



# Educating for emancipation: an analysis of the concept of awareness and educational practice in Paulo Freire's theory

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## Abstract

**Objective:** This article aims to discuss the concept of awareness and educational practice in the evolution of thinking about education aimed at the popular class, in the works of Paulo Freire, with theoretical contributions for reflections on Brazilian political, economic and social factors, in the decades of 1950 – 1960.

**Originality/contribution:** The original article is anchored in a discussion by axes, where a historical period marked by intense transformations in the life of the popular classes is debated, when government investments in industry denoted an increase in rural-urban migration and the formation of a mass of illiterate workers in Brazilian cities.

**Method:** The research method listed for this study was a survey, systematization and bibliographic analysis, from descriptors close to the theme and determined period, using the tools of content analysis for the elaboration of the article.

**Information strategy/data collection** The collection of information was based on bibliographic surveys in Brazilian and foreign collections that dealt with the discussion about awareness and educational practices in the specific period.

**Conclusions:** As conclusions, it is observed that the changes that took place over the decades acted directly in the structuring of Paulo Freire's theory on education. As a criticism of the education given to workers, the concept of awareness and educational practice, were consolidated as the basis of Freirean pedagogy and are progressively developed and complexified in the author's works. The enunciated concepts offer subsidies to the current analyzes on the social function of the school and the human formation.

**Keywords:** *Paulo Freire; education and conscientization; pedagogical practice.*

## *Educar para la emancipación: un análisis del concepto de conciencia y práctica educativa en la teoría de Paulo Freire*

### Resumen

**Objetivo:** Este artículo tiene como objetivo discutir el concepto de conciencia y práctica educativa en la evolución del pensamiento sobre la educación dirigida a la clase popular, en la obra de Paulo Freire, con contribuciones teóricas para reflexiones sobre los factores políticos, económicos y sociales brasileños, en las décadas de 1950 – 1960.





**Originalidad/aporte:** se ancla en una discusión por ejes, donde se debate un período histórico marcado por intensas transformaciones en la vida de las clases populares, cuando las inversiones gubernamentales en la industria denotaron un aumento de la migración rural-urbana y la formación de una masa de trabajadores analfabetos en las ciudades brasileñas.

**Método:** El método de investigación enumerado para este estudio fue la encuesta, la sistematización y el análisis bibliográfico, a partir de descriptores cercanos al tema y período determinado, utilizando las herramientas del análisis de contenido para la elaboración del artículo.

**Estrategias de recolección de información:** La recopilación de información se basó en levantamientos bibliográficos en colecciones brasileñas y extranjeras que trataron la discusión sobre la conciencia y las prácticas educativas en el período específico.

**Conclusión:** se observa que los cambios ocurridos a lo largo de las décadas actuaron directamente en la estructuración de la teoría de la educación de Paulo Freire. Como crítica a la educación de los trabajadores, el concepto de conciencia y práctica educativa, se consolidaron como base de la pedagogía freireana y se desarrollan y complejizan progresivamente en la obra del autor. Los conceptos enunciados ofrecen subsidios a los análisis actuales sobre la función social de la escuela y la formación humana.

**Palabras clave:** *Paulo Freire; educación y concienciación; práctica pedagógica.*

## *Educar para a emancipação: uma análise do conceito de consciência e a prática educativa na teoria de Paulo Freire*

### **Resumo**

**Objetivo:** Este artigo pretende discutir o conceito de consciência e prática educativa na evolução do pensamento sobre a educação destinada à classe popular, na obra de Paulo Freire, com contribuições teóricas para a reflexão sobre os fatores políticos, econômicos e sociais brasileiros, nos anos 50-60.

**Originalidade/contribuição:** está ancorado numa discussão por eixos, onde se debate um período histórico marcado por transformações intensas na vida das classes populares, quando os investimentos governamentais na





indústria denotaram um aumento da migração rural-urbana e a formação de uma massa de trabalhadores analfabetos nas cidades brasileiras.

**Método:** O método de pesquisa indicado para este estudo foi o levantamento, sistematização e análise bibliográfica, baseada em descritores próximos do tópico e período determinado, utilizando os instrumentos de análise de conteúdo para a elaboração do artigo.

**Estratégias/coleta de informações:** Para a recolha de informação foi baseada em inquéritos bibliográficos em colecções brasileiras e estrangeiras que trataram da discussão sobre sensibilização e práticas educativas no período específico.

**Conclusões:** Observa-se que as mudanças que ocorreram ao longo das décadas actuaram directamente na estruturação da teoria da educação de Paulo Freire. Como crítica à educação dos trabalhadores, o conceito de consciência e prática educacional foram consolidados como a base da pedagogia freireana e são progressivamente desenvolvidos e tornados mais complexos no trabalho do autor. Os conceitos enunciados oferecem subsídios às análises actuais da função social da escola e da formação humana.

**Palavras-chave:** Paulo Freire; educação e conscientização; prática pedagógica.

## Introduction

Paulo Freire was an expressive Brazilian educator of the 20th century, engaging theoretical productions focused on the analysis of the Brazilian reality and the education implemented, especially for the popular classes. The period in which the foundations of his pedagogy were laid in Brazil is from 1959 to 1964. In this short period of time, Paulo Freire criticized the organization of education in the Brazilian context, especially in the 1950s and 1960s.

His criticism was directed at the ideals of the mass policies of the populist governments. They were also directed to the situations of illiteracy, including political illiteracy, in which the workers [rural and urban] found themselves, and to the methods adopted in adult literacy, considered to be out of context with the reality of the popular classes, and therefore, alienating. This perspective brings us back to the present time and proposes a reflection on the awareness and educational practices in the country.

