


## NEOCONSERVATISM IN EDUCATIONAL SPACES AND THE NEED FOR EDUCATION IN/FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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### ABSTRACT

This article intends to problematize the (re)updating of conservatism in Brazilian society, and its implications for educational agendas. The discussion is based on the following question: how can education in and for human rights serve as a counterpoint to the rise of neoconservative narratives in Brazilian society, reproduced/updated in educational spaces? The text brings together arguments, arising from bibliographic research procedures, analyzed from the perspective of the qualitative approach. In the study, it is highlighted that human rights are situated in the field of disputes of interests between the state, the market and civil society. In this context, the strategic role of educational spaces in strengthening a culture in and for human rights is discussed, as a resistance to conservative ideologies that, in recent years, have gained strength in educational policy.

**Keywords:** Conservatism. Educational Spaces. Human Rights Education.

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## INTRODUCTION

The debate about the conservatism present in Brazilian society is not new, however, the rise of conservative narratives and actions are revealed in all areas of society, being reproduced and updated in educational, social and cultural spaces. According to Bonazzi (1998, p. 242), conservatism is characterized by conceptions and "[...] attitudes aimed at maintaining the existing political system and its modes of functioning, presenting itself as a counterpart of innovative forces".

In the same vein, Crowther (1996, p.132) conceptualizes conservatism as "[...] the instinctive aversion to change and the corresponding attachment to things as they are, are feelings from which few human beings have ever been totally exempt." In the same way, conservatism can be nurtured through different political, social, cultural, digital strategies, among others, which relate to values, customs, beliefs, and conceptions of the world that transit and guide the educational field.

In this vein, it is worth noting that conservative narratives and agendas expressed in the educational field react against advances in debates on human rights, gender diversity, sexuality, and racial equality, promoting education aimed at maintaining the status quo by strengthening discourses in which inequality is exalted as meritocracy (Miguel, 2016). These conservative movements propose a pedagogical neutrality that, in practice, is a form of censorship of critical thinking and freedom of expression of educators (Miguel, 2016), marked by a moralistic agenda that seeks to restrict access to progressive content (Franco, 2017).

In view of this reality, the need to strengthen education in and for human rights in school spaces emerges, as an indispensable tool for the construction of a counter-narrative to conservatism. Therefore, the objective of this article is to identify whether education in and for human rights can serve as a counterpoint to the rise of conservative narratives in Brazilian society, reproduced/updated in educational spaces.

It is worth noting that, according to Nisbert (1987), conservatism is a political ideology, and one of its recognized exponents was Edmund Burke (1729-1797) who at the time opposed the Enlightenment and revolutionary ideas of a total rupture with the past, constituting itself as a response to strategies that sought to break with the traditional perspective of man and society associated with customs, to religion and political-economic organization. Historically demarcated, conservative thought preserved in social, political and cultural relations transiting in different contexts, is the crystallized argument to justify

exclusionary practices, such as: patriarchy, enslavement, authoritarianism, the permanence of oligarchies present in power, the defense of meritocracy, determining factors for its legitimation and reproduction.

It should also be noted that conservatism "[...] It is, and always will be, indispensable food for the reproduction of capital, and therefore it never leaves the scene. In other words, it is a central food to preserve capitalist society and will always be at its disposal" (Boschetti, 2015, p. 639). It is an argument and strategy to legitimize the restriction of access to rights, reproduced in all instances of life, with great force in the field of education, based on its ability to create narratives to be reproduced in society.

In line with the objective of this article, the arguments were gathered, based on the research of a narrative bibliographic review that "is carried out from the available record, resulting from previous research [...] using data or theoretical categories already worked on by other researchers and duly registered" (Severino, 2007, p.122). And, since the analysis is conducted with a qualitative approach, which aims to "[...] understand the process through which people construct meanings and describe what these meanings consist of" (Bogdan; Biklen, 1994, p. 70).

Thus, in a qualitative approach it is possible to "[...] to scrutinize the way people construct the world around them, what they are doing or what is happening to them in terms that make sense and that offer a rich vision" (Gibbs, 2009, p. 8). Although, "the qualitative data are very varied, [...] all have in common the fact that they are examples of human communication endowed with meanings" (Gibbs, 2009, p. 24).

