


PAULO FREIRE AND DIALOGIC EDUCATION: RELEVANCE AND APPLICATIONS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

This article revisits Paulo Freire's main contributions to dialogic education and its relevance in the twenty-first century, highlighting its applications in contexts of social inequality. Through a qualitative approach, based on bibliographic and documentary research, Freire's fundamental works are analyzed, such as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), *Education as a Practice of Freedom* (1967) and *Pedagogy of Autonomy* (1996), seeking to identify their central concepts: dialogue, awareness and emancipation. The objective of the study is to demonstrate how Freire's ideas continue to be relevant to face contemporary educational challenges, especially in contexts of social vulnerability, where education proves to be an essential tool for social transformation. The methodology used includes content analysis, focusing on the thematic categories extracted from Freire's works, and triangulation of sources to ensure the validity of the results. The conclusion points out that Freire's critical pedagogy remains vital for the promotion of active citizenship and for the formation of critical and engaged students, emphasizing the importance of pedagogical practices that value dialogue and the collective construction of knowledge, with the aim of overcoming inequalities and promoting a more just and equitable society.

Keywords: Dialogic Education. Awareness. Social Transformation. Paulo Freire.

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INTRODUCTION

Paulo Freire is recognized worldwide as one of the greatest exponents of critical education, having formulated a pedagogy that questions traditional power structures and seeks the liberation of individuals through education. His work transcends geographical and temporal borders, being applied not only in Brazil, but in several countries that face similar social and educational challenges¹⁶. Freire revolutionized the way we understand the role of education by proposing a dialogical and humanizing approach, which places the learner at the center of the learning process, breaking with the traditional view of a "banking" education, in which the teacher deposits knowledge in a passive student.

In times of deep social, economic, and cultural inequalities, revisiting Paulo Freire's thought is more than a theoretical exercise: it is a practical necessity. Contemporary societies face challenges such as growing social exclusion, the marginalization of vulnerable groups, and the deepening of inequalities, elements that make Freire's ideas even more pertinent. Freire argued that education should be an instrument of awareness (or "awareness", as he coined it), promoting a critical reflection of reality, in order to transform not only the lives of students, but society as a whole.

This article aims to revisit the main concepts of Freire's thought, exploring how his fundamental works, such as *Pedagogy of Autonomy* (1996), *Education as a Practice of Freedom* (1967) and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), can be applied in the contemporary educational context. The ideas present in these works not only challenged the traditional education of their time, but continue to offer important subsidies to rethink pedagogical practices aimed at the inclusion and empowerment of subjects. In particular, it will be emphasized how Freire's proposals maintain their relevance in contexts marked by social inequality and exclusion, themes that are increasingly present in the global scenario.

Throughout this analysis, we will highlight how Paulo Freire's legacy can be used to propose transformative pedagogical methodologies, especially in situations of social vulnerability, where education has the potential to be one of the engines for emancipation and the construction of a more just and equitable society.

¹⁶ The social and educational challenges to which Paulo Freire refers in his critical pedagogy are deeply linked to oppression, the marginalization of vulnerable groups, and structural inequalities in societies. In the report "Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education" (2021), UNESCO addresses the need for education that promotes the development of critical citizens capable of taking action to transform their communities, aligning with Freire's ideas about education as a tool for social emancipation. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379707>.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach, based on bibliographic and documentary research, as described by Lakatos and Marconi (2003) and Gil (2008), to analyze the main works of Paulo Freire, such as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), *Education as a Practice of Freedom* (1967) and *Pedagogy of Autonomy* (1996). The choice for the qualitative method is justified by the exploratory and interpretative character of this study, which aims to understand the impact of Freire's ideas in the contemporary educational context and their applications in the twenty-first century.

Data collection was carried out through the analysis of primary and secondary works on Freire's thought, seeking to identify the main contributions of his pedagogy to dialogic education and its relevance in contexts of social inequality. In addition, academic articles, dissertations and theses that discuss the application of Freire's ideas in current pedagogical practice were analyzed, as well as documents from international organizations on human rights and education, such as UNESCO and the UN.

For data analysis, the content analysis technique was used, as proposed by Bardin (2011), focusing on the identification of thematic categories related to the concepts of dialogue, awareness and emancipation present in Freire's work. The data were organized into categories that reflect the main dimensions of his pedagogy, such as the criticism of banking education, the role of education as a practice of freedom, and the promotion of active citizenship.

Finally, this study adopted the triangulation of sources, as suggested by Yin (2001), to ensure greater validity of the results. The triangulation involved comparing data collected from primary sources (Freire's works), secondary sources (research and articles) and contemporary educational policy documents, in order to corroborate the analysis and offer a broad view of Paulo Freire's contributions to current education.

PAULO FREIRE'S PEDAGOGY: FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Throughout his career, Paulo Freire elaborated a pedagogy that not only broke with traditional approaches, but placed education at the center of social and political transformations. Among its main concepts, libertarian education, the problematizing model of teaching present in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and the relevance of dialogue in the process of awareness, addressed in *Pedagogy of Autonomy*, stand out. These principles, articulated in his works, reflect a sustained perspective on education as a process of

collective construction, which makes the student capable of acting critically on his reality and transforming it. In this sense, Freire's pedagogy is established as a crucial tool for the fight against social inequalities and oppression.

