

**EMANCIPATORY EDUCATION: CONTRIBUTIONS FROM FREIREAN THEORY  
AND HISTORICAL-CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL-CRITICAL THEORIES**

***EDUCAÇÃO EMANCIPADORA: CONTRIBUIÇÕES DA TEORIA FREIRIANA E DAS  
TEORIAS HISTÓRICO-CULTURAL E HISTÓRICO-CRÍTICA***

***EDUCACIÓN EMANCIPATORIA: CONTRIBUCIONES DE LA TEORÍA FREIRIANA Y  
LAS TEORÍAS HISTÓRICO-CULTURAL E HISTÓRICO-CRÍTICO***

Anderson Luiz FERREIRA<sup>1</sup>  
Gustavo Kosienczuk GOMES<sup>2</sup>  
Leoni Maria Padilha HENNING<sup>3</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** This chapter presents a conceptual discussion on the idea of humanization, having as theoretical support Paulo Freire's concept of emancipation and the concept of human development from historical-cultural psychology and historical-critical pedagogy. First, we approach the Freirean concept of emancipation, central to the liberation work proposed by this author's educational approach, and its incidence within educational practice. Then, we focus on the ideas of cultural-historical and critical-historical theories and, as presented by Lígia Martins (2016), realizing what approaches, in theories, to understand development according to the Marxist perspective of Vigotski and other related authors. It is concluded that all these theoretical approaches by Paulo Freire, the historical-cultural and historical-critical theorists contribute to the insertion of the subject in the emancipation process, understood as the development for maximum humanization of the individual within a society that supports existence in a collaborative and participatory way.

**KEYWORDS:** Education. Emancipation. Educational work. Humanization.

**RESUMO:** *O presente artigo apresenta uma discussão conceitual sobre a ideia de humanização, tendo como suporte teórico o conceito de emancipação de Paulo Freire e a concepção de desenvolvimento humano da psicologia histórico-cultural e da pedagogia histórico-crítica. Primeiramente abordamos o conceito freireano de emancipação, central no trabalho de libertação proposto pela abordagem educacional deste autor, e sua incidência dentro da prática educacional. Em seguida, nos detemos nas ideias das teorias histórico-cultural e histórico-crítica e, como apresentado por Lígia Martins (2016), percebendo o que se aproxima, nas teorias, para compreender o desenvolvimento segundo a perspectiva marxista de Vigotski e outros autores correlatos. Conclui-se que todas estas abordagens teóricas de*

<sup>1</sup> University of Londrina (UEL), Londrina – PR – Brazil. Coordinator of Pastoral Ministry at the Marist School of Londrina. Master's student in the Postgraduate Program in Education (UEL). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7271-9709>. E-mail: [anderfilos@gmail.com](mailto:anderfilos@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> University of Londrina (UEL), Londrina – PR – Brazil. Master's student in the Graduate Program in Education (UEL). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2342-2893>. E-mail: [gustavo.kosienczuk@uel.br](mailto:gustavo.kosienczuk@uel.br)

<sup>3</sup> University of Londrina (UEL), Londrina – PR – Brazil. Professor at the Philosophy and Education Nucleus of Line 01 of the Postgraduate Program in Education (UEL). Pós-Doutorado em Filosofia (UFSC). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8004-2371>. E-mail: [lhenning@uel.br](mailto:lhenning@uel.br)

*Paulo Freire, dos teóricos histórico-culturais e histórico-críticos contribuem para a inserção do sujeito no processo de emancipação, compreendido como o desenvolvimento para a máxima humanização do indivíduo dentro de uma sociedade que dê suporte para existir de maneira colaborativa e participativa.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Educação. Emancipação. Trabalho educativo. Humanização.

