonged in constant analysis and intervention in the social context. This idea is connected with Freire's conception that "[...] to read the word is also to read the world" (Freire, 1982, p. 14).

In this way, the relationship between literacy and awareness is configured as the central axis of Freire's pedagogy. Therefore, the educational process should not be reduced to a simple accumulation of information, but needs to be understood as a path to human emancipation. As Freire (1979) states, "[...] educator and student, the two creative beings, mutually free each other to become, both, creators of new realities" (p. 40). This means that liberating education not only teaches reading and writing, but allows individuals to read the world and transform their own existence. In addition, Freire emphasizes that "[...] the true commitment of the progressive educator is to the transformation of society" (Freire, 1996, p. 57).

Therefore, the educational practice based on dialogue and problematization presents itself as a way of resistance against the domestication imposed by traditional teaching. From the Freirean method, literacy becomes a political act, which not only transmits knowledge, but instigates critical reflection and social transformation. Therefore, by promoting the historical awareness of students, education assumes its fundamental role in the construction of a less unjust society. As Freire (1997) points out, "[...] there is no change without a dream, just as there is no dream without hope" (p. 91).

Thus, the concrete acts of literacy, within the Freirean perspective, are not limited to the acquisition of technical skills, but involve a process of becoming aware of one's own social condition and the possibilities of overcoming injustices. Freire states that "[...] literacy should allow students to discover themselves as historical subjects, protagonists of their own emancipation" (1979, p. 29). Still, he reinforces that "[...] the culture of silence imposed on the popular classes must be broken through words and critical action" (Freire, 1979, p. 33), demonstrating that the literacy process needs to go beyond technical education and enable the autonomy of the subjects.

The educational project is a liberating project. From their inception, the 'circles of culture' have included not only a denunciation – that of the situations of domination that prevent man from being a man – but also an affirmation, which in the context was a discovery: the affirmation of the creative capacity of every human being, even the most alienated. Hence the need to act on social reality in order to transform it, an action that is interaction, communication, dialogue. Educator and student, the two creative beings mutually free themselves to become both creators of new realities (Freire, 1979, p. 36).

That said, the application of the Freirean method requires a political and pedagogical commitment to social transformation, as education cannot be reduced to a neutral or technicist practice. As Freire emphasizes, "[...] assuming freedom as a way of being a man is the starting point of the Culture Circle" (1979, p. 31). In addition, he adds that "[...] a liberating education needs to question power structures and not just adapt them" (1979, p. 36), reinforcing that the pedagogical commitment needs to be focused on the transformation of society.

Therefore, the critical literacy proposed by Paulo Freire transcends the simple acquisition of language skills, becoming a process of liberation and social transformation. By promoting the awareness of subjects about their own reality and enabling them to intervene in it, liberating education breaks with the logic of domestication and strengthens the struggle for a less unjust society. As Freire summarizes, "[...] there is no change without a dream, just as there is no dream without hope" (1979, p. 39). Thus, he emphasizes that "[...] literacy as a political act must be capable of generating historical subjects and not just individuals adapted to the status quo" (Freire, 1979, p. 41), reaffirming that education, when committed to the emancipation of subjects, is a fundamental instrument for social transformation.

## LIBERATION: PAULO FREIRE'S TRANSFORMATIVE PRAXIS

Oppression is a structural phenomenon that manifests itself in social, political, and economic relations, restricting the freedom of individuals and perpetuating inequalities. However, the oppressed, by becoming aware of their condition, can transform this reality. Freire (1979) points out that "[...] Who, better than the oppressed, is prepared to understand the terrible meaning of an oppressive society? Who suffers the effects of oppression more intensely than the oppressed? Who more clearly than they can grasp the need for liberation?" (p. 31). However, this liberation does not occur spontaneously, but through a process of awareness that challenges power structures and promotes transformative praxis.

But almost always, during the initial phase of the struggle, instead of fighting for freedom, the oppressed tend to become oppressors or "sub-oppressors" themselves. The very structure of their thought was conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete existential situation that manipulated them. Their ideal is to be men, but for them, to be men is to be oppressors. This is his model of humanity. This phenomenon comes from the fact that the oppressed, at a given moment in their existential experience, adopt an attitude of 'adherence' towards the oppressor. Under these conditions, it is impossible for them to 'see' it with sufficient lucidity to objectify it, to discover it 'outside themselves'. This does not necessarily mean that the oppressed are unaware that they are being trampled on. But being immersed in oppressive reality prevents them from having a clear perception of themselves as oppressed (Freire, 1979, p. 31).

