

Paulo Freire: a new education to create a new world¹

Lucia Alvarez²

I actually met Paulo Freire. I participated in some sessions, but I understood his thinking better in my career as an educator. I worked with campesinos in the region of Sao Félix do Araguaia, Mato Grosso, Brazil. For ten years I worked in literacy and then in basic education. Then I returned to Belo Horizonte where I have lived until today. I worked and still work with aboriginal education at the University of Minas Gerais, where we have an indigenous degree course in the Faculty of Education. I am part of the team and once again I had to move from my culture to know the culture of the other, so I say that first I *lived* Paulo Freire, then I read and I studied. So what I want to bring here, thinking about the influence of his thinking on pedagogical practices, is precisely the resignification of practices, creating transformative pedagogies, a strategic field to discuss today.

It's necessary to think of Paulo Freire today more than ever when we are in such a difficult situation in Latin America and in Brazil especially, not only with the pandemic, but with all the conservative, authoritarian backsliding and the loss of hard-won rights. At this moment, the centenary of Paulo Freire represents a moment to bring his thought back to us, for debate in the public space, allowing us to confront his ideas, even with people who today deny his relevance for public education. In Brazil, we are at a very important moment to recover and update Paulo Freire's ideas.

There are some key ideas of Paulo Freire. He was always an optimistic person in relation to human beings, men and women. He was a humanist thinker who believed in people. He always said "no one wants to be less, everyone wants to be more". So in Freire's thinking

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² Professor at the University of Mina Gerais, Brazil.

there is a belief in people and that makes him think of education as a relationship between subjects, an expression of the relationships between people.

For him, man is an incomplete being, unfinished, and this incompleteness makes us historical subjects. We are able to change the world because the world is not ready. We are building it and it is constantly changing. So this is a very strong idea in Paulo Freire's thinking. In addition, we are not born, we become people with the experiences we share.

For Freire, educating is transforming people and we become people to the extent that we share experiences. I always say, I was born in a big city, in a middle-class family. I never needed to work in my childhood. However, I am what I am today, because I went to work with the peasants and I went to work with the indigenous people. I worked in teacher training on the outskirts of the city. The experiences we have lived form us. However, these ideas of Freire must be distinguished from romantic humanism because Freire always had a very strong critique of the structure of oppressive societies.

For example, in the face of confinement and remote schooling, there was a great effort to ensure that education did not stop. However, there was great inequality. Many students do not have access to the Internet while others have their computer, their space, their room and all the material conditions to keep them safe at home. I believe that the pandemic allows us to read the world through the thoughts of Paulo Freire when he makes it clear that "education is not neutral, they are projects in dispute, and education is a political act". Freire proposes dialogical education, education as the practice of freedom, education as the practice of emancipation. And it is this education that confronts banking education, mercantile education, where the subjects are objects, and the private school is the model to be followed.

This is very strong in Brazil and the two projects are very clear: education as a commodity and education as a right and now with the pandemic this is becoming much stronger. For example, the big companies are producing books and other pedagogical material and selling them for those responsible for public education to share among students. Thus, they reinforce the idea of education as merchandise, selling technical education as innovation: the technique and the content is the center.

The argument of the government is that, with the pandemic, the school year is being lost. The students are not learning Portuguese, "it is a lost generation." But there is little reflection about children, adolescents, and young adults. What happens to them in their daily lives? Living with fear, living with death, living with insecurity are also educational processes. But so are living with solidarity, living with help, living with connection. So today in Brazil, those aspects of life that Paulo Freire defends so much with emancipatory education are no longer considered in public policy. What counts are "the eleven years to learn mathematics" and "children no longer know how to read". This makes me think that we are living through

the same situation that Paulo Freire observed at the end of the 1950s, when it was said in society that "these adults do not know how to read, they are retarded, they do not learn" and he said: "they do not learn because the school does not see them as subjects of knowledge. For that, you must connect with reality, connect with their knowledge" and what we are seeing today are those prejudices, which clearly mark a setback in terms of public policy.

Another idea for debate has to do with us as educators, our role. I believe that we are also being blamed, as if the problem were only the lack of classes, open or closed schools. In Brazil, the debate in the media claims that "teachers do not want to work, everyone goes to work, and teachers do not want to go". There is a movement to blame the teacher, trying to reduce his role, simply to the one who produces lessons and sends the child home without any contact and without any other possibility. Paulo Freire reflects on the idea of the teacher as a problematizer. I think this is a very strong idea for us educators - the possibility of seeing reality as unnatural. I believe that at this moment it is fundamental that we reflect with the students and with the families on what is happening, why it is happening, seeking to understand reality.

So, it's a process of denaturalizing the situation. Why in Brazil do we have 600,000 deaths in the pandemic? Surely it is not because "God wants it", or because "the poor little poor people have no resources". We know that the policies and actions of this government are behind it. We know very well that it is deliberate, that death and genocide is a political project, it is not only a problem of disease.

So the idea is that we as educators in this moment can reflect and bring elements so that students and their families also begin to question the current situation. I believe that the coronavirus forced us to give different answers. We are living a time of denunciation in the face of the forces of dehumanization, but we are also living a moment of announcement, and this announcement comes precisely through the most oppressed collectives.

Who gave us a class of solidarity, who gave us a class of fraternity and resistance? It was the popular collectives that organized themselves to create support networks, from the management of health to the feeding of the population, replacing public policies that the state should be in charge of.

So again, Paulo Freire brings us the idea that those who can change the world are the oppressed - through liberating education. I have a Paulo Freire banner with a phrase that I love: "If education is not liberating, the desire of the oppressed is to be the oppressor". Paulo Freire placed a force for change onto the educational process, and he always believed that it was possible. In addition to being indignant - he spoke of righteous anger, of righteous rage, of indignation - one of the components of change is transformation, and the possibility of

transformation comes first from the possibility to be indignant with reality. If we are comfortable with it, we are not going to be open to change.

So, Paulo Freire brings both the idea of indignation and the idea of hope. In the book: Pedagogy of Indignation there is a very strong phrase: "dreams are projects for which we fight". Paulo Freire always put forward the idea of the dream, of the "viable unknown", the idea that "we can always hope".

In indignation, denunciation, hope, the possibility of change, of moving and freedom, we find the possibility of thinking about freedom. I believe that this is part of Freire's thinking, and today I imagine that for us as educators there is the task of thinking of a dialogical education, which is not simply accepting the thinking of the other. I may not agree, I may not think the same, but yes, I can treat them as a subject and not as someone lesser, with less capacity, with less understanding, and at that moment I imagine that the school can be a space of humanization, if the school is connected with its territory, if the school opens the doors to learning from social practice.

Paulo Freire always spoke of knowledge from experience. In the pandemic, the lived experience taught us a lot, although often with a lot of pain, but we learned. Now the challenge is to establish a dialogue between experience and academic knowledge. I conclude, then, by inviting everyone, so that we can build a new world; a new education, so that from our indignation with this reality, we can change and seek alternative ways of resisting.