**RESUMEN:** Este capítulo presenta una discusión conceptual sobre la idea de humanización, teniendo como soporte teórico el concepto de emancipación de Paulo Freire y el concepto de desarrollo humano desde la psicología histórico-cultural y la pedagogía histórico-crítica. En primer lugar, nos acercamos al concepto freiriano de emancipación, central en el trabajo de liberación propuesto por el enfoque educativo de este autor, y su incidencia dentro de la práctica educativa. Luego, nos enfocamos en las ideas de las teorías histórico-culturales y crítico-históricas y, como lo presenta Ligia Martins (2016), percibiendo lo que se acerca, en las teorías, para entender el desarrollo según la perspectiva marxista de Vigotski y otros autores afines. Se concluye que todos estos planteamientos teóricos de Paulo Freire, los teóricos histórico-culturales e histórico-críticos contribuyen a la inserción del sujeto en el proceso de emancipación, entendido como el desarrollo para la máxima humanización del individuo dentro de una sociedad que sustenta existir de forma colaborativa y participativa.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Educación. Emancipación. Trabajo educativo. Humanización.

## Introduction

Given the present social structure that divides individuals into antagonistic classes living in situations of domination and dehumanizing oppression (WALLERSTEIN, 2001), we identify an education that reproduces this social structure and serves to maintain the status quo. This education is considered by a more current and critical school of thought to be an expression of the traditional approach, which Paulo Freire (1921-1997) called banking education (FREIRE, 1987; 1993).

In this sense, it is understood that this dominant structure is present in all dimensions of human life, eventually shaping the subjectivity of individuals - a denunciation presented by Giovanni Alves (2011), who understands capitalism as the system that shapes the way people perceive the world, socialize, work, and organize themselves. That is, capitalism and its means of domination and hegemony constantly format human consciences.

The challenge posed by this reality, conflictive and oppressive for a large part of society, has as its central focus education itself, seen as a mechanism, par excellence, traditionally committed to the perpetuation of inequalities and oppression and to hindering the possibilities of transformations. A new education is needed that is elaborated and thought out in such a way

as to serve people in their process of individualization, humanization, and appropriation of reality as a historical object, in order to transform it.

An education with this objective, for emancipation, can only be done in an intentional and planned way. There are many authors who think about emancipation. In this text, we will expose what we have studied about the thought of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian author of great international relevance in the area of philosophical education - since it is directly grounded in thought, reflection, and critical consciousness. We also consider the contributions of the cultural-historical and critical-historical theories about human development through educational work, which in the core of its proposals inserts individuals in the emancipation movement. To this end, we rely on authors who are still active, such as Ligia Marcia Martins and Dermeval Saviani.

In analyzing these trends, we respect the specificities of each one, aiming to present how these approaches, each one in its own way, offer subsidies for the promotion of emancipatory educational processes. Thus, in the first part we present the concept of emancipation from Paulo Freire's point of view, considering some of his most emblematic texts on the subject, adding the interpretation of some of his commentators. In the next part, we present the contributions of cultural-historical psychology and critical historical pedagogy on human development and the importance of the educational work for the emancipation of the subjects. Finally, we will highlight the contributions of each approach, emphasizing their methodological and conceptual foundations, and then we will make some final considerations.

### **Freirean perspective on the concept of emancipation**

The concept of emancipation is at the core of Freire's work, since education is for emancipation. Several authors have looked at Freire's work and understood this concept as referring to a political achievement. It is a concept that is equally supported by others of great importance in the author's thought, such as human praxis and transformation of the relations between oppressed and oppressor (OLIVEIRA; PROENÇA, 2016; RAMBO, [s.d.]).

The term was previously theorized by Marx, an author to whom Paulo Freire several times resorts to demystify reality. Oliveira and Proença (2016) consider Marx's production in theorizing the concept of 'emancipation' as a "[...] decipherment that observes a logical sequence, rational and coherent with the context of the concept" (2016, p. 13). The authors point out, through an extensive research in articles published in ANPED, that often the concept loses its Marxist perspective of transforming the relations of oppression through overcoming the

capitalist model and is employed with a "weak sense" (2016, p. 13) when put in equivalence with the concept of autonomy.