To support this discussion, it was necessary to organize the text into three axes that are interconnected. Initially, the article demarcates the elements of conservatism present in the history of education in Brazil based on: Germano (2011); Sucupira (1996); Paiva (2002); Romanelli (2014) and Saviani (2019). In the second moment, the reflection on the presence and reproduction of conservatism in educational spaces is presented, for this we use Pacheco (2009); Boschetti (2015); Sepúlveda and Sepúlveda (2016); Gohn (2017); Franco (2017) and Seffner (2017). And, finally, as the purpose of the article is to present education in/for human rights as a counterpoint to conservatism, the debate was based on reference authors in the area, such as: Arroyo (2008, 2015); Candau (2008, 2013, 2016); Candau and Sacavino (2013); Walsh, De Oliveira and Candau (2018) and Estevão (2019).

## HOW IS CONSERVATISM PRESENT IN BRAZILIAN EDUCATION?

Initially, it is highlighted that education in the Brazilian reality was marked by selectivity of access, with an educational model at the service of the dominant class predominating. Thus, it is important to emphasize that the historical process of the constitution of Brazilian society, in its economic, political and ethical context, took place in an authoritarian way (Koga, 2013). In this scenario, the context of slavery, patrimonialism and authoritarianism that still interfere in our sociability today is presented, this heritage legitimizes citizenship as a class privilege. In this way, the cultural process that guides the conception of the world, about ourselves and others, when it is not characterized by the recognition of rights, but as an expression of favor, benefits and charity, preserves social inequality and restricts access to the set of rights for the largest portion of the population.

This perspective, which was present in the construction of the conception and policy of education in Brazil, we can affirm that they are some substrates for the transmission and reproduction of conservatism. Such conservative elements, founding the history of education, since the colonial context, in which formal education was restricted to a few, a scenario in which the Jesuit school aimed to teach and indoctrinate, based on the foundation of hierarchy and religion, and education should "[...] to mean full adherence to Portuguese culture" (Paiva, 2002, p. 43). This means that it was a rigid and selective education permeated by the European intentionality of religious and cultural imposition on colonized peoples.

This cultural attitude was based on the understanding that it was "[...] by the letters [that] the organization of society is confirmed. This same organization will determine the degrees of access to letters, to some more, to others less" (Paiva, 2002, p. 44). In this educational model, the schools were focused "on the children of the principals" with the perspective of an education of control to reproduce control, "[...] one educates not to do (this or that)" (Paiva, 2002, p. 50). Therefore, the colonial educational model "[...] invades and shapes all areas of social life, thus increasing the distance between letters and lived life" (Paiva, 2002, p. 55). The same model extends to Imperial Brazil, which began in 1822 and ended with the Proclamation of the Republic in 1889. In the period, marked by disputes between liberals and the preservation of the empire, primary education, provided for citizens, was enjoyed by the children of wealthy families.

The Additional Act of 1834 presented the need for decentralization and compulsory public education, in the midst of divergences with groups defending religious education,

instituted free primary education. In a scenario of centralization of power, it was a matter of teaching how to read, write and understand arithmetic operations, with the duty of the provinces to act in guaranteeing the primary structure. Against the backdrop of the process of slavery and the domination of the ruralist oligarchies, education remained an instrument used by the elite to maintain power and preserve its privileges. At this juncture, a small group discussed and decided the fate of education, and indicated who could have access (Sucupira, 1996).

After the imperial period, establishing the republic in the country, the Constitution of 1891 paid little attention to education. The constitutional text only signaled education as a responsibility of Congress, but not privately, highlighting the need to "[...] to encourage the development of letters, arts and sciences in the country [...]" and "to create institutions of higher and secondary education in the States" (BRASIL, 1891), without, however, bringing any item on free primary education, provided for in the Constitution of the Empire. In this context, it should be noted that the illiterate did not have the right to vote, thus, a republic designed and organized for the elites was constituted. This means that, even with a significant political and governmental change, the essence of selectivity and meritocracy remain intact. It is a distinction, in the definition of who occupies power, in the direction of the country, but the authoritarian and conservative traits in the relationship with the population have changed little.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the control of school expansion remained in the hands of the elites of power, of privatist and religious interests, of the maintenance of the status quo, aiming to link education to the need for economic development. In the period, there is also an important movement that culminates in the Manifesto of the Pioneers of New Education, in 1932, which presented the defense of free public schooling, compulsory education and secularism, situating education as a social problem in Brazil (Romanelli, 2014).