Due to Paulo Freire's vast production, this study does not intend to cover all the determining elements in the construction of the concept studied by this author, but the concept of awareness and the meanings attributed to the educational practice, analyzed in the light of the highlighted works.

This is a qualitative and bibliographical research. The collection of materials for analysis took into consideration the bibliographical productions developed by Paulo Freire and scientific articles that integrate and synthesize the construction of the concepts of awareness



and pedagogical practice. The scientific articles were selected from the SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library Online) portal and from the Capes Periodicals Portal.

During the works selection, we sought to identify the way in which the author discusses awareness and educational practice, and how, in the exposition of his ideas, he emphasizes the social and political aspects in the composition of his thought. In the first part of the study, an outline of the author's life is presented, with a review of the factors that permeated the construction of his political and pedagogical positions.

The book *Conscientização – teoria e prática da libertação*<sup>4</sup> was used as the main source for the construction of the first parts of this article. In it, the author talks about his personal life, the path of political engagement and what influenced the consolidation of his thought about education. In addition, it was considered important to study the *Movimento de Cultura Popular – MCP* (Popular Culture Movement) and Freire's participation in it. For this reason, Germano Coelho was used as support. In the researcher's conception, the MCP is considered a concrete expression of his work as a critical and reflexive educator<sup>5</sup>. In the second part, the analysis of the concepts of awareness and educational practice is based on the following works: *Educação e Atualidade Brasileira*<sup>6</sup>, *Conscientização - teoria e prática da libertação*<sup>7</sup>, *Educação e Mudança*<sup>8</sup>, *Pedagogia do Oprimido*<sup>9</sup> and *Pedagogia da Autonomia*<sup>10</sup>.

In the listed works, the studies of specific chapters were deepened, so that they could subsidize the understanding of the evolution of the author's thought on the theme addressed. Moreover, in the works chosen, we sought to understand how the author discusses awareness in relation to the historical, social, cultural, and educational context of Brazil. The study by Otaíza de Oliveira Romanelli<sup>11</sup> is also used to contextualize Freire's thought and to understand the historical and political factors that influenced the organization of Brazilian society and its confluence with his pedagogical thought, with emphasis on events that took place in the 1950s and 1960s. In this second part, current researchers who draw on Freire's theory are also used.

From the analysis of the texts, it is possible to consider that the development of Paulo Freire's thought and theory on pedagogical practice and the awareness of subjects is present in all the material consulted, showing that it is a structuring element of his theory. Education is seen as a process of construction of the human being, of the critical being, when it is carried out in a conscious practice of the conditioning factors that act in determining the

4 Paulo Freire. *Conscientização – teoria e prática da libertação*. São Paulo: Cortez & Moraes, 1979.

5 Germano Coelho. "Paulo Freire e o Movimento de Cultura Popular." In Freire, Paulo. *Educação e Transformação Social. Organização*: Paulo Rosas. Recife: Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, 2002. <http://www.paulofreire.ufpb.br/paulofreire/Files/seminarios/mesa16-c.pdf>

6 Paulo Freire. *Educação e Atualidade Brasileira. Tese de Concurso Público para a CADEIRA de História e Filosofia da Educação*. Academia de Belas Artes de Pernambuco. Recife: Universidade Federal do Recife, 1959.

7 Paulo Freire. *Conscientização – teoria e prática da libertação*. São Paulo: Cortez & Moraes, 1979.

8 Paulo Freire. *Educação e Mudança*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1981.

9 Paulo Freire. *Pedagogia do Oprimido*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1987.

10 Paulo Freire. *Pedagogia da Autonomia: saberes necessários à prática educativa*. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2011.

11 Otaíza de Oliveira Romanelli. *História da Educação no Brasil*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1991.

concrete life of individuals. To achieve criticality, the educator needs to reflect himself as a situated subject, immersed in a web of social relations. Thus, he will also be able to help the student to become a reflexive subject of the world that surrounds him. The teaching action, if committed to this movement, tends to offer to the student conditions to become conscious and active in the struggle for the deconstruction of power relations printed in class disputes, by the oppressors over the oppressed, by the elite over the popular class.

### Life and History: Paulo Freire in memoirs...

In the first part of his book *Conscientização – teoria e prática da libertação*, Freire describes his personal and political life history. The description of himself, entitled *O Homem e sua Experiência*, highlights the interconnection between religious philosophy (inherited from his mother), family life, experiences marked by social and economic changes, and the construction of his world view and his engagement in the struggle for the structuring of another popular consciousness, more politicized and rooted in the problems of the dominated class.

Paulo Freire was born in Recife, Pernambuco, on September 19, 1921. In his accounts of his life and origins, he highlights the capacity to love and the kindness of his father, Joaquim Temístocles Freire, and the justice and docility of his mother, Edeltrudes Neves Freire, as important references in his childhood and youth. From his parents he learned dialogue, respect for religious beliefs and options of others, to listen and to believe in the human being. His family and religious base (Catholic) founded his thinking and relationship with the world, with the people, and his humanizing ethics.

At the age of 10 he began to “think that in the world many things were not right”. And he says: “although I was a child, I began to wonder what I could do to help people”<sup>12</sup>. It is clear that, already in childhood, the questioning about how the actions of individuals were projected into the social space and its consequences for the collectivity began.

At 15, he took the entrance exam for the gymnasium with difficulties in the Portuguese language. At 20 he started the pre-law course and had already expanded his reading and cultural universe, because “he had read the ‘Serões Gramáticas’, by Carneiro Ribeiro, the ‘Réplica’ and the ‘Tréplica’ by Rui Barbosa, some Portuguese and Brazilian grammarians”<sup>13</sup>. He introduced himself in Philosophy and Psychology of Language studies and became a teacher of Portuguese for the junior high school.