According to the authors, the concept of autonomy has a definition close to the idea of freedom when grounded in the political doctrine of liberalism. Within the Kantian perspective, autonomy refers to the right that each subject, making use of his autonomy, conquers to say his own word. The Brazilian author understands emancipation as a phase of transformation in the lives of subjects in need of breaking with the prevailing system of oppression. Thus, emancipation would find its full meaning in the process by which the subject approaches his existential plenitude, recognizing himself as a historical, unfinished and autonomous subject.

According to another version of Marx's concept, we are shown the distinction between political emancipation and human emancipation. In the former, man has the possibility of being politically emancipated, but he remains conditioned within an oppressive system that has certain characteristics. Human emancipation, on the other hand, requires a real transformation in human thought and practices, i.e., the overcoming of the capital system.

Freire sees education as an important instrument for the liberation of the oppressed through dialogue conducted by the educator. In other words, it is not something that occurs in an isolated way in the individual, but is carried out within the collective and in favor of it.

The emancipation process is social, so it only occurs from "[...] a political intentionality that assumes a future focused on social transformation" (RAMBO, [s.d.], p. 2). This movement takes place on the occasion of men and women's search for the reconstruction of their humanity, as part of the oppressed, and who are dedicated to their mission of liberating themselves and their oppressors in the process of social transformation and the Freirian emancipatory project.

Paulo Freire does not stop only at criticism. He denounces the problem of traditional education, the dehumanizing theme of silence and non-dialogue, proposing, on the other hand, a liberating education that will take place through a dialogical pedagogy that guarantees access to the emancipatory and liberating process (FREIRE, 2005). Thus, when criticizing traditional teaching, Freire indicates the importance of creating a school with an inverse perspective, that is, a school where children can be subjects, can be the cause, not only the effect of what they experience. A Freirean school that is critical and emancipating, that denies the meritocratic and competitive logic and promotes participation, solidarity, equity, and coexistence with the different, which is of utmost importance for overcoming the dehumanizing social problems we find in our society (OLIVEIRA; SANTOS, 2018).

Education, in Freire's view, must overcome the banking logic of transmission, promoting participation that fosters creativity in students through a pedagogy that is also that

of the question generated by the student's understanding of his way of living, thinking, knowing, and doing. The knowledge socialized in an ideal school is not, necessarily, provided by books, nor only by the teacher, but it is built in dialog with the students who already have their knowledge before entering the school spaces.

For Freire, education must start from curiosity, because only then the educator can stimulate the subjects to become interested, investigate and respond autonomously to their own problems, thus producing knowledge (OLIVEIRA; SANTO, 2018).

Within a community that stimulates collaboration, development, and production of knowledge in a democratic and autonomous way, along with a critical stance fostered by conscious and transforming agents, the process of awareness of students will occur progressively, culminating in the formation of individuals identified as historical subjects acting to transform society toward the emancipation of all.

We can therefore consider that, for Freire, emancipation is an indispensable part of the search for humanization, besides being the corollary of this development or of its permanent construction.

### **Human development and emancipation from the standpoint of historical-cultural and historical-critical theories**

The two approaches in question discuss human development, considering the process of emancipation of subjects. Based on the historical-dialectical materialist method, both historical-cultural psychology and historical-critical pedagogy conceive the human being as an essentially social being, who develops in an activity interconnected to nature, through a dialectical movement and a complex historical-social process of objectifications and appropriations.

From the perspective of historical - cultural psychology, the human psyche is a historically and socially constructed product. In other words, the legacy objectified by the historical-social practice presupposes the mediation of educational processes so that the individual can make the transition from a being that has phylogenetically formed properties, natural psychic properties, to a humanized being. From the development of the higher psychic functions that result from the transformations conditioned by the relationship of the individual with the cultural and material riches, systematically elaborated in the course of the history of mankind. In this view, there are the elementary psychic functions, which occur in immediate reflexes in the relation subject and object, and the higher psychic functions, which result from the transformations conditioned by the relationship of the individual with the social work.