Scenario of the clash between reformers and Catholics, between the secularity of education versus religious education, between 1930 and 1937, these ideological disputes were present, in addition to the commitment of the Getúlio Vargas government to the economic sector. Thus, in the Francisco Campos Reform, there was the creation of the National Council of Education in 1931, the organization of higher education, secondary and commercial education. The renovation movement, on the other hand, sought to sensitize the public authorities and educators in relation to the reality of the country's educational

problems. However, what was established and/or remained was primary and vocational education for the poor, and secondary and higher education for the rich. With the Estado Novo of 1937-1946, the totalitarian regime was established, priority was given to the need for economic development through industrialization. At this juncture, with a focus on technical education and the qualification of the workforce for industry, the Organic Laws of Education (1942-1946) were established: Organic Law of Industrial Education, National Service of Industrial Learning (SENAI), Organic Law of Secondary Education, Commercial Education, Primary Education and Normal Education (Romanelli, 2014).

In 1946, with the new Federal Constitution, education was presented as "[...] right of all and will be given at home and at school [...]" (BRASIL, 1946), with compulsory and free primary education, and that after primary school, the state should provide for those who prove a lack or insufficiency of resources. There was also the permanence of religious education with optional enrollment. A federative organization was also presented for the division of responsibilities between the union, states and municipalities, regarding the financing of education, and it is the responsibility of the Union to organize a federal education system (BRASIL, 1946).

In 1961, Law No. 4,024 was approved, which provided for the Guidelines and Bases of National Education (BRASIL, 1961). According to Saviani (2019), the first Law of Guidelines and Bases - LDB, was established in the midst of disputes around the centralization and decentralization of education, between the interests of private schools and the Catholic Church, with the centrality of family decision-making.

In this sense, the text of Law No. 4,024/1961 reconciled the ongoing projects: first, the right of the family in choosing the education of children, and education as an obligation of the public power and the private sector (Saviani, 2019). An example of conservative traits in the law is Article 30, which provided for the compulsory nature of primary education, and there were cases of exemption from access to education, when: "a) proven state of poverty of the parent or guardian; b) insufficient schools; c) closed enrollment; d) serious illness or anomaly of the child" (BRASIL, 1961).

Therefore, in practice, the exclusion of the poor, the most vulnerable, the children with disabilities, who were "exempt" from attending school, was instituted. It must also be considered that such a measure allowed the public power to be relieved of responsibility in relation to the guarantee of school spaces and vacancies for enrollment.

From 1964 onwards, with the military coup established in the country, authoritarianism was legitimized in the structure of the state, there was the suspension of civil and political rights, and the field of education became one of the strategic spaces for the legitimization and maintenance of the military regime. It seeks to silence the debate and stop the expansion of the articulation on the purpose of the formative process of teaching (Toledo, 2017). In this period of political repression, persecution of teachers and "unwanted students", educational reforms were imposed: Higher Education Reform in 1968 and Primary and Secondary Education Reform in 1971. The trend of education in this period is the privatization of teaching, of education directed to professionalization, strengthening the conception of discipline, obedience, respect for order and institutions (Germano, 2011). The educational context, in this period, directed the compulsory nature of vocational schools, moral and civic training, linked to technical education for the formation of the workforce (Toledo, 2017). The tripod that supported the teaching was: doctrine of national security, conservative Christian thought and the theory of human capital (Germano, 2011).

It is worth noting that the diagnosis of the Brazilian scenario, at the end of the military dictatorship, showed who were excluded from the educational system in this period, which undoubtedly were the poor, and among these, the black population. According to Germano (2011), in 1986 about 30% of the national population had an income equal to or less than half a minimum wage, therefore, they lived in poverty. In the following year, 1987, data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) indicated that 59% of illiterate people were black and brown. In the 1980 census, data on access to education indicated that 39% of the black population had less than one year of schooling, and only 6% of this population group had gone beyond elementary school (Germano, 2011).

With the redemocratization of Brazil, after the long period of military dictatorship, the possibility of the construction of rights was opened, already gestated by the movements of struggle and contestation of the military regime, the milestone achieved was the promulgation of the Federal Constitution of 1988, which included education in the list of social rights, as a duty of the state (BRASIL, 1988). In this context, there were many debates, organizations and disputes in the direction of the construction of a new Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education, the new LDB was enacted in Law No. 9,394 in 1996. According to Saviani (2019), the LDB was forged in a liberal conception of education, supported by the capitalist system, reconciling access to education with the interests of the market.