As a teacher, he developed a taste for the study of the Portuguese language. He married Elza Freire at the age of 23. His wife, who was an elementary school teacher, was described as “a woman of courage, understanding and ready to help others”<sup>14</sup>. With the support of his wife, Paulo Freire began to concern himself systematically with educational problems.

12 Paulo Freire, 1979, p. 09, our translation.

13 *Ibid.*

14 Paulo Freire, 1979, 10, our translation.

His Law degree from the Federal University of Pernambuco did not keep him away from the problems that bothered him the most, and so he began to dedicate himself to studies on Education, Philosophy and Sociology of Education. Upon contact with his first lawsuit, which involved a debt to be collected from a young dentist, who was required to hand over his work materials to pay a debt, which would leave him unable to work, Freire realized his inadequacy for the function, since he had given up the case and also his job as a lawyer. From then on, he dedicated himself to the problem of education.

From 1946 to 1954, he served as Director of the Department of Education and Culture of SESI in Pernambuco, where he conducted the first experiments that inspired the creation of his literacy method, which began in 1961. Before that, in 1959, he was preparing to apply for the chair of History and Philosophy of Education at the School of Fine Arts of the University of Recife. He applied for the thesis *Educação e atualidade brasileira* (1959).

The study was launched to discuss the Brazilian educational problem, based on the development of a critical thought about society, men, work, education, democratization of knowledge and social transformation. The studies of Anísio Teixeira, Florestan Fernandes, Gilberto Freyre, among others, formed the theoretical basis used in Paulo Freire's critical thinking in the composition of the thesis *Educação e Atualidade Brasileira* (1959). According to Germano Coelho, despite the elaboration, the chair was won by Maria do Carmo Tavares Miranda, with the thesis *Pedagogia do tempo e da história*, and on this occasion "Freire won the second place and the titles of doctor and Associate Professor" of the School of Fine Arts of the University of Recife.<sup>15</sup>

As Coelho reports, in other words, concomitant to this event, in the administration of the newly elected Mayor of Recife Miguel Arraes, a schooling plan for children and adolescents of the city was being promoted, which did not exist before. The meetings indicated the need to build a concrete education plan, and as a result the MCP was born, which did not have a text written by Freire, but had his signature, support and practical re-dimensioning.

Freire was one of the founders of the MCP of Recife, along with Paulo Rosas and others, to meet an educational demand. Thus, in the early 1960s, the MCP was born, aiming to become "one of the numerous forms of mass mobilization adopted in Brazil"<sup>16</sup>. In order to solidify the MCP, it was necessary to identify and touch on neuralgic points in the composition of Brazilian society: the existence of an oppressive power that exercised domination over a mass of oppressed people.

The study *Paulo Freire e o Movimento Popular*, by Coelho elucidates that, in 1962, the MCP started adult literacy through an agreement signed between the Recife City Hall and the MCP with the Ministry of Education and Culture of Brazil. The Federal Government sent primers from the Sirena Program to be practiced in classes taught to adults. However, the content was not adequate to the reality of Northeastern men and women, and it was necessary to adapt it to the students' expectations.

To make the adjustments, Norma Freire and Josina Godoy, teachers, conducted research in the working-class areas of Recife, with the objective of discovering the centers of fundamental

15 Germano Coelho, 2002, 435, our translation.

16 Paluo Freire, 1979,11, our translation.



interests of the subjects of the working classes, which would provide the basis for the class discussions. In the research, the keywords emerged: politics, survival, housing, and others. As a result of this work, carried out in 3 months, the MCP's Adult Reading Book was elaborated.

According to the phases of development of the adult literacy method within the MCP, it is possible to see that the method implemented within the MCP follows the same characteristics of Paulo Freire's method. Thus, it can be said that the MCP's Adult Reading Book was an outline of the Paulo Freire Method.

As far as the social, political, and cultural contexts in Brazil are concerned, we can identify in the studies highlighted so far that the decades from 1950 to 1960 were marked by an intense mobilization of some educators for educational actions aimed at making the masses aware of the exploitation processes of their labor force and the need to assume themselves as subjects of their own histories, based on critical thinking and collective organization.

As Freire (1979) points out, in Pernambuco, the strike of agricultural workers in 1951 had been moved by the growing emergence of the Rural Unions, which aggregated around 230,000 striking workers, and the Popular Education Movement acted in the workers' awareness front. Analyzing the political conjuncture of the 60s, the author recognized that the gathering of the peasant classes for the defense of their rights provoked intense repercussion at the end of the Goulart government. Thus, one can see that Paulo Freire's work was inserted in the broader context of popular mobilization, within which youth and adult literacy was being structured as a mediating element to raise the awareness of the masses, especially in the Northeast region of Brazil.

Freire identifies the Northeast as "Brazil's poorest region - with 15 million illiterates over 25 million inhabitants"<sup>17</sup>. The high rate of illiteracy in this region became evident as a problem and was a determining factor for the expansion of research and testing of his Literacy Method<sup>18</sup>, in 1962. As a result, in the city of Angicos, Rio Grande do Norte, an experiment was carried out to teach 300 rural workers to read and write in 45 days, and the results were impressive to public opinion, especially to those who wished to expand Paulo Freire's Literacy Method. Thus,

*It was decided to apply the method nationwide, but this time with the support of the Federal Government. And so, between June 1963 and March 1964, training courses for coordinators were held in most of the Brazilian state capitals (in the State of Guanabara more than 6,000 people signed up; courses were also created in the States of Rio Grande do Norte, São Paulo, Bahia, Sergipe and Rio Grande do Sul, bringing together several thousand people). The 1964 action plan foresaw the installation of 20,000 culture circles, capable of training, that same year, around 2 million students. (Each circle educated 30 students in two months). Thus*

17 *Ibid.*

18 Due to the limited space reserved for an article, it will not be possible to further discuss Paulo Freire's Literacy Method, particularly with regard to the stages of its construction. See *Conscientização - teoria e prática da libertação* (Freire, 1979) and *Educação e Mudança* (Freire, 1981).



began, at the national level, a literacy campaign that would first reach the urban areas, to be immediately extended to the rural sectors<sup>19</sup>.