About this issue, in dialog with Vygotsky (1995), researcher Lígia Márcia Martins states the following about the qualitative differences between the elementary and higher psychic functions

The first ones he called elementary psychic functions, which guide immediate responses to stimuli and express a fusional relation between subject and object. From them result the immediate reflex acts that, to a certain extent, do not substantially differentiate human behavior from the behavior of other animals, especially the higher animals. The latter, in turn, were qualified as higher psychic functions, which are not formed as a result of hereditary biological devices, but from transformations conditioned by the activity that sustains the individual's relationship with his physical and social environment, that is, they are engendered by social work (MARTINS, 2016, p. 15).

In this perspective, work is the primordial activity for the development of humanity. Moreover, as a category of social life, it is the dimension that promotes the tools and signs that differentiate man from other living beings. That is, humanity is produced by the action of human beings themselves, who, instead of adapting to nature, adapt it to their needs and, through work, the process of humanization is outlined. However, objectification and appropriation do not occur naturally! It takes an educational dynamic of transmission of material and symbolic culture. In other words, the internalization of the culturally and historically objectified occurs in a subjective way through intentional educational relations.

As far as critical historical pedagogy is concerned, educational work allows men to improve their capacity to appropriate and elaborate knowledge. In a way, from an educational point of view, human beings learn the world through different types of knowledge, as Saviani (SAVIANI, 2000, p. 11) states: sensitive, intuitive, affective, intellectual, logical, and rational knowledge, artistic and aesthetic knowledge, and even practical and theoretical knowledge. This set of elements finds its importance as humanity is constituted from their assimilation. "This is because man does not become man naturally; he is not born knowing how to feel, to think, to evaluate, to act. In order to know how to think and feel; to know how to want, act or evaluate, it is necessary to learn, which implies educational work" (SAVIANI, 2000, p. 11).

As a result of these assumptions, systematized and methodical knowledge predominates over spontaneous learning and, in turn, the individual is configured as a human being, being inserted in qualified educational dynamics that allow him to absorb the material and symbolic riches developed by humanity. On the other hand, educational work is not just any activity, without intentionality; on the contrary, it has a purpose and develops in the subjects the ability to reflexively anticipate the action that transforms nature. In this vein, educational activity is oriented to the act of intentionally producing, in a subjective way to individuals, the human

development engendered by the collectivity in the outlining of its social history. And according to Saviani

[...] the object of education concerns, on the one hand, the identification of the cultural elements that need to be assimilated by individuals of the human species in order for them to become human and, on the other hand, and concomitantly, the discovery of the most adequate ways to achieve this goal (SAVIANI, 2000, p. 17).

The educational work must promote tools that help subjects to distinguish between what is essential and what is secondary, as well as organize the proper means that are expressed by contents, spaces, time, and procedures, so that each individual can perform his movement of assimilation of knowledge and know-how, involving him in an emancipatory dynamic that, in turn, allows subjects to mean their realities imbued with the historical-cultural apparatus of humanity.

The symbolic universe and the instrumentalization of the human being need teaching, because it concerns the collective work objectified in a cultural-historical way. The cultural-historical psychology reinforces this statement by developing the concept of "sign", an element that acts upon the functions and transforms spontaneous processes into intentional movements. This movement qualifies the development, although it is conditioned to the signs already available to the subjects (social devices). So to speak, the sign appears as a mediating tool that, in turn, provokes transformations through the interconnection of psychic properties. It is also a "[...] symbolic universe through which the objects and phenomena of concrete reality conquer another form of existence: the form of abstract existence embodied in the subjective image of objective reality" (MARTINS, 2016, p. 16).

The interface between historical-cultural psychology and historical-critical pedagogy is expressed by the fact that both currents present the socialization of culturally formed and systematized knowledge as a central point for human development. Conversing with Demerval Saviani, Professor Ligia M. Martins advocates that critical-historical pedagogy privileges the teaching of historically systematized knowledge, overcoming the idea that human development occurs through actions that reproduce only aspects of daily life. This positioning expresses the characteristic of the educational action for the pedagogy in question, which promotes the dialectic between form and content, that is, the psychic functions are developed through guiding activities that sustain the periodization of development fostered by the tension between the concrete and the abstract, "springs" that propel logical reasoning operations, which are revealed when the sensorial capture proves to be insufficient. And, along these lines, the formation of

concepts occurs during all phases of development and the school plays a fundamental role in this process.