It is noteworthy that from the initial project, until the approval of the LDB, there were several changes, moving from a social-democratic conception, as a social right and duty of the state, to a neoliberal conception, incorporating conservative aspects of privatist interests. Therefore, a minimalist law of guidelines and bases was constituted, linked to the minimal state, waving directly to the market and the third sector, paving the way for the implementation of the guidelines coming from multilateral organizations, corresponding to the Brazilian political and economic scenario of openness to neoliberal logic in the 1990s (Saviani, 2019).

In this scenario, education starts to be oriented, based on its measurement processes, to the business models of productivity, pursuing the efficiency and effectiveness of education (Gohn, 2017). In the LDB there was an inversion, in relation to the constitutional provision, education from the duty of the state and the family becomes the duty of the family and the state, it is not only about the inversion of the text, but about the intentionality of the law. From this perspective, Saviani (2019) warns that there are distinctions between the proclaimed objectives, which are the purposes and intentions provided for by law, and the real objectives, identified by the actions, of what is accomplished. Thus, there is a mismatch between the advancement of legislation and the realization of the right to education.

## **THE MANIFESTATION OF CONSERVATISM UPDATED IN EDUCATIONAL SPACES**

Conservatism is attributed several meanings, since the "[...] conservative adjective simply qualifies practical attitudes or ideas" (Bonazzi, 1998, p. 242). Thus, we use Pacheco's (2009) concept, which defines conservatism as the search for maintenance and conservation of the established order, rejecting any possibility of change. Thus, in the reproduction of conservatism, it does not use questioning and critical reflection. This leads to "[...] permanent distrust in the face of everything that changes or establishes conflict with the convictions assumed" (Pacheco, 2009, p. 65).

It is noteworthy that conservative values and policies are rekindled, in the economic field, from the crises of capitalism, such as, for example, the minimization of state regulation in the economy, under the narrative of defending the expansion of the free market. In this sense, the use of public money to save the financial system in times of crisis and the commodification of public services are the most recurrent strategies. All these tactics unleashed "[...] Under the neoliberal mantle since the 1970s, they feed competitiveness,



individualism and conservative liberal values. But they also make explicit the inability of capitalism to live without crises and without exacerbating inequalities, violence and social barbarism" (Boschetti, 2015, p. 640). In the same way, Mandel (1982) already reaffirmed that cyclical crises are fundamental for the expansion and intensification of accumulation in the capitalist system.

In the cultural and ideological field, Boschetti (2015) states that conservatism seeks to wage a "battle" using various forms of oppression and intolerance, sometimes, allied to religious fundamentalism, disseminating prejudice and discrimination, especially against historically oppressed groups such as: women, the LGBTQIA+ population, the black population, the poor. It should be noted that the

[...] Conservatism is a historical category, that is, it derives from social processes through time and power relations. We know conservatism from people's speeches and practices. This historical process generates a certain regularity of arguments for analogous situations, which allows us to observe the development of a conservative culture (Sepúlveda; Sepúlveda, 2016, p. 88).

In recent decades, there has been an advance in debates on issues related to human rights, such as the discussion on gender equality, feminist movements, denunciations of the structures of oppression of historically invisible groups, such as the black population, people with disabilities, native peoples, and the urgency of the need to respect cultural diversities. gender identity and expression, the fight against various forms of prejudice. However, as these agendas advance, they are tensioned, and find in this tension, conservative groups that try to stop and maintain the oppressive modus operandi of homogenization, invisibility, and exclusion of diversity.

Thus, the manifestation of a re-actualization of conservatism, present in educational spaces, is problematized, it is education for conservation, which is based on the conservatism present in all areas of society, being reproduced in the school space. However, as educational spaces have the political and social function of building knowledge, of understanding different narratives and arguments that enable the full development or integral education of the subjects of education, it is configured as a space in dispute, fundamental to deconstruct excluding ways and values of understanding the world, as well as to preserve models already in place.