The expansion of the literacy program was supported by the populist right and the state to maneuver the people, since the politicians saw the Popular Education Movement as “any other form of mass mobilization: as a function of their electoral concerns; and proposed a verbal and abstract revolution, there where it was necessary to continue the practical reform underway”<sup>20</sup>.

According to Freire, the thought of the governors was simplistic, because the intention was to extract from a famous educator the possibility of achieving an ideal desired by all governments: to make the Brazilian people literate in a short time. The need to accelerate literacy present in the discourse of politicians of the 1950s and 1960s cannot be dissociated from the restriction of the right to vote for illiterates - a restriction that was only revoked in the 1988 Federal Constitution. For many of Freire's contemporary politicians, fighting illiteracy was the most viable way to consolidate our fragile democracy. Out of demagogy, these politicians did not consider as relevant the economic situation of the workers, their health conditions, or the precarious housing conditions. In this aspect, Paulo Freire departed from the prevailing political thought of the time, insofar as he wanted to insert the masses into history and form the basis of an education that would be able to pave the way “for the formation of a critical judgment of the popular class about society and the proposals of the elite”<sup>21</sup>.

The MCP's first intention was to expand a literacy program based on class consciousness. This objective alerted reactionary groups to the “danger of an insurgency of the oppressed”, as Freire (1979) put it, and because of this, the experience was vetoed with the 1964 coup d'état and was limited to remaining within the utopian atmosphere of transformation of society starting with the working class, “which could not provide the necessary conditions for the constitution of a true popular ideology”<sup>22</sup>. Paulo Freire was exiled after the military coup of 1964. However, even away from Brazil he remained a thinker on the country's political issues and developed several studies in the field of education.

### **“Awareness” and educational practice: for a change in the power structure of Brazilian society**

Paulo Freire's theoretical evolution accompanied the social, cultural, and political development of Brazilian history and Brazilian education, especially since the 1950s. In his thesis *Educação e Atualidade Brasileira* (1959), Freire addresses issues inherent to the construction

19 Paulo Freire, 1979, p.11, our translation.

20 Paulo Freire, 1979, p.15, our translation.

21 *Ibid.*

22 Paulo Freire, 1979, p.17, our translation. The word ideology is used as a synonym for ideal, set of ideas, ideation based on the demands of the working class. It does not refer to the concept used by Karl Marx, for whom ideology was configured as a false perception of reality, erected over historical time in conflicts between divergent classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.



of a more just society for the oppressed, for the working class. In this work, Freire seeks to understand how the organicity of educational planning responds to the values of Brazilian society. Thus, he inserts an important discussion about man and culture.

Man is placed as a subject, who in the game of relationships with the world allows himself to be marked and is also capable of imprinting marks. He understands man as an active individual in the construction of the world and of himself. With this position, he admits that it is not possible to have or to think of man as totally uncommitted to the circumstances and problems that surround him, since he considers commitment to his origins a condition of his own existence. In this way, he states that “man does not live authentically until he is integrated with his reality” and that the organic relationship he refers to implies a conscious relationship between the subject and the context, so that he can interfere and modify its structures<sup>23</sup>.

By tracing Paulo Freire’s academic, cultural and political background, it is possible to establish a relationship between his theory and the transformations that have taken place in Brazilian society since the 1950s. As a result, Paulo Freire’s criticism of the role of education in this process is clear. In the construction of his critique, he positions himself in favor of a liberating education - an education capable of making man critical and active in solving the problems that emerge from the relations between subjects and their environment. For a better understanding of the relationship of his productions with Brazilian history, it is necessary to check some historical events.

According to Romanelli, after 1945 there was an intensification of the migratory flow from the countryside to the cities, because of the accelerated modernization of the Brazilian society, and the composition of the rural-urban industrial proletariat. This process changed the profile of populist actions from the Getúlio Vargas Government on, and the emergence of mass politics, which linked political leaders to the popular strata. During the industrialization process promoted by Juscelino Kubitschek’s government (1956-1961), the rural exodus was continuous and the urban centers received thousands of workers<sup>24</sup>. An expressive part of these migrants displaced by the rural exodus was composed of illiterate or semi-literate adults; and, in this condition, migrants were exposed to demagogic discourses and political maneuvers. Besides, these migrants came from “a cultural universe marked by values from the rural universe, [...] delimited by mysticism, violence and conformism as traditional solutions”<sup>25</sup>; ideal factors for the reproduction of the domination of the industrial bourgeois class over the proletariat, of the leaders over the led. Romanelli states that the transition from the agricultural model to the industrial one presented political leaders with the problem of the gap between education and development. The new proletariat could not guarantee the formation of human resources because of the high rate of illiteracy of this class. Thus, from the 1950s on, with the changes

23 Paulo Freire, 1959, 09, our translation.

24 The rural exodus was one of the consequences of the industrialization promoted in the Vargas period (1930-1945) and intensified in the 1950s. Another consequence was the worsening of the living conditions of rural workers. In the Northeast region, the gravity of the exploitation of the rural worker motivated the creation of the Peasant Leagues (Montenegro, 2008). In Rio Grande do Sul, the situation of exploitation of the rural worker provoked the creation of the Landless Farmers’ Movement (MASTER). The movement that took shape in 1961 to claim an agrarian reform policy (Harres, 2011).