It can be inferred from this fragment of Paulo Freire that oppression is not only an external phenomenon, imposed by the dominators on the dominated; it also internalizes itself in the oppressed, shaping their perception of the world and their own identity. However, this internalization does not mean that the oppressed are unaware of their condition, but that their immersion in the oppressive reality makes it difficult to have a clear perception of the need for liberation. Freire (1979) points out that "[...] Awareness is not based on consciousness, on the one hand, and the world, on the other; on the other hand, it does not want a separation. On the contrary, it is based on the relationship between consciousness and the world" (p. 15). In addition, Freire points out that "[...] the oppressed, by internalizing the image of the oppressors, believe that the only possible way out is to become oppressors too" (1974, p. 33).

However, this rupture does not happen spontaneously, because the structure of thought of the oppressed has been conditioned by the contradictions of the oppressive society. Therefore, many, instead of seeking collective liberation, aspire to the position of dominators, perpetuating the cycle of oppression. Freire (1974) states that "[...] The pedagogy of the oppressed, which cannot be elaborated by the oppressors, is one of the instruments for this critical discovery – that of the oppressed by themselves and that of the oppressors by the oppressed, as manifestations of dehumanization" (p. 32). Thus, the cultural revolution is necessary for the oppressed to understand that "[...] the culture of silence is not born by spontaneous generation, but is imposed by the structure of dependence" (Freire, 1979, p. 38).

Consequently, the phenomenon of adherence to the oppressor is one of the main barriers to the emancipation of the oppressed. Since the dominant culture imposes a model of humanity based on power and domination, many oppressed people see social ascension as the reproduction of these same practices. Freire (1979) observes that "[...]

the oppressed do not see the 'new man' as the one who must be born of contradiction, once resolved, when oppression gives way to liberation" (p. 31). In a similar way, Freire points out that "[...] the culture imposed by the dominators does not allow the dominated to become aware of their true situation and, therefore, of the possibility of transforming it" (1979, p. 40).

However, true liberation is only possible when the oppressed break with this logic and assume themselves as historical subjects capable of transforming reality. This requires a process of awareness that goes beyond the simple recognition of oppression, leading to transformative praxis. As Freire (1979) points out, "[...] awareness invites us to assume a utopian position in front of the world, a position that converts the conscious into a 'utopian factor'" (p. 41). Furthermore, Freire emphasizes that "[...] awareness cannot claim any 'neutrality'; it is always a political act, which is inserted in a given historical context" (1979, p. 45).

But this awareness does not occur mechanically, as it requires a space for dialogue and critical reflection, allowing the oppressed to recognize themselves as agents of their own history. Freire (1979) emphasizes that "[...] educator and student, the two creative beings, mutually free themselves to become, both, creators of new realities" (p. 36). Therefore, he states that "[...] dialogue cannot be a mere pedagogical technique, but rather a meeting between subjects who seek, together, the understanding and transformation of reality" (Freire, 1974, p. 98).

However, this liberating education comes into direct confrontation with banking education, which seeks to maintain oppression through the mechanical transmission of information. Freire (1979) criticizes this approach by stating that "[...] banking education, instead of encouraging critical reflection, reinforces passivity and acceptance of oppressive structures" (p. 40). Likewise, Freire points out that "[...] true education cannot be reduced to the mechanical memorization of contents, but must be an act of creation and recreation of the world" (1996, p. 43).

Therefore, cultural action has a fundamental role in overcoming oppression, because it is through it that subjects can reinterpret their reality and build new forms of expression and social organization. Freire (1979) points out that "[...] the culture of silence 'overdetermines' the infrastructure from which it springs" (p. 33). At the same time, he adds that "[...] cultural action for liberation must stimulate in the oppressed the ability to critically formulate their own questions and seek their own answers" (Freire, 1979, p. 44).