In this sense, conservatism and conservatives in new guises begin to see in the school a potential that deserves vigilance and inspection so as not to run the risk of rupture with the structural system of oppression. From this perspective, Toledo (2017) highlights

that: if the social and political function of the school is only aligned with the capitalist model of society, there will be the selection of what is configured as an element of preparation that will be destined to the interests of the market, reproducing the power relations, which permeate the curriculum and the organization of the school's daily life.

Conservative thinking and structure in educational spaces are consistent with the dissemination of a culture of homogenization of society that determines social standardization, fostering prejudice, silencing and oppression of people and social groups that do not "fit" into the standards of "normality". And so, the concept of diversity is annulled in this model of society, and reproduction in school spaces prevents the collective construction of respect for differences and makes the right to be and exist of many unfeasible. This debate needs to go through the deconstruction of ethnocentrism, with the appreciation of cultural diversity, breaking with structures that intersect and combine elements of oppression.

It is worth mentioning that conservatism is intertwined with traditional values, especially of a moral and behavioral nature. Thus, conservatism is

[...] an ideological element that builds common sense. Therefore, it is not exclusive to any social class. In the dispute for power that occurs in the field of culture, conservatism is an important element in the construction of class interests and in class consciousness itself (Sepulveda; Sepúlveda, 2016, p. 88).

In this way, it is not possible to understand conservatism and the conservative disassociated from class interests, but not exclusively, because conservatism "[...] is reproduced as an argument for a discourse that goes beyond class issues, finding the abstract themes of survival that are in dispute in the field of culture, especially in the different demands of minority groups". Thus, "[...] It does not mean that the class struggle disappears. It simply becomes more complex with more variants occurring in different social spaces" (Sepulveda; Sepúlveda, 2016, p. 89).

Some highlights of conservative tensions, present in the field of education, can be exemplified, one of them is the program known as "School Without Party" idealized by lawyer Miguel Nagib, which became the bill (PL No. 193/2016) authored by Magno Malta, at the time senator for the Republican Party of the state of Espírito Santo. It is an ideological and not an educational project, since its content directly interferes with the freedom of expression of teachers, based on avoiding critical thinking, inhibiting spaces for discussion, and being based on a supposed neutrality and fed by conservative "Christian" thought. In

this sense, the School Without Party is "[...] a controversial project – supported by retrograde sectors of society that openly defend anti-democratic values" (Gohn, 2017, p. 105).

Under the justification of combating political and ideological indoctrination, groups associated with ultraconservative and right-wing thinking, linked to politicians who call themselves religious, known for homophobic statements and defense of the military dictatorship, oriented in a neoliberal economic bias, such as, for example, the so-called Free Brazil Movement (MBL), position themselves against the freedom of expression of teachers in the classroom, of critical thinking, demanding neutrality of teaching and denying the possibility of urgent debates on differences, equality, social justice, especially of vulnerable and criminalized groups (Franco, 2017).

Another topic of great prominence was the clash around the supposed "gender ideology", a conservative nomenclature assigned to the "[...] practices and thoughts critical to the representations of the heteronormative of society. This epithet is always associated with negative images alluding to immoral behavior" (Franco, 2017, p. 235). With unfounded arguments and widely disseminated by social networks, conservative groups with political representatives aligned with religious agendas, take sides using the fight against "gender ideology" as a government platform, having conquered many followers, in the name of saving the traditional family. This agenda gained support from civil society groups, families and educators. In practice, the clash further restricted the possibilities of debate on diversity, respect for differences, sex education in schools, which is a strategy for the protection of children and adolescents, victims of violence and sexual exploitation.

At this point, it is worth reaffirming that discourses are not outside actions, on the contrary, discourses drive practices. From this perspective, conservative ideas determine the direction of thought and guide practices in line with the values and norms that they disseminate as absolute truth. Thus, through conservative thought and discourse "[...] the devices of power are interrelated and established within educational institutions, thus showing that the ways of producing truth are materialized in political practices that interfere in the ways in which life and professional practice are woven" (Sepulveda; Sepúlveda, 2016, p. 92).

In this sense, adherence to conservative agendas linked to values, customs and behaviors gain strong adherence, to the detriment of other debates that present themselves as urgent collective problems. An example is that a conservative group is scandalized by

the possibility of sex education in schools, but is oblivious to the scandals of misappropriation of public resources and reduction of investments in education policy. The conservative strategy, linked to the agenda of customs, is a movement that uses isolated facts, widely disseminated by the media, especially on digital platforms and social networks, reaching a large group of the population, easily convinced, due to the assimilation of their beliefs and values.

