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THE RELEVANCE AND TIMELINESS OF PAULO FREIRE'S TEACHINGS

A RELEVÂNCIA E ATUALIDADE DOS ENSINAMENTOS DE PAULO FREIRE

LA RELEVANCIA Y ACTUALIDAD DE LAS ENSEÑANZAS DE PAULO FREIRE

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ABSTRACT
This work aims to reflect on the relevance and timeliness of the teachings left by our greatest Brazilian educator: Paulo Freire (1921-1997). His Liberating Pedagogy, his philosophy of education, and his focus on issues in Brazilian education, especially for the most vulnerable (oppressed), are important not only for Brazil but also for several countries that use his teachings. Methodologically, this paper presents itself as a theoretical, reflective, and qualitative bibliographical research, seeking concepts and bases for critical thinking from selected texts. The theoretical reflections raised here seek to engage in a dialogue with the challenges of contemporary education, contributing to the strengthening of pedagogical practices committed to an ethical vision of the world, of the subject[2] , and of Education.

Keywords: Education. Ethics. Humanization.

RESUMO
Este trabalho tem como objetivo refletir sobre a relevância e a atualidade dos ensinamentos deixados pelo nosso maior educador brasileiro: Paulo Freire (1921-1997). Sua Pedagogia Libertadora, sua filosofia da educação e seu foco nas questões da educação brasileira, principalmente dos mais vulnerabilizados (oprimidos), são importantes não somente para o Brasil, mas também para vários países que utilizam seus ensinamentos. Este escrito se coloca, metodologicamente, como uma pesquisa teórica, reflexiva e qualitativa de cunho bibliográfico, buscando conceitos e bases para o pensar crítico a partir de textos selecionados. As reflexões teóricas levantadas aqui buscam travar um diálogo com os desafios da educação contemporânea, contribuindo para o fortalecimento de práticas pedagógicas comprometidas com uma visão ética de mundo, de sujeito e de Educação.

Palavras-chave: Educação. Ética. Humanização.

RESUMEN
Este trabajo tiene como objetivo reflexionar sobre la relevancia y la actualidad de las enseñanzas dejadas por nuestro mayor educador brasileño, Paulo Freire (1921–1997). Su Pedagogía Liberadora, su filosofía de la educación y su enfoque en las cuestiones de la educación brasileña—especialmente respecto a los más vulnerabilizados (oprimidos)—son importantes no solo para Brasil, sino también para varios países que utilizan sus aportes. Metodológicamente, este escrito se configura como una investigación teórica, reflexiva y

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[2] Freire's use of the word "subject" refers to a person who acts with an understanding of the importance of their historical action, acting upon their realities.

cualitativa de carácter bibliográfico, buscando conceptos y bases para el pensamiento crítico a partir de textos seleccionados. Las reflexiones teóricas aquí presentadas buscan entablar un diálogo con los desafíos de la educación contemporánea, contribuyendo al fortalecimiento de prácticas pedagógicas comprometidas con una visión ética del mundo, del sujeto y de la Educación.

Palabras clave: Educación. Ética. Humanización.

1 INTRODUCTION

This text aims to reflect on the relevance and timeliness of Freirean teachings in education today. We understand that Liberating Education, as conceived by Paulo Freire, is still extremely necessary in our society, mainly because of its emphasis on critical subjects and agents in their societies.

We justify writing this work at a time when teacher training programs are attracting less and less interest from young people leaving Brazilian high schools. In other words, the teaching profession has ceased to be seen for its social relevance and has come to be judged solely by its financial gains (from a neoliberal perspective). We are not saying that teachers should not earn good salaries, but that neoliberal governments (from the last decades of the 20th century to the present day) have been, constantly, trying to cheapen (or outsource) public education and devalue the teaching profession.

The constant attacks on Brazilian public school education, its weakening on several fronts, attempts to privatize public assets, the recurring ban on literary works in schools, among other points, reinforce the need for an educational shift towards Freirean theories.

In this sense, this study aims to use Freirean views to understand the increasingly relevant importance of a Liberating Education in times of constant fake news, taking into account the need for critical thinking on the part of students and teachers, so that they do not vote for or support politicians and policies that are only against us Brazilians and against public, democratic and quality education.

