

## PAULO FREIRE'S PEDAGOGY AND ITS RELEVANCE IN THE CONTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

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Franciele Del Vecchio dos Santos<sup>1</sup>, Elivaldo Serrão Custódio<sup>2</sup>, Francisco Antonio Machado Araujo<sup>3</sup>, Gislaine Aparecida Valadares de Godoy<sup>4</sup>, Diogo Almeida e Silva<sup>5</sup>, Léslie Amanda da Silva<sup>6</sup>, Naura Letícia Nascimento Coelho<sup>7</sup>, Rodrigo Gomes Abreu<sup>8</sup>,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Doctor in School Education **UNESP/Araraguara** E-mail: fran.delvecchio@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0002-9021 0583 <sup>2</sup> Doctor of Theology Faculdades EST E-mail: elivaldo.pa@hotmail.com ORCID: 0000-0002-2947-5347 <sup>3</sup> Doctor of Education Federal University of Piauí E-mail: chiquinhophb@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0001-8443-6853 <sup>4</sup> Doctor in Education State University of Maringá - UEM E-mail: gavgodoy@uem.br ORCID: 0000-0003-2007-7024 <sup>5</sup> Doctor student in Education State University of Maringá - UEM E-mail: diogopesquisador@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0003-2303-0272 <sup>6</sup> Doctor student in Education State University of Maringá - UEM E-mail: pesquisadoraleslie@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0003-0770-2710 <sup>7</sup> Doctor student in Letters UFSM E-mail: nauracoelho55@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0002-0076-281X <sup>8</sup> Doctor student in Education, History and Society University of São Paulo - USP E-mail: rodrigogomesabreu9@gmail.com ORCID: 0009-0009-0368-8211



Helena Campista de Souza<sup>9</sup>, Rayane Emanuelle de Oliveira<sup>10</sup>, Luciano Luiz da Silva<sup>11</sup>, Evandro Cechin Fagundes<sup>12</sup> and Francisnei Freitas Santos<sup>13</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This article explores Paulo Freire's contributions to critical education, focusing on his works "The Importance of the Act of Reading" (1981) and "Pedagogy of Hope" (1992). The introduction highlights Freire's legacy as a central reference for emancipatory education, underscoring the importance of listening, critical awareness, and transformative practice. The objective of the study is to analyze how Freire's ideas continue to be a relevant tool to face contemporary educational challenges, such as the commodification of education and the precariousness of teaching work. The article reaffirms the relevance of Freire's theories for the construction of a critical and emancipatory education. The ideas of active hope and critical awareness are seen as central to promoting social justice and equality, making Freire's pedagogy indispensable in the fight against oppression and social inequalities. The methodology used was a qualitative bibliographic research, which consisted of analyzing Freire's main works and highlighting their implications in the current context. The research emphasizes the relationship between the reading of the world and the reading of the word, proposing education as a political act of transformation.

**Keywords:** Emancipatory Education. Critical Awareness. Active Hope. Social Transformation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Master of Education Estácio de Sá University – UNESA E-mail: helenaise@gmail.com ORCID: 0009-0001-2324-0344 <sup>10</sup> Master in Innovation and Educational Technologies UFRN E-mail: rayane822@hotmail.com ORCID: 0000-0001-5035-0883 <sup>11</sup> Master's Degree in Education **UNESP/Rio Claro** E-mail: luciano.luiz@unesp.br ORCID: 0009-0008-3834-856X <sup>12</sup> Bachelor of Business Administration UFSM E-mail: evandrocechin@hotmail.com ORCID: 0009-0004-7668-3562 <sup>13</sup> Postgraduate student in Oncology **IFSULDEMINAS** E-mail: neyenf2017@gmail.com ORCID: 0009-0007-4123-7898



#### INTRODUCTION

The contemporary scenario, marked by deep social inequalities, economic crises, and growing educational challenges, maintains Paulo Freire's legacy as a central reference for those who seek to promote emancipatory education. Freire's ideas transcended their time and place of origin, remaining current and influential in questioning traditional models of teaching that perpetuate oppressive structures. His proposal for a pedagogy centered on dialogue, critical awareness and transformative practice offers an alternative and radical path for education, emphasizing the importance of listening, respect for popular knowledge and the active participation of students in the learning process. In an increasingly complex world, these ideas gain new momentum by confronting the dehumanization and alienation that many contemporary educational systems seem to reinforce, especially in contexts where neoliberal logic has dictated the direction of education, transforming it into a market product.