It is important to highlight the "duty of the family" element in the process of educating children, as provided for in the LDB itself, in principle to meet the privatist interests of the market, giving freedom to families to choose education, is re-signified in different developments: the responsibility and blaming of families, for the success or failure of their children in school spaces; the transfer or total delegation of the legal guardians of the students to the school institutions, to meet all the needs of formal and non-formal education; and, the process of resistance and surveillance of family groups that monitor the content of the school, but with an alert only in relation to guidelines of values and customs. Hence the movements in support of the school without party, and the fight against the fallacy about the implementation of "gender ideology". The latter was so fostered by conservative groups that "[...] culminated in the removal of mentions of gender and sexuality, if not other social markers, from education plans (municipal, state and the National Education Plan)" (Seffner, 2017, p. 200).

In the perspective of defending an education directed to a single thought, in relation to gender identity, sexual orientation, cultural and ethnic belonging, family composition and arrangements, religious adherence, all singularities are annulled and social reproduction pre-established by a hegemonic system of oppression is restricted.

In this line of thought, Miguel (2016, p. 610) warns that, "[...] with the fetish of the neutrality of the pedagogical discourse and with the sacralization of family authority, the recipe for the criminalization of teaching is complete." Thus, "[...] the teacher is seen beforehand with suspicion: not as a partner in the intellectual maturation of the students, but as a possible agent of a distortion of their innocence, at the service of vested interests" (Miguel, 2016, p. 610).

Faced with the scenario of setbacks, it is necessary to shed light on the possibilities of resistance and contestation to the influence of conservative thought and practices that produce exclusion in educational spaces. Because the school cannot be a space doomed to the reproduction of conservatism, even if conservative forces are present, it is necessary

to seek a democratic education that "[...] it is not limited to the mere exercise of social and civil rights, but is also understood and, I would say, mainly, as education to know how to discuss and choose" (Mesquita, 2022, p. 18). It is necessary to position students and educators, families and communities in the understanding that the school is a "[...] institution subject to modification and, thus, see students as active and active subjects in this space, with their own interests and capable of actively contributing to this movement of change" (Mesquita, 2022, p. 20).

### **CAN EDUCATION IN AND FOR HUMAN RIGHTS BE THE COUNTERPOINT TO CONSERVATISM?**

Such a question, in the face of an economic, social, political and cultural structure that reproduces expressions of inequalities and exclusions, such as prejudice and discrimination, requires inclusive responses. To this end, it is necessary to advance education in and for human rights, as an indispensable tool for the construction of a counter-narrative to conservatism, thus strengthening the culture of human rights, of recognition of sociopolitical subjects, in its multidimensionality.

Education in and for human rights can contribute significantly to the construction of an inclusive narrative, based on respect for diversity. One of the main ways to act in the transformation of the social reality marked by tensions lies in inclusive educational processes. In this sense, human rights education seeks to promote a culture that "[...] contributes to the affirmation of citizenship and democratic processes in all dimensions of the lives of people and societies" (Candau et al, 2013, p. 33). According to Silveira (2019), human rights education,

[...] has the challenge of contributing to the confrontation of historical social inequalities and the scenarios of reproduction of the various forms of violence that especially affect people in conditions of greater vulnerability, at a disadvantage due to factors symbolically reproduced through prejudice and discrimination, the uncritical repetition of standards considered ideal that they actually reproduce (Silveira, 2019, p. 60).

It should be noted that human rights education has as its principles the formation of subjects of rights and the orientation for social transformation. At this point, two strategic elements are configured, to overcome conservative education or conservatism in education, as a liberating education is sought, which permeates the school culture involving all the

actors of the educational process, directing to an active citizenship "[...] capable of recognizing and claiming rights and building democracy" (Candau et al, 2013, p. 40).

In this context, of contradictions and possibilities, the need to move forward emerges, beyond simplistic debates about the right to education, which generally, in the capitalist system, is linked to training for the market, from the perspective of meritocracy. However, it is necessary to bring to light the silenced and invisible reality of the "[...] relations between the right to education and the denial of basic human rights to discriminated social and racial groups, treated in our history without the right to have rights and repressed when fighting for rights" (Arroyo, 2015, p. 32).