EDUCATION AS A PRACTICE OF FREEDOM

In his work *Education as a Practice of Freedom*, Freire argues that education should be a liberating and awareness-raising process. He criticizes traditional pedagogies that alienate the student, reducing him to a passive subject and receiver of knowledge. Freire challenges this approach, proposing that education is a means for personal and collective transformation. According to him, "True education is praxis, reflection and action of man on the world to transform it" (Freire, 1977, p. 25). This transformation is achieved through a process of awareness, in which students acquire a critical awareness of their reality, recognizing their ability to act on it.

Freedom, for Freire, is a collective process, not an individual one, and is conquered through a participatory and dialogical education. He argues that "it is not in silence that men make themselves, but in words, in work, in action-reflection" (Freire, 1977, p. 81). Therefore, education must allow the development of this autonomy, breaking with the cycle of oppression and creating the conditions for the student to become an active subject in his community and society.

THE PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire deepens the dialectical relationship between oppressors and oppressed, proposing that liberation can only be achieved by the oppressed themselves. He criticizes the "banking" model of education, in which the teacher deposits knowledge in the students, without involving them in a critical reflection. According to Freire, "in the banking view, knowledge is a donation from those who think they are wise to those who think they know nothing" (Freire, 2019, p. 72).

In contrast, he proposes a problem-solving education, where knowledge is built in dialogue between teacher and student. This process of "awareness" is central to Freire's pedagogy, allowing the oppressed to understand their own reality and thus transform it. He states, "Liberation is childbirth, and this is a painful process. The man who is born from this birth is a new man, no longer a vassal, but master of himself" (Freire, 2019, p. 39).

DIALOGIC EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

In both works, Pedagogy of Autonomy and Pedagogy of the Oppressed, dialogue is the heart of Freire's educational process. Freire argues that dialogue is essential for learning, as it provides an active exchange between educator and student. He states that "dialogue is the meeting of men, mediated by the world, to pronounce it, and is therefore not limited to the I-thou relationship" (Freire, 2019, p. 107). This dialogical relationship not only transforms knowledge, but also the individuals who build it.

Awareness, a process in which the individual becomes aware of his social and political reality, is the main objective of education for Freire. This awareness should lead to transformative action, and it is through it that the learner goes from being passive to being an active agent of social change. "Awareness implies an organization that is not imposed, but starts from within, from the real needs of the life of each oppressed" (FREIRE, 2019, p. 41).

THE RELEVANCE OF FREIREAN PEDAGOGY IN THE CONTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

In the contemporary educational scenario, social inequalities are more pronounced, and the critical education proposed by Paulo Freire continues to be a powerful tool to deal with these realities. He saw education as a political act, where there is no neutrality: "In fact, there is no neutral education. Education is always a political action, because it involves values, desires, choices and aspirations" (Freire, 1996, p. 14).

Inequalities, especially in regions of greater social vulnerability, demonstrate the need for a pedagogy that goes beyond the transmission of content and seeks to form critical citizens, capable of recognizing injustices and acting against them. In this sense, Freire continues to be a reference in challenging the perpetuation of power structures and proposing education as a means of emancipation of the oppressed.

The criticism of "banking" education, a model where the teacher is the only holder of knowledge and the student a passive receiver, is one of the best known elements of Freire's work. This teaching model, according to Freire, "maintains and intensifies the contradiction of the teacher who knows and the student who does not know" (FREIRE, 2019, p. 74). He proposes an overcoming of this model through a dialogical and horizontal education, where knowledge is built together.

Freire suggests that the teacher should also be open to learning, just as the student should be encouraged to teach. This process is essential to create an educational environment that promotes critical and transformative development. Freire states that "teaching is not transferring knowledge, but creating the possibilities for its own production or construction" (Freire, 1996, p. 23).

Freire (1996) reinforces the importance of the teacher as a mediator and facilitator of learning, someone who helps to construct knowledge in a dialogical way. He criticizes the model in which the teacher imposes absolute truths, and proposes that the teacher be an encourager of the students' autonomy. "The educator becomes, then, a mediator of the student's curiosity, and not someone who gives ready-made answers, but someone who instigates questions" (Freire, 1996, p. 42).

This concept becomes even more relevant today, in an increasingly challenging educational context, with increasing digitalization and the need to adapt to different social realities. The teacher, in Freire's view, must be in constant dialogue with the student, helping him to develop his autonomy and critical capacity, and contributing to meaningful and emancipatory learning.

PAULO FREIRE AND MODERN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

Several contemporary pedagogical practices that prioritize dialogue and the collective construction of knowledge find their roots in Paulo Freire's thought. A significant example is the culture circles, a methodology centered on open and collaborative dialogue, where educators and students work together to identify generating themes, exploring them in a critical way. These themes arise from the realities experienced by the students and form the basis for the construction of knowledge. Freire stated that "it is also in dialogue that the knowledge produced, organized and systematized is unveiled" (Freire, 1996, p. 92), showing the importance of a dialogical and democratic pedagogical relationship.