Freire was not only a theorist of education; He was, above all, a thinker who integrated theory and practice by offering concrete tools to rethink pedagogical action as an act of liberation. His thought challenges passivity and alienation, proposing a pedagogy that values the knowledge of the oppressed and invites them to be protagonists in the construction of their own history and in confronting the social structures that keep them on the margins. For him, educating is not limited to the transmission of content, but implies an ethical and political commitment to social transformation, in which education becomes an instrument of struggle for justice and equality. Freire's pedagogy resists the superficiality of banking education, where knowledge is seen as something to be deposited in the minds of students, without dialogue or critical reflection. In this context, its defense of a problematizing education, in which the student questions and transforms reality, remains one of the most important pillars for those who want a truly democratic pedagogical practice.

Revisiting his works in the light of contemporary challenges – such as social exclusion, the advance of neoliberal policies in education, and the precariousness of teaching work – is an opportunity to reflect on the social role of education and its real possibilities for transforming reality. The crisis that plagues the teaching work, aggravated by educational reforms that devalue the role of teachers and reduce the time for the development of reflective pedagogical practices, further highlights Freire's relevance. It invites us to look beyond the limitations imposed by education systems, promoting an



education committed to human dignity. In this sense, Paulo Freire's work continues to be an indispensable source for understanding education as a practice of freedom, as he himself called it. In a historical moment in which education is often instrumentalized to meet economic and political interests, Freire's pedagogy proposes to resist these pressures, reaffirming the role of the school as a space for social transformation.

Freire's theories have been widely applied and adapted around the world, especially in initiatives aimed at adult literacy, in popular education projects and in the formation of critical citizens who are aware of their rights and duties. In addition, they also influence social movements and public policies aimed at education in contexts of vulnerability. This global dissemination of Freire's thought reflects the depth and flexibility of his ideas, which can be applied in different social and cultural realities, always with the aim of promoting an education that emancipates. This article aims to explore the author's contributions, based on two of his essential works: The Importance of the Act of Reading (1981) and Pedagogy of Hope (1992). These works not only broaden the understanding of the role of the educator, but also offer valuable insights into how the educational process can be transformed into a tool for resistance and change.

By articulating the reading of the world with the reading of the word, Freire offers a path to the awareness and emancipation of the oppressed, reinforcing that the reading process goes far beyond the decoding of texts, encompassing the critical understanding of the social, political, and economic conditions that shape the lives of students. For Freire, education is essentially a political practice that can radically transform the reality of the subjects, preparing them to act critically on the world and intervene in their own conditions of existence. The process of reading and awareness described by Freire is an invitation to reflect on the systemic oppression that permeates societies, enabling students, once aware of this reality, to act to transform it.

In the face of contemporary challenges, such as growing educational inequalities, the commodification of education, and the weakening of democratic practices, revisiting these works by Paulo Freire is essential to understand the relevance of a dialogical and critical education in the twenty-first century. Freire's perspective continues to offer a powerful tool to confront new forms of oppression, reaffirming the commitment to building a more just and equitable society. When reflecting on Freire's legacy, we realize that his work does not offer easy answers, but rather deep questions about the role of the educator, the school and education itself in an ever-changing world. Reaffirming this commitment to transformative



education is essential for those who still believe that education can, in fact, change the world.