Another point to be analyzed is competency-based training, which is an unfolding of the meritocratic logic, associated with economic interests. This model of education uses metrics as steps in a narrative of training excellence. In this context, education is not concerned with an education that should direct democracy and citizenship, but that due to the "[...]today's highly competitive world requires individuals endowed with a high-performance and traintively well-oiled engine, in order to gain advantages in terms of employability" (Estevão, 2019, p. 224). This is a conservative education model, not linked to the agenda of customs, but directly linked to the objectification of subjects, summarized to performances of individual efforts, to merit, which direct the selection of the most desired job vacancies, thus contributing to a better functioning of the machinery of the capitalist system.

Contrary to this project, educators, by constituting themselves as socio-cultural and political agents, begin to act, in the counter-hegemonic direction, aiming to break the mercantilist vision of education, in which training is constituted exclusively to meet the interests of the capitalist system. From this perspective, it is necessary to have an education "[...] that develops critical processes of understanding and action in reality to provide the creation of a different mentality" (Candau et al, 2013, p. 35). This articulated movement takes place through collective work, since, "[...] The school is an institution that is only made in the collective. Thus, the development of actions that promote greater horizontality in school work relations contributes to increasing the very nature of school work" (Souza, 2019, p. 279). Therefore, educational spaces need to create strategies to value diversity, in which the participation of differences enriches and contributes to educational processes.

It is worth noting that education is the scenario of the collective organization of democratic search for access, since the "[...] Movements and struggles for education have a historical character, are processual and occur inside and outside schools and other institutional spaces. The struggles for education involve the conquest of rights and are part of the construction of citizenship" (Gohn, 2017, p. 85).

In this sense, the democratic process is the initial marker for education in and for human rights. Thus, there is a need for "[...] democratic disposition that the subjects of the school (and educational) universe must have, without which, no tool seems possible to achieve success. The bottom line is: democracy demands participation and willingness to dialogue" (Souza, 2019, p. 273).

The implementation of education in and for rights is one of the challenges posed in our time, considering the entire conservative structural context that governs society. Thus, the conservative *modus operandi* generates and determines ways of thinking, being and living "[...] with effects of repetition of truths that unfold in prejudice, silencing and discrimination. A reality that conditions the concealment of expressions of inequality, the oppression of native peoples and of people and populations considered "outside" the hegemonic standard" (Silveira; Birth; Zalembessa, 2021, p. 2).

In addition, it is essential to warn that the "[...] education for Human Rights is often referred exclusively to the introduction of content on Human Rights in educational processes, both in the formal and non-formal spheres" (Candau; Sacavino, 2013, p. 61). This simplistic movement cannot empty such an urgent need in society, therefore, "[...] we start from the affirmation of the need to 'denaturalize' the position that supposes that the transmission of knowledge about Human Rights is enough that education in Human Rights is necessarily present" (Candau; Sacavino, 2013, p. 63).

Thus, when we affirm that education in and for human rights is a strategic tool to oppose the reproduction of conservative thought, we emphasize the urgency of building collective principles of valuing and respecting differences, of caring for and confronting situations of human rights violations, the creation of non-negotiable minimum levels of protection of human dignity, of the recognition of the subjects of rights, "[...] privileging the activity and participation of the subjects involved in the process. It is about educating in Human Rights, that is, providing experiences in which Human Rights are experienced" (Candau; Sacavino, 2013, p. 65). The authors reaffirm the need to promote learning in human rights.

Thus, as conservatism is present in the cultural process, linked to social life and class relations, education in and for human rights can also occupy the same spaces. Remembering that culture is conceived "[...] as a continuous process of collective creation and recreation, of attribution of meaning, of interpretation of what has been experienced" (Candau et al, 2013, p. 36). Cultures present a diversity of values and intentions, by recognizing cultural differences, valuing them, especially of subalternized, silenced social groups, having as a principle the respect and appreciation of differences, in line with the conception of education in human rights that constitutes the "[...] recognition of the other as a subject of rights and social actor" (Candau et al, 2013, p. 37), the need for interculturality opens up to support the collective construction with and in diversity. This urgency is guided by:

[...] question the differences and inequalities built throughout history between different sociocultural, ethnic-racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious groups, among others. It is based on the statement that interculturality points to the construction of societies that assume differences as constitutive of democracy and that are capable of building new, truly egalitarian relations between different sociocultural groups [...] (Candau, 2016, p. 21).