The culture circles, popularized in adult literacy practices in Brazil, especially in the rural context and in social movements, are an example of how Freire's thought found resonance in popular education practices and in youth and adults. Dialogue, in this context, is not only a means of transmitting knowledge, but a tool for emancipation, in which the student is led to critically reflect on his reality. Freire describes the process as an "exchange of experiences" that does not involve hierarchy, but rather cooperation among the

participants: "Those who teach learn by teaching and those who learn teach by learning" (Freire, 1996, p. 25).

Adult education was one of the main areas in which the Freirean method found practical application. In literacy programs based on the "Paulo Freire Method", the starting point for the educational process is the world lived by the students. The method values the student's previous knowledge, recognizing him as an active subject of the learning process. Freire argued that "the starting point should be the vocabulary universe of the group with which one is going to work" (Freire, 1977, p. 34), reaffirming the value of the experiential knowledge of each student.

In the context of needy communities, the use of a dialogical and problematizing pedagogy is an effective strategy to promote the empowerment of students. Instead of an education that only transfers contents, the Freirean method aims to build a critical consciousness. The objective is for students to be able to reflect on their condition and, based on this reflection, act to transform their realities. "Awareness does not occur in silence, but in words, in work, in action-reflection" (Freire, 1996, p. 45), reaffirming the importance of an education that instigates social action.

Freire also argues that the act of teaching should start from the "sense of the world" that students bring with them, that is, from their daily experiences. The role of the educator is to mediate this knowledge so that it can be expanded and re-signified in the education process: "The learner is the one who builds knowledge at the same time as he builds himself" (Freire, 1996, p. 27).

Freire also makes important contributions to human rights education. Its focus on awareness and social transformation is directly related to the promotion of citizenship and the fight against social exclusion. For him, education is an essential tool for the development of a more just and equitable society, in which individuals are able to recognize their living conditions and fight for their rights. According to Freire, "no one frees anyone, no one frees himself alone: men free themselves in communion" (Freire, 2019, p. 54).

In educational contexts that seek to promote equity and human rights, Freire's pedagogy stands out for developing the critical sense of students, encouraging them to act in favor of a more just society. Education in human rights, inspired by Freire, goes beyond the mere transmission of knowledge about rights, trying to form subjects capable of actively fighting for them. The objective is to create an awareness that leads to transformation: "Only to the extent that men, reflecting on their reality, take it as susceptible to

transformation, do they engage in the movement of seeking its fulfillment" (Freire, 1996, p. 44).

This critical and transformative focus on human rights education promotes active citizenship, where students, aware of their rights, start to act as transforming agents. The Freirean approach, in this sense, not only teaches human rights, but seeks to awaken in students the ability to claim and expand them in their own communities and in the world.

REFLECTIONS ON THE USE OF FREIRE'S THOUGHT IN CONTEXTS OF VULNERABILITY

Freire's ideas offer a solid basis for addressing the challenges of education in contexts of social inequality. His critical thinking about oppression and the need to empower the marginalized has been used widely in educational programs aimed at vulnerable populations, such as popular education movements in Brazil and other parts of the world. His proposal for an education that values the culture and experiences of the oppressed, and that commits to their liberation, is especially relevant in peripheral urban and rural areas, where exclusion is more pronounced.

Paulo Freire's pedagogy proposes that education should not only adapt individuals to society, but transform it. In contexts where exclusion and marginalization prevail, Freire's education presents itself as an instrument for the construction of a more just society. Freire argues that social transformation can only occur when students become critically aware of their situation and organize themselves collectively to change this reality.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Paulo Freire continues to be one of the main exponents of critical pedagogy, and his relevance in the contemporary educational context is undeniable. His ideas on education as a practice of freedom, dialogue and awareness are essential tools to face current educational challenges, especially in contexts of social inequality.

The revisiting of Freire's thought shows that his contributions to education transcend time, offering a solid foundation for inclusive and transformative pedagogical practices that aim to build a more just and egalitarian society. In the current scenario, marked by deep socioeconomic disparities, its literacy method and its conception of popular education continue to illuminate the way for a critical approach to learning, which not only teaches content, but also prepares citizens to understand and transform their reality.

In addition, Freire reminds us that education cannot be neutral: it is always a political act. By reinforcing the role of the educator as an agent of social transformation, Freire instigates us to take an active stance in the face of injustices, promoting teaching that values dialogue and critical reflection, essential elements for the development of a collective consciousness that breaks with the structures of oppression.

Therefore, his pedagogy is not just a methodology, but an invitation to action, offering contemporary educators an opportunity to rescue hope in an education that liberates. By applying its principles in pedagogical practices, especially in contexts of vulnerability, we reinforce the need for an emancipatory education that respects differences and offers equal opportunities for all.

Paulo Freire's legacy, with his vision of teaching focused on social transformation and the empowerment of the oppressed, continues to inspire not only educators, but all those committed to the struggle for a more equitable and humane society. Thus, by revisiting and applying his ideas, we reaffirm that education can and should be a space of resistance and transformation.

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