For this text, we used a qualitative, reflective, and bibliographical approach, giving preference to books and scientific articles to support our thoughts on the relevance and importance of Freirean theories today. We used some works by Freire (1967, 1987, 1996); Barbosa (1995); Gadotti (2007); Morin (2001); and Rodrigues (2021, 2022, 2023) to provide theoretical support for this writing and to show how Freirean theories are current and relevant.

Through the studies of some thinkers, we sought to reveal the relevance of Freirean theories today and their necessary use in Brazilian education, especially in public education that serves the most socially oppressed.

2 THE RELEVANCE OF FREIREAN THOUGHTS IN THE EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Paulo Freire (1921-1997), one of the most important educators in 20th-century Brazilian education, was a pioneer in conceiving a pedagogy appropriate for our then-underdeveloped reality. Besides being a sharp intellectual and a perceptive philosopher, he

was a prolific writer, expressing his thoughts in his various publications. Rodrigues and Azevedo (2019) inform us a little about Freire:

> Paulo Reglus Neves Freire (1921-1997), better known simply as Paulo Freire, was a lawyer by training and an educator and philosopher of education by vocation. He worked on themes relevant to Brazil: adult literacy, popular education, and other themes of school pedagogy in general. He created a method of adult literacy that sought to teach from the learner's reality and not from primers completely outside the social and cultural context of the learner, especially those from the Northeast of Brazil. (Rodrigues; Azevedo, 2019, p. 49)

We understand Freire's most important works to be the following books: *Education: the practice of freedom* (1967); *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968); *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau* (1975); *Educação e Mudança* (Education and Change, 1979); *Conscientização: teoria e prática da libertação* (Conscientization: Theory and Practice of Liberation, 1980); *Ideologia e educação: reflexões sobre a não neutralidade da educação* (Ideology and Education: Reflections on the Non-Neutrality of Education, 1981); *Prática e Educação* (Practice and Education, 1985); *Toward a Pedagogy of the Question: Conversations with Paulo Freire* (1985); *The Importance of the Act of Reading* (1989); *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1992); *Teacher, but aunt not: letters to those who dare teach* (1993); *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage* (1998), in addition to various other texts and interviews given in different parts of the world. These are just some of the books published by Freire. His work has influenced many researchers who have expanded and continue to expand his thoughts and understandings.

In this vast range of publications, Freire teaches us not only a method of education for the illiterate, but also gives us a philosophical vision of hope for a better world through education. School education is therefore presented as a path to one’s emancipation, critical thinking, and action, a fertile ground for developing critical, conscious citizens, agents, and political subjects.

Freire desired (hoped for[3]) and believed in education as a true instrument of social transformation, teaching critical thinking, emotional development, sharing, dialogue, ethical coexistence, among many other important points for humanizing people. Freire (1997),

3 In Portuguese “esperançar”.

revealing much of his theories and conceptions, tells us what humanist education is and is not:

> The humanist conception, which rejects mere deposits, dissertations, or narrations of isolated fragments of reality, is realized through a constant problematization of the human-world relationship. Its purpose is to problematize, never to lecture or deposit. Just as the recently criticized conception (the banking model), in some of its aspects, cannot overcome the educator-learner contradiction, the humanist conception starts from the necessity of doing so. And this necessity is imposed on it to the very extent that it views man as a being of choices. A being whose point of decision is, or should be, within himself, in his relationships with the world and with others. To achieve this overcoming, an existence that is the phenomenal essence of education, which is its dialogicity, education then becomes dialogue, communication. And, if it is dialogue, the relationships between its poles can no longer be those of antagonistic opposites, but of poles that reconcilie. (Freire, 1997, p. 14)

In his Liberating Education, Freire undertakes an effort to show that students and educators learn and teach together, questioning the various structural inequalities in our country in the field of Education, through a dialogical relationship and respect for each other's knowledge.

It is worth noting that from wealthy Northern Europe to poor countries in Africa, Freire's legacy resonates as a cry of hope for a better life and a better world for all, where education has a privileged space for critical thinking, inclusion, and social recognition. Freire also does not forget the political importance of education.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1987), Freire posits education as an instrument of genuine social transformation. In this work, he seeks to defend a model of school education in which students and educators learn and teach together, critically questioning the many structural inequalities in their realities. Freire emphasizes the need for an inquiring education (to inquire is the very exercise of philosophizing), grounded in criticality, knowledge of realities, and ethics, taking dialogue as the tool for a truly liberating education. In *Toward a Pedagogy of the Question: Conversations with Paulo Freire* (1985), Freire makes it very clear the importance of being critical and questioning social structures in order to change them.