We also highlight the relationship between teaching and development in a dynamic of interdependence, in which the contradictions between biological and cultural processes are synthesized in a mediated way by devices (signs) that qualify the development and keep it moving. There is no development in inertia! Similarly, critical historical pedagogy calls attention to the need to identify, during the educational action, the conditioning factors at the service of human development.

Given the assumptions that were presented, it is necessary to formalize the intentional role of school education in the movement of human psychism development. In this sense, the school organization should favor the educational action to enable the construction of historical subjects, able to overcome the exploitation conditions to which they are submitted. It is worth pointing out that a formative process is long and schooling takes place under concrete conditions, promoting systematized learning throughout life. So to say, Saviani, as Lígia well observes, exposes the method in five moments:

[...] social practice, problematization, instrumentalization, catharsis, and social practice (requalified) - one must emphasize these are not didactic procedures. As methodological concepts, such moments are abstractions of thought to guide concrete actions in reality (MARTINS 2016, p. 26).

It is a dialectical sequence of a logical organization of teaching in the movement of interaction. Thus, social practice is the starting point of pedagogical work. It is a moment in which the teacher still presents a precarious synthesis and the student a syncretic synthesis, because, in the case of the teacher, he or she is still partially unaware of the reality disposed by the students; and, as for the students, initially there is no dialog between school practice and their social experiences. In a line of development, the articulations between social practices and educational learning lead students and teachers to a logical and dynamic path.

The issue of problematization is translated by the identification of the main problems in social practice and to problematize what is taught in educational practice in order to find knowledge and directions that lead to resolutions. Regarding instrumentalization, it points to the set of resources and appropriations that are available to the teacher for objectification in the act of teaching and, also, the appropriations that will be performed by students in relation to historically systematized knowledge. In turn, the catharsis presents the affirmation of the concretization of learning, how much the educational intentionality was accomplished, in face of the singular appropriation of knowledge historically developed by the collective.



The requalified social practice occurs from the development of pedagogical work that links subject and object in a dialectical movement of appropriation and objectification, in the face of an intentional educational practice. It is in the delineation of these processes that the individual finds himself inserted in a movement of emancipation. As he develops as a human being, he promotes meaning to his existence, imbued with the material and symbolic riches historically developed by humanity.

### **Final considerations**

Throughout the text, it was possible to notice that the analyzed currents present significant contributions for the insertion of individuals in an educational-emancipatory dynamic. Freire calls for the need to develop a dialogical pedagogy, which, in its configuration, assures to the oppressed an emancipatory and liberating process, propitiating the rise to being more. It is worth pointing out that only in this way will everyone be liberated, since in a situation of oppression the two constituent poles do not fit into the humanization that Freire advocates in his pedagogy. This is a movement that opposes an educational model that favors the dominant class, establishing a relationship between oppressors and oppressed in which those who have privilege dictate the behaviors and consciences of those considered unfortunate.

In order to achieve the transformation of humanity through a pedagogy that frees consciences and, consequently, people's position in the world, Freire advocates the implementation of a problematizing and participatory education that is engendered in the curiosity and participation of all, considering each subject as responsible for his own learning and for that of his fellow students. In this sense, one of the key elements that the author presents is the empowerment of the subjects for a collective mobilization with a view to a transforming social praxis, in a liberation process based on the history of the oppressed, in their own struggle for humanity. Furthermore, educational procedures need to create interactions between all subjects and their social, political, and historical contexts, thus overcoming the dualities between subjectivity and objectivity, and establishing intersubjectivities in dialogical and interdependent movements.