# **METHODOLOGY**

This article adopts a qualitative approach, based on the analysis of the contributions of Paulo Freire's works, focusing on The Importance of the Act of Reading (1981) and Pedagogy of Hope (1992). The methodology used consists of the theoretical analysis of Freire's central ideas, highlighting the applicability of his theories to the contemporary educational context. By using this approach, the study seeks to highlight the relevance of Freire's proposals in the face of the current challenges of education, especially with regard to the need for a critical and emancipatory pedagogy.

The bibliographic research was carried out in two main stages. In the first, there was a careful selection of works that address in depth the concepts of emancipatory and critical education as proposed by Freire. This selection process made it possible to identify the most relevant works, with special attention to those that dialogue directly with the issues of critical awareness and the emancipation of the oppressed. In the second stage, the detailed analysis of the selected excerpts provided subsidies for the construction of a narrative that articulates the reading of the world and the reading of the word, fundamental concepts in Freire's work, highlighting its impact on the formation of critical and conscious citizens.

According to Lakatos and Marconi (2003), the methodology of bibliographic research involves the identification, location and compilation of sources, followed by the analysis and interpretation of the content. This process allows not only the deepening of the ideas discussed, but also their contextualization within a broader panorama. In this study, the following methodological steps were followed:

- Choice of theme: The choice of theme was motivated by the relevance of Freire's contributions to the field of critical education, especially considering the contemporary challenges faced by educational policies in neoliberal contexts. The focus was on the applicability of Freire's ideas to current education, highlighting their implications in the formation of critical subjects.
- Identification of sources: The selection of sources included mainly the works of Paulo Freire, with emphasis on The Importance of the Act of Reading and Pedagogy of Hope. In addition to these, complementary texts by scholars of critical pedagogy were included, which allowed to broaden the scope of the



analysis and relate Freire's ideas to the most recent discussions in the educational field.

- Content analysis: The analysis was conducted from a critical reading of the works, seeking to identify Freire's main ideas, such as the conception of education as a political act, the importance of dialogue and the practice of active hope. During this stage, Freire's reflections were contextualized in the light of current educational challenges, including the commodification of education and the precariousness of teaching work.
- Interpretation: The interpretation of Freire's ideas followed the principles of qualitative research, which privileges the relationship between theory and practice. By relating Freire's theories to contemporary pedagogical practices, the study sought to understand the impact of Freire's proposals in the construction of an education aimed at social transformation, especially with regard to the struggle for the emancipation of the oppressed.

The methodology employed allowed the construction of a critical analysis that connects Paulo Freire's thoughts with the current demands of education. By revisiting his works in the contemporary context, the study reaffirms the importance of education as an instrument of struggle for social justice and transformation. The analysis also highlights how Freire's ideas continue to influence pedagogical practices aimed at the formation of critical subjects, capable of questioning and transforming the oppressive realities in which they are inserted.

### RESULTS

In Pedagogy of Hope, Freire revisits and deepens the fundamental concepts of his work Pedagogy of the Oppressed<sup>14</sup>, reflecting on the experiences accumulated over the years and reaffirming the centrality of hope in the educational process. For the author, hope is an essential force, but it must be understood actively, not as a passive or resigned expectation. It is an ontological need that is not limited to a vague desire, but is translated into concrete practices, it is, therefore, a vital energy that drives the struggle for social

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), presents a scathing critique of traditional educational practices, which he calls "banking education", in which knowledge is passively transmitted to students, reinforcing oppression. Freire proposes a dialogical and liberating approach to education, where oppressed and oppressors engage in a process of mutual awareness and transformation. This pedagogy aims at the liberation of the oppressed, allowing them to become aware of their situation and actively participate in the transformation of their social and historical reality



transformation, stating that "there is no practice without a dream, just as there is no dream without hope" (Freire, 1992, p. 58).

This hope, however, cannot be naïve or devoid of critical action. Freire criticizes the idea of an isolated hope detached from concrete reality, as it can easily be converted into hopelessness or frustration. He argues that hope must be nourished by a pedagogical practice that is critical and ethical, capable of unveiling the contradictions of society and, at the same time, proposing viable alternatives. Without this active hope, the struggle for a liberating education is weakened, as it is the fuel that maintains resistance and the search for a more just and democratic world.