25 Otaíza de Oliveira Romanelli, 1991, 58, our translation.

in production relations and the concentration of workers in urban and industrial centers, the need to eliminate illiteracy as much as possible and to prepare qualified labor became urgent. These objectives included economic interests insofar as it was intended to create conditions for competition and consumption by the workers, to maintain the survival of capital itself.

Still in Romanelli, it is understood that the interest in education permeated the need for transformation from an oligarchic structure, in which the need for instruction was not perceived by the population and by the power structures, to a structure marked by new social aspirations, in terms of education, economy, work, etc. Education and schooling started to be considered solutions to the development impasse and, therefore, there was an expansion of the offer of vacancies in public schools and the implementation of policies aimed at the education of the masses, of adults and young people without qualifications, for the new horizon that was emerging in the Brazilian economy.

The formal preparation provided by the school institution did not make practical sense for a large number of workers, because the type of school that started to expand was shaped according to the interests and pressures of the elites, focusing only on content-based education. For this reason, the demand became reduced, even in the face of market demands for workers, who should become literate and seek qualification in school<sup>26</sup>.

In analyzing the statements about the context presented by Romanelli, it is possible to say that the process of schooling, education, and literacy of young people and adults is permeated by real world experiences and this adds meaning to the educational space. Therefore, as Freire emphasizes in his works, the need to change the starting point of teaching, that is, what should be taught and how to teach people whose cultural universe was different from the urban one.

The starting point, in this conception, are the students' own experiences, their worldview, their knowledge of the space around them. In this aspect, it is necessary that teaching is done as a broadener of horizons, promoting inquiry, dialogue, and above all a change of vision in face of the challenges imposed to the working class. Therefore, it seems that the traditional school education process did not start from these assumptions and could only result in discouragement, lack of understanding by the students, and dropout. Thus, it is not possible, as intended by the political speeches of the time, and even today, to throw this weight on the shoulders of the workers. But first we must ask: what is the function of a decontextualized and mystifying education? It serves the interests of which class: the bourgeoisie or the proletariat?

Resuming the discussion, Paulo Freire, in *Educação e Atualidade Brasileira* characterized the speeches of political leaders as anti-dialogic, authoritarian, verbalistic, and emptied of democracy, given the criticism that the educational policy did not include illiterate adults in the education system, because it did not meet the needs of the popular classes, and, consequently, kept men and women from the countryside away from political decisions and the right, in fact, to citizenship.

26 Dermeval Saviani. *Escola e Democracia*. São Paulo: Cortez Editora e Autores Associados, 1987.



For Freire, it was necessary to believe in the people and promote their growth along the lines of democratization by modifying their consciousness. Consciousness emerges from the understanding of the contradictions present in society. With this understanding, the people can “reject the old quietist positions” and new positions emerge, “now for participation, action, and interference in Brazilian life and politics”<sup>27</sup>. In pursuing the roots of Freire’s philosophy of liberation and awareness, it is interesting to note the following line:

*We all know what the “populists” want - in Brazil, as in any other Latin American country - for the mobilization of the masses: one man equals one vote. And therein lies the whole problem, because, according to the pedagogy of freedom, preparing for democracy cannot mean only converting the illiterate into voters, conditioning them to the alternatives of an already existing power scheme. An education must prepare, at the same time, for a critical judgment of the alternatives proposed by the elite and give the possibility of choosing one’s own path*<sup>28</sup>.

Freire clarifies that the term “awareness” was created by a team of professors from the Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies, around 1964<sup>29</sup>, and because he realized the depth of its meaning, it became a concept of his ideas around education. As the author puts it:

*When I heard the word awareness for the first time, I immediately realized the depth of its meaning, because I am absolutely convinced that education, as the practice of freedom, is an act of knowledge, a critical approach to reality*<sup>29</sup>.

The educator analyzes in depth the importance of the concept and elucidates that thinking about reality is not yet becoming aware of it. In this first moment man thinks the experience of reality. Awareness occurs when man goes beyond the “spontaneous sphere of apprehension of reality” and reaches the “critical sphere in which reality is given as a cognizable object and in which man assumes an epistemological position”.

Awareness is “based on the relation conscience-world” and “invites us to assume a utopian position towards the world, a position that turns the aware into a ‘utopian factor’”<sup>30</sup>. In Freire’s conception, utopia cannot be understood simply as idealism, but should be understood as the act of denouncing and announcing: “denouncing the dehumanizing structure and announcing the humanizing structure”<sup>31</sup>. That is why he considers awareness and utopia as a historical commitment, especially of those who assume themselves as educators.

About the process of awareness and the organization of class consciousness, Georg Lukács says:

*Consciousness is therefore neither the sum nor the average of what each of the individuals who form the class thinks, feels, etc. And yet the historically decisive action of the class*

27 Paulo Freire, 1959, 24, our translation.

28 Paulo Freire, 1979, 12, our translation.

29 Paulo Freire, 1979, 15, our translation.

30 Paulo Freire, 1979, 16, our translation.

31 *Ibid.*

*as a totality is ultimately determined by this consciousness and not by the thought of the individual; this action can only be recognized from consciousness*<sup>32</sup>.

Lukács conducts an important study on class consciousness based on Karl Marx. For the researcher, the limitations for this consciousness are found in the apprehension of the entire historical process of division of society into classes and the position occupied by these classes (and their members) in the production of capitalist society. In other words, there is a complex of economic and social relations that create a totality that is nebulous to understand the concrete, material reasons that lead the subjects to occupy certain positions in society and to act in different ways in the struggle to build this society.