From this perspective, the teacher is not better, more intelligent, or the ultimate authority who knows everything in the eyes of the students, but a learner from the multiple realities and thoughts of dialogical interaction with scientific knowledge, with their students, and with their peers. The equality of human beings and the importance of their actions in the world are made clear in Liberating Education.

In *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage* (1996), Freire highlights the importance of the educator as a mediator between knowledge and students, and encourages us to train more critical and reflective students, capable of building their own intellectual autonomy and learning to navigate the world of literacy independently. The importance of the teacher as a mediator is even more crucial today, when information, widely available through digital means, is consumed extensively but needs to be critically articulated to become knowledge.

Furthermore, according to Freire, the educator must be an example of respect, integrity, and consistency, recognizing their students as autonomous subjects endowed with critical thinking, agents in their realities as historical beings. Freire also does not forget to mention the need for the teacher's affectivity towards their students and their lived realities.

In *Education: the practice of freedom* (1967), Freire discusses the need for the school to teach the student to read the world and its realities and to intervene positively in them, “hoping” for a possible change. He considers education as a constant process that is capable of raising people's awareness of their realities and motivating them to transform them. In this sense, this Freirean work already places education as a political act, of awareness for agency in the world.

He also reflects, in his writings, on the role of the teacher and the importance of reading the world around us, a process which precedes reading the word. Here he paves the way for current thoughts on the multiple literacies needed by teachers and students today. Especially for reading multimodal (or multisemiotic, or multisensory) texts, texts that are very common in our digital and post-industrial society.

Also, Freire, with all his prior philosophical background, shows us that education must also be a political act, of criticality and action in the face of realities that oppress and assault us. Hence the need to exercise thinking from lived realities, avoiding illiteracy (literal, historical, critical, political, etc.). Hence, banking education (opposed to liberating education) disconnects theory from practice, seeking not to critically question the world, domesticating people:

> The existing dichotomy between theory and practice, the sensibly universal validity of knowledge free from all historical conditioning, the role of philosophy as an explanation of the world and as an instrument for its acceptance, education conceived as a mere exposition of facts and as the transmission of a heritage of "chaste" knowledge: all this characterizes the naive consciousness of the politically illiterate. Ideologized on the plane of domestication, such a consciousness will not even reach the objective

> idealism of Hegel's Phénomelogie de L'Esprit, where praxis appears as the transformative action that men exert on the world and as their own formation – even though for Hegel praxis is only a purely mental activity. Such an ideology will never be able to understand the impossibility of theory without practice, of thought that is not an act of transforming the world; it clings to knowledge for knowledge's sake, to a theory that does nothing but explain reality, and to a neutral education. (Freire, 1997, p. 24)

We realize that Freire's effort was to place education as a mechanism for understanding the world and for historical action in the world. Therefore, he positioned education as a political action, as it would make us act in society with real objectives of removing people from their situations of oppression, whether social, cultural, historical, etc. Education, therefore, serves as a tool to break the chains of oppression that limit individuals from acting towards a better and more just life.

We see that many authors and researchers echo Freirean teachings and update them, as is the case with art educator Ana Mae Barbosa. She does so through her well-known **Triangular Approach in Arts**, a methodology rooted in Freirean influences. Barbosa worked with Paulo Freire in São Paulo and applied much of what she learned from him to her educational practice and thinking in the field of Arts teaching.

Edgar Morin also acknowledges the strong influence of Freire's thought on his **Theory of Complexity**, which is a philosophical and epistemological approach attempting to interpret realities. It is a non-linear and complex approach to interpretation. Morin explains a little about the notion of complexity:

> Complexity arises from something that is complementary to something else. It comes from a certain degree of complementarity between the parts involved in the process. This notion of antagonistic complementarity is basic to our reasoning. It is an antagonistic complementarity between the individual and the artistic on the one hand, and the standardized and industrial on the other. (...) The complementary association of antagonistic things. (Morin, 2001, p. 10)

We can also mention the feminist philosopher bell hooks (1952-2021), who sought a transformative pedagogical approach, from a more inclusive and critical perspective, focusing on the struggles against various forms of oppression against Black women. Her **education as a practice of freedom** echoes Freire's teachings regarding the need to educate the oppressed. She had direct contact with Freire and questioned him about the absence of the feminine perspective in his works.