Freire also makes an important distinction between true hope and passive waiting. He warns that to wait without acting is to allow oneself to be immobilized by the forces of oppression, transforming hope into an empty element. On the contrary, the hope he proposes is the one that is anchored in social and political practice, creating the conditions for overcoming the limitations imposed by situations of oppression.

This view establishes that pedagogical practice must always be guided by hope, connected to the possibility of changing reality, as there can be no truly transformative education without a horizon of hope and dream. In this context, hope emerges as an essential element for any educational project that proposes to build a more just and egalitarian society.

Freire's idea of hope is intrinsically linked to political action. He argues that all education is, by essence, a political act, and that neutrality in the educational field is a dangerous illusion. "Neutrality in education is a lie. Every educational act is a political act, which may or may not be at the service of social transformation" (Freire, 1992, p. 64), Freire maintains, challenging educators to adopt a critical stance in their practices. Freire's pedagogy, therefore, not only raises awareness among the oppressed, but invites them to recognize the roots of their oppression and to engage in the struggle against the social structures that perpetuate this condition. Education thus becomes a tool for liberation, which does not naturalize oppression, but confronts it, offering students a critical view of the world.

The author also emphasizes that hope should not be confused with naivety or utopian idealism, but rather as a transformative force that must be cultivated in real contexts of critical action. He points out that "to hope is to get up, to hope is to go after, to hope is to build, to hope is not to give up" (Freire, 1992, p. 73). Thus, the pedagogy of hope is



configured as a path of resistance to oppression, anchored in transformative and critical practices, which aim to mobilize both students and educators to build a fairer world. Hope, for Freire, is, therefore, an active attitude that is concretized in educational practice, enabling individuals to see that social change is possible and achievable through critical and dialogical education.

In The Importance of the Act of Reading, Freire deepens the idea that the reading of the world precedes the reading of the word, reaffirming his view that the literacy process goes far beyond the mechanical decoding of texts. For him, literacy is, above all, an act of critical understanding of the context in which the subjects are inserted. "The reading of the world precedes the reading of the word, so the subsequent reading of the latter cannot dispense with the continuity of the reading of the former" (Freire, 1989, p. 11), says Freire, underlining the importance of an education contextualized in the reality of the students. By promoting a deep connection between the experiences of the subjects and the content they learn, Freire places education as a process of awareness, in which literacy is transformed into an act of empowerment.

In this sense, literacy, for Freire, goes beyond the simple transmission of reading and writing skills; It is a process of awareness and empowerment of the subjects. He argues that "literacy is, first and foremost, learning to read the world, understanding its context" (Freire, 1989, p. 14), positioning the learner as an active subject, engaged in a process of reflection on his or her living conditions and the possibilities of transformation. For Freire, literacy is not only the acquisition of technical skills, but a creative and critical act, in which written expression is the result of the reflexive elaboration of oral experience: "literacy is the creation or assembly of written expression from oral expression" (Freire, 1989, p. 30). By promoting this critical view of literacy, Freire proposes a break with traditional teaching methods, which often treat the learner in a passive way, without exploring their transformative potential.

In addition, Freire argues that education should be an act of liberation and promotion of autonomy. He points out that "the critical reading of the world and of the word enables popular groups to have a different understanding of their indigence" (Freire, 1989, p. 23). Thus, critical literacy is not restricted to the simple ability to read and write, but also promotes students' awareness of their position in the world, allowing them to understand the social structures that limit their opportunities and, from this, seek their emancipation. In this way, Freire reaffirms the centrality of education as a process of liberation, which not



only enables individuals to navigate the world of letters, but also prepares them to intervene critically in their realities and fight for their autonomy and dignity.