The positions are defined according to the conditions of primitive accumulation of capital and can produce objective differences between human beings; as well as forming a class unconsciousness, supported by the naturalization of relations and lack of knowledge. In summary, “the destiny of a class depends on its ability to clarify and solve, in all practical decisions, the problems imposed on it by historical evolution”<sup>33</sup>. For this, it is necessary, especially for the educator, alluding to Freire, that there is a compression of the aspects that form the economic, historical and social totality, which organize the concrete reality (Lukács, 2003); so that it is possible to analyze how these aspects affect the most vulnerable groups: the poor and illiterate, for example, and the possibilities of changing this reality through education, as one of the ways.

Paulo Freire's philosophical and political position on education has shown the current of forces between the progressive and the conservative wings, especially since the 1960s. But in the game of interests for political and economic power there are those interested in the domination of the masses and those who seek a way out to consolidate the struggles for their liberation, from the construction of a conscience focused on the oppressed class.

For the educator, the liberation of the oppressed from the oppressive forces would occur through the awareness of the subject and the consequent positioning of the latter in the social space. As far as the teacher is concerned, an important subject in this awareness raising process, this process is linked to the exercise of his *praxis*, of reflection and conscious action in his educational practices. *Praxis*, according to Freire (1981), is the articulation between knowledge of the social conditions that act upon man and the practice, especially revolutionary, of this knowledge in the social, political and cultural spheres.

For Souza Neto “the importance of praxis is to ensure unity between action and reflection, theory and practice, to avoid the imprisonment of the educator and his action in the web of the political, religious, economic, cultural and social world”<sup>34</sup>. In Paulo Freire, emancipatory education must be committed to unveiling reality and inserting the subject

32 Georg Lukács. *História e Consciência de Classe: Estudos sobre a dialética marxista*. Tradução: Rodnei Nascimento. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2003, 142.

33 Georg Lukács, 2003, 146, our translation.

34 Souza Neto, 2012, 60, our translation.



in the phenomenal essence of the object, in front of which we find ourselves in order to analyze it. For this very reason, awareness does not consist in “standing in front of reality” assuming a falsely intellectual position. Awareness cannot exist outside of “praxis,” or rather, without the act of action-reflection. This dialectical unity constitutes, in a permanent way, the way of being or transforming the world that characterizes men.<sup>35</sup>

In this way, education for awareness gains prominence in Freire’s structuring of philosophy and educational practice, both in the Popular Culture Movement and in his academic career and permanence. One can consider that from 1962 on, Paulo Freire and his comrades in the struggle were about moving cultural and political structures capable of changing the consciousness of the masses. With his militant friends, he was critical of the educational disorganization offered to the rural-urban worker and to the entire popular class, of the anti-democratic and manipulative discourses of political leaders, and of the consequences of the accelerated process of modernization of Brazilian society, focused on the interests of an elite that fed on the ignorance of the people.

As a result of these aspects, the literacy method and the methodology of investigation of the issues that generated debates and learning, arising from the reality of the popular class students, aimed to promote the awareness and demythologization of the reality of the oppressed, which would never be provoked by the representatives of the oppressor elite. In this sense, the educator’s work and his educational practice is by essence humanizing work when it commits to the action of demythologizing reality and empowers the subject, historically and socially subjected to the domination of the oppressors, as an active being in the struggles for the interests of his class<sup>36</sup>.

In his book *Educação e Mudança* Paulo Freire stresses the importance of questioning the professional performance committed to society at the concrete level and highlights the educator and his educational practice as the one who must “engage socially and politically”, to “realize the possibilities of his social and cultural action in the struggle for the transformation of the oppressive structures of class society”<sup>37</sup>. He goes on to state that man is a creative being and “education is more authentic when it develops the ontological urge to create” (Freire, 1981, p.17, our translation). This implies, in the educator’s activity, making the movement of re-signification of human creations, in order to develop a critical consciousness in the subject, enabling him to transform reality, in response to the challenges imposed by the world.

From an analysis perspective on Paulo Freire’s influence beyond the debate, José Rubens Lima Jardimino<sup>38</sup>, points out the singularities of how scientific production and fields of disputes in the area of education constituted premises of inclusive education

35 Paulo Freire, 1979, 27, our translation.

36 Paulo Freire, 1979, 1981, 2011

37 Paulo Freire, 1981, 5-7, our translation.

38 Jardimino, José Rubens Lima. “Paulo Freire, filósofo, pedagogo e cientista social: a singularidade e a universalidade do seu pensamento.” *Revista História de La Educación Latinoamericana*, n.º. 10 (2012): 41-56. [https://revistas.uptc.edu.co/index.php/historia\\_educacion\\_latinoamericana/article/view/1485/1480](https://revistas.uptc.edu.co/index.php/historia_educacion_latinoamericana/article/view/1485/1480)

in countries that approached the new theories. It was a period of questioning, appropriation and new knowledge based on Freire's proposals for the continents.

Education and the educational process, in the micro sphere, need the educator's commitment to social change in favor of the oppressed. This commitment should not be restricted to the needs of learning in the classroom but should extend to the needs of understanding how education works in society. This knowledge-generating process aims to situate man in the world before the factors that condition him to the domains of capital and make him aware that he is being conditioned<sup>39</sup>. This variation of perspective, of vision about the world and the conditioning factors of consciousness is an organizing factor of the critical thinking of the educator who historicizes his educational experience.

Freire, in *Educação e Mudança* does not ignore the complexity of educating for the emancipation of the masses. On the contrary, he considers it a challenging task, with a high degree of difficulty, but urgent in the face of a society in constant transformation and transition, marked by the need to generate more popular participation. According to Freire, it is necessary that the educator understands education as an opening to new perspectives of struggles, claims and positions of the popular masses in relation to their real needs. Therefore, the educational practice cannot be separated from the pedagogical act and the political act, nor should it confuse them.