Critical interculturality proposes to break with the homogenization of tensions, which reaffirms a functional logic, of superficial and delegitimizing treatment of identity issues, without establishing a connection with power relations and the model of capitalist sociability (Candau, 2016). In addition, it is essential to understand that the counter-reforms of the neoliberal agenda further deepen social inequality, which affects issues of class, race and identities, as it breaks with "[...] the partial conquests in rights and state public systems, reveals a dynamic of hegemony of a reactionary project that disseminates hatred, racism and indifference, and of the expansion of the perverse faces of a socially penal and economically managerial State" (Silveira; Birth; Zalembessa, 2021, p. 3).

Therefore, a critical intercultural perspective aims to expand democratic processes, correct historical inequalities, articulating equality and difference in the struggle for the construction of possibilities for valuing diversity, which aim to expand inclusive and democratic opportunities.

In the face of the educational process, crossed by conservatism based on customs and deepened in the economic structure, interculturality "[...] it wants to promote an education for the recognition of the other, the dialogue between the different sociocultural groups [...]", breaking with the matrix of single thought, with the monocultural and



ethnocentric logic. The intercultural perspective "[...] it is oriented towards the construction of a democratic, plural, humane society, which articulates equality policies with identity policies" (Candau, 2008, p. 54).

Thus, in educational spaces, it is essential that students are conceived as integral subjects of rights, providing access to "[...] all knowledge, culture, values, memories and identities without hierarchies, segmentations and silencing" (Arroyo, 2008, p. 38). From this perspective, by recognizing the students "[...] as equal subjects of rights, we will be obliged to recognize that the right to education, knowledge, culture and the formation of identities is not isolated from the recognition and guarantee of all human rights" (Arroyo, 2008, p. 38).

At this point, interculturality is situated in the construction of a decolonial educational perspective directly linked to education in and for human rights. According to Silveira, Nascimento, and Zalembessa (2021, p. 2), the colonizing process that generates many effects of subordination, exploitation, and silencing are updated and reupdated "[...] in the forms of reproduction of historical inequality, particularly social, ethnic-racial and gender, in a context of conservative modernization, whose basis is colonial, with a consequent intensification of state racism, in relation to stigmatized and oppressed peoples and groups". Faced with this reality, decoloniality "[...] has been built as a political, epistemological and pedagogical force, it refers to the possibilities of critical thinking from those subalternized by capitalist European modernity [...]", in this sense, it is established "[...] a theoretical project aimed at critical and transdisciplinary rethinking, in opposition to the dominant academic tendencies of a Eurocentric perspective of knowledge construction" (Walsh; De Oliveira; Candau, 2018, p. 3).

Opposing conservatism is not a simple task, as we are referring to an economic, political, social and cultural structure that facilitates the perpetuation of a conservative model of society. Betting on education, in and for human rights as a counter-narrative, in the face of conservative thought and practice, especially in the field of education, is to dream of new times, more inclusive and less prejudiced. Therefore, advancing in the culture and experience of and in human rights is the most appropriate tool capable of countering neoconservatism.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

To make considerations about neoconservatism is to be sure that in addition to the most evident strategies, or that we can visualize, there are structural elements that connect

and feed the conservative theoretical-practical model of society. Neoconservatism is functional to the neoliberal economic system, and the guidelines of customs and moral values serve as a smokescreen for neoliberalism to establish and reinvent itself with each need to maintain economic power.

Thus, conservatism also resignifies itself and advances when it finds fertile ground to disseminate its modus operandi. Hence the need to look at the field of education, as a space for the construction of another education, capable of being the counterpoint to the reproduction of conservation strategies found in educational spaces.

In this movement, it is essential to recognize education as a field in dispute, whether political, economic, social or cultural. Therefore, insisting on education in and for human rights, as a strategy to oppose conservatism, initially means recognizing that there is an advance of conservatism, in various guises, in all instances of Brazilian society, configuring neoconservatism. When intending this debate, we can think, for example, of the agenda of customs and other neoconservative attacks that are present in education policy, in the composition of legislation in the political area, in the discourses and rhetoric of protection of "traditionalism" that in practice leave intact the selective model of recognizing who are subjects of rights. This direction distorts the emerging needs of thinking about diversity and the recognition of differences, as a starting point for guaranteeing rights.

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