# DISCUSSION

Paulo Freire's ideas about hope and critical reading remain deeply relevant in the contemporary educational landscape, characterized by accentuated social inequalities and the marginalization of diverse groups. Freire's pedagogy, with its focus on critical awareness and transformative action, offers a robust theoretical basis for educational practices that transcend the simple transmission of content. Freire proposes an education aimed at the emancipation of individuals, challenging passivity and promoting the active participation of students in the process of social transformation. According to Saviani (2012), the transformative character of education is revealed when it goes beyond the mere communication of formal knowledge, being directly linked to the struggle for better living and working conditions, always in dialogue with the concrete realities of the subjects involved. This dialogue is central to critical pedagogy, as it allows education to be contextualized, relevant, and capable of responding to the real demands of students.

In contexts of social vulnerability, where inequalities are more evident, the implementation of a critical pedagogy, based on dialogue and active hope, can create the necessary conditions for students to become protagonists of their own liberation. Freire believed that education, when done in a critical and dialogical way, could be the first step to break with the cycles of oppression. In this sense, Santos (2002) complements this perspective by stating that emancipation can only occur when subjects become aware of the multiple forms of oppression to which they are subjected, and education is one of the main instruments to awaken this critical consciousness. Critical pedagogy, therefore, is not only an educational tool, but also a means to address the structural injustices that perpetuate exclusion and inequality, offering learners the ability to critically analyze their living conditions and, more importantly, to act to change them.

By providing students with the opportunity to perceive themselves as historical and political subjects, Freire's pedagogy not only stimulates reflection, but also encourages active resistance against structural oppressions. It encourages the search for a more just and equitable society, where social transformation is possible through collective engagement. Apple (2006) reinforces this view by showing that education has the potential to challenge established power relations, promoting a space where students can question



dominant norms and actively collaborate for social transformation. This transformative potential is one of the main strengths of Freire's pedagogy, which is not limited to teaching content, but seeks to form critical citizens, aware of their role in society and their ability to promote change.

In this way, Paulo Freire's legacy continues to inspire educators committed to a truly transformative education, guided by the principles of social justice and equality. Education, for Freire, cannot be neutral; It is always a political act, and, as such, it must be committed to the fight against oppression and to the promotion of a more inclusive and democratic society. With his critical and dialogical approach, Freire invites us to reflect on the role of education in building a world where awareness and collective action are the main tools for transformation. Throughout his work, Freire highlights that active hope – the one that drives action and struggle – is fundamental for education to be able to fulfill its emancipatory role.

### CONCLUSION

Paulo Freire's contributions to critical education remain indispensable today, especially in a global scenario marked by deep social inequalities and educational challenges that demand innovative approaches committed to transformation. His ideas, present in works such as Pedagogy of Hope and The Importance of the Act of Reading, offer not only a theoretical reflection on pedagogical practice, but also concrete tools for educators and students to face the complexities of the contemporary world.

Freire reminds us that education, to be truly transformative, must be grounded in a critical political practice, capable of promoting awareness and empowerment of the oppressed. This implies that the role of the educator goes beyond the simple transmission of knowledge; It should act as a facilitator of processes of critical reflection and collective action, encouraging learners to perceive themselves as agents of change in their communities and societies. In this sense, the notions of active hope and critical reading of the world continue to be essential principles for the construction of a pedagogy that, more than teaching content, transforms realities.

Furthermore, by revisiting Freire's works in the light of contemporary challenges, the need to adapt his pedagogy to different social and educational contexts is reinforced. In an increasingly globalized and technologically connected world, the tools offered by Freire continue to be applicable, especially with regard to digital inclusion, the formation of critical citizens, and the promotion of social justice in environments of great vulnerability. Freire



leaves us the legacy that education must be thought of in a contextualized way, and that it is necessary to take into account the realities of the students so that the educational process is effective and liberating.

Finally, Freire's pedagogy, by valuing dialogue, awareness, and hope, continues to be an essential guide for educators committed to building a more just and inclusive society. It is up to us, educators and researchers, to continue deepening and disseminating these concepts, promoting the formation of critical subjects, aware of their capacities and ready to transform the world around them. The relevance of Freire's ideas reveals that critical and emancipatory education is still a viable and necessary path to face the inequalities that continue to mark our societies.



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