In this context, awareness and meaningful educational practices need to be presented as driving forces for the work of educators of the popular classes. Educators are primordial in the process of political transformation of society, but it is also essential that they understand their social function and act to modify the power structures by criticizing and politicizing the educational and cultural process in mass schools (Freire, 1979, 1981).

In *Pedagogia da Autonomia*, we see that to understand the concept of educational practice it is also necessary to reflect on the ideological character widely espied by the discourses of the globalizing economy, with the intention of making believe a destiny for popular education that cannot be avoided, that is, "training" the learner for insertion into the labor market, whose political orientation is "dictated by the interests of those who hold power"<sup>40</sup>.

Admitting the sphere of economy and power as conditioning factors of life, which are inserted in the way subjects think and act in society, Freire considers essential to the act of teaching and educational practice - in school or not - the critical recognition of the forces that maintain social differences. For the author, the being is unfinished and is not exempt from the influence of social forces. It is precisely this perception that mobilizes him, that takes him out of passivity, that makes him realize the difference between being conditioned and determined; because the conditioned subject, who perceives himself in this way, can assume "a fighting position so as not to be only an object, but also the subject of history"<sup>41</sup>.

39 Paulo Freire, 1981.

40 Paulo Freire, 2011,123, our translation.

41 *Ibid*, 53.



Freire's emancipatory education from the perspective of adult literacy method is based on the premise that the process of learning words comes from the objectification of the world, from placing the world of the learner as an object of analysis. In *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, the author calls attention to the liberating political intention of education when it is focused on promoting the encounter of the subject with his own history and with the collective history; with the construction of himself and the other in a circle of social and cultural relations.

The reading of the environment and the world in which men and women of the popular classes are immersed needs to be expanded starting from the "codification" and "decoding" of the problems that make up life and condition the subject to the reality that is presented to him. Thus, the literacy proposed by Paulo Freire, based on his method, integrates the meaning of the respective words to the existential context of the learner, so that the expansion of criticality of the elements that make up this context may result in the opening for awareness and dialectical integration between man, word and knowledge<sup>42</sup>.

Freire extols the word in its social meaning and significance as a way of entering the world of the oppressed and awakening in them a critical view of their reality. For this reason, dialogue and ethics in the educational teaching practice are fundamental elements in his theory and, therefore, should be assumed as the educator's stance, so that thought, and action can be fostered aimed at changing the structure of social domination, imposed by a small bourgeois and industrial elite on a vast mass of families and workers of rural origin.

The educational process, if carried out in the way proposed by Paulo Freire, aimed at provoking the dialectical movement of criticism of the modes of development of the productive forces of society. This theoretical and practical positioning tended to develop the ability to "distance oneself from things in order to make them present" and thus modify oneself in the process. The pedagogy and literacy of adults, and also of children, young people, and the elderly, "in this interaction between subject, history, and world, is also anthropology"<sup>43</sup>.

In the current context, Souza Neto, in his perspective on educational practice based on the Freirian philosophy, reinforces that "learning and *praxis* occur in a set that articulates academic training and everyday life" and that the "construction of knowledge is founded on the social place in which the subject is inserted"<sup>44</sup>. Moreover, reflecting on the current educational process, he stresses that "the educator must learn to put himself in the place of the other in order to listen to him and, together with him, find meaning in a life project", in order to establish "organic reflections and overcome reductionist perceptions"<sup>45</sup>.

Carlos Bauer<sup>46</sup> focuses on aspects of national identity and its interface with education and culture in the light of Paulo Freire's theories. It deals with the temporal process of the plurality of Brazilian historical phenomena and the influences

42 Paulo Freire, 1979 e 2011.

43 Paulo Freire, 1987. 07, our translation.

44 João Clemente de Souza Neto. "O compromisso ético do educador social." *Revista Lusófona de Educação*, vol. 22, (2012): 55-67. file:///C:/Users/fabiano.ruckert/Downloads/3281-Texto%20do%20artigo-11348-1-10-20130517.pdf

45 *Ibid.* p. 60.

46 Carlos Bauer. "História, educação e construção da identidade nacional." *Revista Historia de La Educación Latinoamericana*, nº. 10 (2012): 119-136. [https://revistas.uptc.edu.co/index.php/historia\\_educacion\\_latinoamericana/article/view/1489/1485](https://revistas.uptc.edu.co/index.php/historia_educacion_latinoamericana/article/view/1489/1485)



on the constitution of the country, its interfaces with Maxism and the need to expand knowledge.

For Santiago and Batista Neto<sup>47</sup>, the contribution of Freire's pedagogy to the pedagogical practices aimed at children, young people, and adults in elementary and high schools, if taken from the problematization of the reality of these subjects, the teacher's questioning of the content to be worked on, and the dialogical approach, can contribute to mobilize in these subjects the construction of new knowledge and actions aimed at modifying their relationship with others and with the context that surrounds them.

Brayner reflects on the narratives of academic scientific productions, dedicated to the preservation of the memory of the educator, naming them "*paulofreireanism*"<sup>48</sup>. The "*paulofreireanism*" is explained as a process of institution of narrative systems in high relief of the traces of the author's idea, from which a chain of disseminators and followers of the author's thought is produced. According to the researcher, the discourses erected in the field of Brazilian education have generated the caricaturizing and sterilization of the concepts of awareness, freedom, and humanization, failing to contemplate the liberating nature that makes us aware of education. In Brayner's critique, this sterilization results in the loss of the original subversive force of Freire's ideas, contributing to the conversion of his elaborations into a doctrinal and teleological system.