Consequently, the cultural revolution cannot be limited to a superficial change in artistic or intellectual forms, but must encompass a profound transformation of social and political relations. Freire (1979) argues that "[...] The educational project is a liberating project. From their inception, the 'circles of culture' have included not only a denunciation of the situations of domination that prevent man from being a man, but also an affirmation: the affirmation of the creative capacity of every human being" (p. 36). Additionally, he reinforces that "[...] popular culture, when appropriated by the oppressed, becomes a space of resistance and the construction of a new historical consciousness" (Freire, 1979, p. 48).

In this way, transformative praxis is the central axis of liberation, as it unites theory and practice in a continuous process of questioning and action. Freire (1979) endorses that "[...] Awareness, as a critical attitude of men in history, will never end. If men, as acting beings, continue to adhere to a 'made' world, they will find themselves submerged in a new obscurity" (p. 40). In this way, the struggle against oppression cannot be reduced to an isolated event, but must be a permanent commitment to the transformation of society. As Freire emphasizes, "[...] men educate themselves, mediated by the world, for the transformation of this world" (1974, p. 69).

However, oppression is not maintained only by force, but by the naturalization of the dependence of the dominated on the dominators. Once the oppressed internalize the logic of the oppressor, they end up reproducing the values that sustain their own submission. Freire (1979) observes that "[...] The oppressed, at a given moment in their existential experience, adopts an attitude of 'adherence' towards the oppressor. Under these conditions, it is impossible for them to 'see' it with sufficient lucidity to objectify it, to discover it 'outside of themselves'" (p. 33). Thus, dependence is not only economic, but psychological and cultural, reinforced by institutions such as the school and the media. As Freire points out, "[...] banking education, instead of encouraging critical reflection, reinforces passivity and acceptance of oppressive structures" (1979, p. 40).

In the banking conception of education, knowledge is a gift granted by those who consider themselves to be its possessors to those who they consider to know nothing. Projecting absolute ignorance onto others is characteristic of an ideology of oppression. It is a denial of education and knowledge as a process of search. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary 'opposite': considering that their ignorance is absolute, he justifies his own existence. The students, alienated like the slave in the Hegelian dialectic, accept their ignorance as a justification for the existence of the teacher, but unlike the slave, they never discover that they educate the teacher (Freire, 1979, p. 40).



Consequently, dependence should not be understood only as an economic phenomenon, but as a structural relationship that conditions individuals' perception of themselves and the world. As Freire (1979) explains, "[...] it is not the dominator who builds a culture and imposes it on the dominated. It is the result of structural relations between the dominated and the dominator" (p. 33). Therefore, to overcome this dependence, it is necessary to have an educational process that promotes the intellectual and political autonomy of the subjects. Freire argues that "[...] awareness cannot be an isolated act, but a continuous process that challenges and transforms reality" (1979, p. 41).

However, marginality does not mean absolute exclusion from society, but a specific position within it, in which certain groups are kept in conditions of inferiority. According to Freire (1979), "[...] The marginalized man is not 'a being outside of'. On the contrary, it is a 'being inside' a social structure, in a relationship of dependence on those we falsely call autonomous beings" (p. 38). Therefore, marginality should not be seen as a natural state, but as a historical construction that can be deconstructed. As Freire reinforces, "[...] the process of liberation requires that the marginalized perceive themselves as historical subjects and engage in the transformation of their reality" (1979, p. 42).

Therefore, the lines of action for overcoming oppression must be based on liberating education, which enables the emergence of a critical and engaged consciousness. Freire (1979) states that "[...] Awareness, as a critical attitude of men in history, will never end. If men, as acting beings, continue to adhere to a 'made' world, they will find themselves submerged in a new obscurity" (p. 40). In this way, the educational process needs to be continuous and dialogical, allowing students to understand their condition and act to change it. As Freire reinforces, "[...] there is no change without a dream, just as there is no dream without hope" (1997, p. 91).

That said, the new pedagogical relationship proposed by Freire breaks with the logic of traditional education and establishes a practice based on dialogue and collaboration between educator and student. As Freire (1979) explains, "[...] The methods of oppression cannot, on pain of contradicting each other, serve the liberation of the oppressed. Education as a practice of freedom inevitably requires a pedagogy of the oppressed" (p. 39). Therefore, education needs to be an emancipatory process, in which subjects recognize themselves as agents of their own formation. As Freire points out, "[...] teaching is not transferring knowledge, but creating the conditions for its construction" (1996, p. 25).