In this view, the individual needs to become the protagonist of the history in which he is inserted, fighting for his affirmation in the face of the oppressive violence that seeks to perpetuate itself. Facing the duality: oppressed consciousness and oppressor consciousness, which generates a problem of submission, a humanist and liberating pedagogy is characterized

by motivating men to reflect about the causes that generate oppression and instigate them to a transforming action, what the author calls liberating praxis, a concept elucidated by the author.

It is worth saying, therefore, that recognizing themselves as limited by the concrete situation of oppression, of which the false subject, the false 'being for oneself', is the oppressor, does not yet mean their liberation. As the contradiction of the oppressor, which has its truth in them, as Hegel said, they only overcome the contradiction in which they find themselves, when recognizing themselves as oppressed engages them in the struggle for liberation. It is not enough to know themselves in a dialectical relation with the oppressor - their antagonistic opposite - discovering, for example, that without them the oppressor would not exist, (Hegel) to be in fact liberated. It is necessary, we emphasize, that they give themselves to the liberating praxis (FREIRE, 2005, p. 39).

Faced with this process, a true communion between individuals is necessary for liberation to take place. It is in the discovery of the oppressor and the commitment to liberation that the oppressed begin to believe in themselves. This is a liberating action as a result of conscientization. Freire argues that human beings educate each other mediated by the world; if this were not the case, it could even be seen as a lot of verbiage, blah, blah, blah, innocuous verbiage. On the contrary, the students find in problematizing education the possibility of overcoming the educator- student contradiction in a dialog that directs them to a critical insertion in reality, which allows the oppressed and the oppressors to co-responsibility for liberation. From this perspective, dialogicity becomes the essence of education. Dialog is seen as a human phenomenon, a word that becomes praxis as an act of creation. Freire presents a problematizing education that subsidizes the practice of the humanizing process. This emancipatory movement of social subjects, understood as historical agents in their social praxis, leads to the transformation of relations marked by oppression in the perversely neoliberal capitalist society. This is not an easy process to accomplish, given the incorporation of the oppressive model in the consciousness of the oppressed, which leads them to perpetuate the dehumanizing system as soon as they have the chance to assume the role of oppressor. To break with this dualism installed in the subservient and dominated consciousnesses, that is the fantastic educational role of the transforming Freirian dialogue.

In turn, cultural-historical psychology also presents the human psyche as a historical and socially constructed product. In this way, humanity is produced by the action of human beings themselves who, through work, adapt nature to their needs. And it is through this activity that the humanization process occurs, which does not happen naturally! It is a process embedded in an educational perspective of transmission of material and symbolic culture.

Work, as a category of social life, is the dimension that promotes the tools and signs that differentiate man from other living beings.

For critical historical pedagogy, educational work allows men to improve their capacity to appropriate and elaborate knowledge. Thus, systematized and methodical knowledge prevails over spontaneous learning, and the individual becomes human by being inserted in qualified educational dynamics, which are intentionally developed and subjectively produce human development based on socially constructed cultural riches.

Both historical-cultural psychology and historical-critical pedagogy are fundamentally based on the historical-dialectical materialism method, since they approach human development from a historical-social perspective and both defend the importance of historically developed and accumulated knowledge for the transformation of individuals into humanized beings. Freire, besides the contribution of the mentioned approach in his thought, brought to his theory other perspectives, such as the Christian, the existentialist, the phenomenological, and the pragmatism - in a collection of authors, many of them not very well known and coming from different fields of knowledge - configuring his uniqueness exactly by his ability to merge his concepts with so many contributions, without incurring in the difficulties expected for a similar proposal.

The three approaches present provocations and perspectives regarding the possibility of an emancipating education proposal. It is possible to say that all of them position themselves as critics. Although Paulo Freire is a theorist who dialogues with several sources of inspiration, a fact already pointed out above, a conceptual dialog with the Marxian perspective is possible, as far as the terms used in this article are concerned. However, while in Freire, individuals educate each other mediated by the "world", in the cultural-historical and critical-historical theories, educational work occurs not only through the mediation of individuals in the world, but also considers the important path of signs, instruments that allow individuals to develop themselves through educational procedures.

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