Besides the aspects analyzed, in the field of Brazilian education, the creation of a sacralized figure tends to associate Freirean elaborations with a "salvationist pedagogy", influencing the formation of distorted conceptions and the vulgarization of his thought. The distortions tend to exempt the actions from historical and material conditions, producing conceptual instruments of emotional and ideological appeal, potentially present in public policies in education. In this sense, it characterizes the ideologization of Paulo Freire's ideas, to "produce the automatisms of thinking, preventing the distanced and judicious evaluation" of concrete reality<sup>49</sup>.

This highlights the importance of questioning the institutionalization of Paulo Freire's ideas as indoctrination, but also of promoting conjunctural analyses of his productions in the elevation of man's consciousness and emancipation; according to the present study.

For Paulo Freire the space for education should be organized as a more formative and less *banking* institution, a term used to characterize traditional teaching, decontextualized and focused on the consolidation of formal learning and the administration of information. In this institutional model, the student is a depository of information transmitted by the teacher, considered to be the only holder of knowledge. Reality, in this case, tends not to be read by the students, because it is understood and, therefore, teaching becomes disconnected from the concrete.

47 Eliete, Santiago; José Batista Neto. "Formação de professores e prática pedagógica na perspectiva freiriana." *Educar em Revista*, vol. 61 (2016): 127-141. <https://www.scielo.br/j/er/a/h5WJtqDm7d3bBmYQ9TzxpVh/abstract/?lang=pt>

48 Flavio Henrique Albert Brayner. "Educação popular na institucionalidade: potencialidades, limites, contradições de um Marco de referência de Educação Popular para as Políticas Públicas. "Paulofreireanismo": instituindo uma teologia laica?" 37ª Reunião Nacional da ANPEd. (2015): 1-26. <http://37reuniao.anped.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Trabalho-de-Flavio-Brayner-para-o-GT06.pdf>

49 Flavio Henrique Albert Brayner, 2015, 07, our translation.



In Freire's perspective, "teaching is not about transferring knowledge, but about creating the possibility for its production or construction" amid social and cultural reality<sup>50</sup>. In Paulo Freire's view, education is a factor for changing reality; it is how conditions for reflection and action are created. Through emancipatory education, it is possible to think about the structures of power and domination between classes, the strategies to maintain the privileges of the oppressors over the oppressed, and the ways to overcome the precarious conditions of the lives of the subjects, which differentiate and diminish men, and are imposed by the capital as a requirement for their survival.

## Considerations

In the works studied, the concept of awareness is referenced in power relations and class domination. Paulo Freire, who had a Marxist background in the elaboration of his thought, historicizes his approaches, even indirectly, when he highlights the alienating character of the education of the working masses, whose interest was in maintaining the domination of the elite over the rural proletariat and the political and economic interests of the populist governments.

Education was offered to increase worker qualification and human capital formation, due to the need to modernize Brazilian society and to maintain the capital's own logic, with the precarious offer of improved living conditions in urban centers, despite the workers' increased consumption of goods and services.

The interests presented in the scope of the school education of the proletariat did not express the ideals of emancipation of the subjects and would not present, as it occurs until the current moment, not to awaken the critical consciences and the fights for their interests. In the period under study, the increase of vacancies for the adult public in public schools was highlighted, but also the lack of demand from this public, due to the elitist standard of school education, which did not enter the universe of knowledge of the working-class students.

Traditional school education did not teach literacy based on the reality of the students but was carried out through decontextualized and mechanical methods of learning. Thus, education took place in a conceptual and political vacuum, incapable of inserting the subject in the historical context and making him aware of the conditioning factors, imposed by a small elite, present in social relations. Without the awakening of critical thinking and the organization of consciousness, education and educational practice tend to reflect the domination of the oppressors over the oppressed, as Paulo Freire has shown throughout his works. Perhaps for these reasons, today we face an intense repression of Paulo Freire's pedagogical thought.

Paulo Freire, by analyzing the ideas of the progressive and conservative strands, and how they configured forces in the dispute for social space, brings out the discussion about class struggle in a sensitive period of Brazilian democracy - a democracy that was fragile and full of tensions. His works, full of political meaning, inclined to the defense of the popular classes,

50 Paulo Paulo, 2011, 24, our translation.



historically excluded from the decision-making process and social participation, translate into the national context the need to establish public policies in the area of education that value the individual and recognize him as a citizen with rights. It is possible to highlight from the analysis of Paulo Freire's works that education and educational practice become emancipating when they transform the culturally, economically, and socially disadvantaged individual into a critical, conscious, and active individual in the construction of his history and in the modification of the power and domination structures, considered to be crystallized by the wealthier social layers. In this sense, education is configured to emancipate the subject through reflection and action on his own reality, since awareness cannot occur without the action of reflecting and the action of acting.

The meanings attributed to awareness, and educational practice cannot be understood without an analysis of the historical contents and class struggles that emerge in the Brazilian social context. It is true to say that society is not, in its totality, homogeneous and this generates (while it was generated) the development of economic differences and the opposing positions in the struggles for the interests of the different classes.

Because of his tradition in Marxist theory, Freire highlights the bourgeois class and the working class as opposites in the struggles, and then defends the interests of the working class, named as popular class, based on liberating education. The main intention of liberating education was to question the power structures, but also to generate the conditions to change the social structure from the critical consciousness of the proletariat and the organization of its actions in the context that surrounded it and surrounds us in this new moment. It is possible to identify that education is considered a vector for transformation, a political and historical act, but that it can also constitute an instrument of domination by the elites, when the educational process aims only at preparing for the labor market. Paulo Freire calls attention, in all his works, to the humanizing function of education, and therefore, to the emancipation of the subject.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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