Also, hooks learned from Freire the need to understand the realities of oppression in order to work towards a truly liberating education. She tells us that:

> The emphasis on education as necessary for liberation, which Black people affirmed during the time of slavery and later during reconstruction, informed our lives. And that is why Freire's emphasis on education as a practice of freedom made immediate sense to me. Aware since childhood of the need for literacy, I carried with me to university the memory of reading to people, of writing for people. I carried with me the memories of Black female teachers in the segregated school system who had been critical educators and had provided us with liberating paradigms. (hooks, 2013, p. 72-73)

Moacir Gadotti is another contemporary thinker who uses Freirean theories and thoughts to understand current issues. Regarding **education in times of neoliberalism**, he tells us that:

> Paulo Freire's worldview and his socio-political-educational theory help us not only to better understand how the neoliberal model works, but also to build the necessary response to neoliberalism. He defends a **new modernity** whose rationality must be "wet with affectivity." Against the pedagogical and cultural Enlightenment that emphasizes only the acquisition of curricular content, he highlights the importance of the cultural dimension in the processes of social transformation. Education is much more than instruction. To be transformative – to transform the conditions of oppression – it must be rooted in the culture of the people. (Gadotti, 2007, p. 80, author's emphasis)

The appropriation and reinterpretation of Paulo Freire's thought by various authors is still necessary and essential for understanding the issues of current Brazilian education.

Walace Rodrigues (2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023) applies Freirean ideas (such as criticality, dialogue, and autonomy) to contemporary educational contexts, such as **multiliteracies and the decolonization of knowledge**, showing the relevance and adaptability of Freirean pedagogy to the current challenges of education.

In this sense, Freire's teachings are extremely relevant to be used in basic schools, in undergraduate programs, and in all places where there is a need for education focused on criticality, on understanding world situations, on a hopeful approach to education that preserves the utopia of thinking for the common good and that leads to an agentive action of the subjects.

Freirean ideas can also be applied to a more ecologically conscious understanding of the world that values the cultures of traditional peoples, riverside communities, quilombola

communities, etc., taking their knowledge and practices as a basis and giving them importance in school environments.

3 SOME FINAL CONCLUSIONS

We were able to verify, here, the relevance and timeliness of Paulo Freire's teachings for an education that seeks to understand today's oppressed subjects, their problems, their aspirations, and their possibilities for breaking the chains of oppression through education. In addition to the possible applicability of Freirean theories in areas such as the Arts, Ecology, Anthropology, Sociology, Education, among many others.

The results of this work reveal that several thinkers currently utilize Paulo Freire's theories and thoughts, updating them for their applications in education, whether in schools, universities, or other educational institutions.

We have seen that important and current thinkers, such as Gadotti, Barbosa, Morin, hooks, Rodrigues, among many others, echo Freirean studies in various spheres of education.

In this way, teachers in current education should have more contact with Freire's teachings to try to understand the possible advantages of dialogue, criticality, ethics, affectivity, learning from the realities of students, etc., for the exercise of a truly liberating education.

In this context, we have several theories influenced and implemented based on Freirean views, such as the Triangular Approach, by Ana Mae Barbosa; the Theory of Complexity, by Edgar Morin; education as a practice of freedom, by bell hooks, among others, which are clear examples of the relevance of Freire's thoughts today and their necessary applicability to the educational problems and themes of the current world.

As we can see, **Liberating Education** for Freire must be an education that promotes beneficial transformations in people's lives, because “If education alone does not transform society, without it society does not change either” (Freire, 2000, p. 67).

Throughout this journey, his theories and teachings engage with contemporary education, which is so focused on the digital world but forgets the most human and humanizing aspects of the task of teaching: dialogue, affectivity, understanding the humanity of others, critical thinking, questioning reality, understanding humankind as historical beings who construct their own history, education as a political act, among many other important points that end up being forgotten in our post-industrial society.

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