Consequently, cultural action becomes fundamental to break with the culture of silence and enable new forms of expression and social organization. As Freire (1979) points out, "[...] the culture of silence 'overdetermines' the infrastructure from which it springs" (p. 33). This means that domination does not occur only through physical repression, but also through the imposition of narratives that delegitimize popular knowledge and reinforce alienation. Therefore, cultural action must be a strategy of resistance and reappropriation of the identity of the subjects. As Freire states, "[...] culture cannot be reduced to an instrument of domination, but must be a space of recreation and freedom" (1979, p. 44).

However, the cultural revolution cannot be understood only as an aesthetic or symbolic change, but as a process of transformation of social and political relations. Freire (1979) points out that "[...] Paulo Freire's educational project is a liberating project. From their inception, the 'circles of culture' have included not only a denunciation of situations of domination, but also an affirmation: the affirmation of the creative capacity of every human being" (p. 36). Thus, the cultural revolution must not only question the status quo, but build new forms of social organization based on justice and solidarity. As Freire emphasizes, "[...] the struggle for liberation is, at the same time, a struggle for humanization" (1979, p. 45).

Finally, transformative praxis requires the articulation between reflection and action in the search for a more just and egalitarian society. As Freire (1979) states, "[...] awareness invites us to assume a utopian position in front of the world, a position that converts the conscious into a 'utopian factor'" (p. 41). Therefore, social change does not occur by chance, but through a conscious commitment to the transformation of reality. As Freire concludes, "[...] the progressive educator must commit himself to the construction of a more humane world" (1996, p. 57).

## CONCLUSION

Freire's literacy, conceived as an act of liberation, transcends the mere decoding of words to be configured as a process of awareness and social transformation. By understanding reading and writing as tools for the critical interpretation of the world, Freire proposes a teaching model in which the learner is not a passive receiver of information, but an active subject in the construction of knowledge. Thus, literacy is not reduced to a technical instrument, but is presented as a means for the emancipation of individuals and the overcoming of the structures of oppression that sustain social inequalities.

Within the neoliberal logic, education has been reduced to a commodity, shaped to meet the demands of the labor market and consolidate the current social hierarchy. This model perpetuates a school that does not emancipate, but trains, preparing students for adaptation and not for the transformation of reality. Critical literacy, on the other hand, resists this logic by promoting a dialogical and problematizing education, capable of unveiling the mechanisms of domination and stimulating the active participation of subjects in the construction of a more just world.

The concept of "generative words", developed by Freire, exemplifies this process, as it starts from the vocabulary universe of the students to broaden their understanding of reality and enable them to become aware of their social condition. This method breaks with the traditional banking education, which deposits information without allowing critical reflection, and establishes an emancipatory pedagogy that enables the literacy student to read the world before reading the word. In this way, literacy becomes an instrument of struggle against alienation and social exclusion, promoting the intellectual and political autonomy of the subjects.

In addition, Freire's literacy cannot be dissociated from transformative praxis, that is, from the articulation between reflection and action in the search for structural changes. By recognizing students as historical agents, capable of intervening in reality, Freire's pedagogy breaks with the passivity imposed by traditional teaching and reaffirms the need for an education aimed at the formation of critical and engaged citizens. This is directly opposed to the neoliberal logic, which seeks to restrict the school to a space for technical training, distancing it from its social and political function.

That said, another central aspect of this perspective is the recognition of the political character of education. As Freire points out, every educational act carries an intentionality and can serve both for liberation and for the perpetuation of oppression. In this sense, critical literacy is configured as a fundamental strategy to break with the culture of silence imposed on the popular classes and to provide means of resistance and construction of new forms of social organization. In this way, liberating education reaffirms its role in the struggle for a less unequal and more democratic society.

Therefore, Freire's literacy is a process of humanization that enables subjects to recognize themselves as protagonists of their own history. Unlike traditional education, which reduces them to mere spectators of reality, critical literacy offers them the tools to interpret the world and transform it. Thus, the word ceases to be just a written code and

becomes an instrument of resistance, enabling students not only to read, but to "rewrite" their own existence. In this way, it is reaffirmed that education, when committed to the emancipation of the subjects, is a powerful means of social transformation.

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