

# Is freedom social achievement? Freire and Vygotsky from the perspective of human rights education\*

Andressa Urtiga Moreira<sup>1</sup>  
ORCID: 0000-0001-6027-7368  
Lúcia Helena Cavasin Zabotto Pulino<sup>1</sup>  
ORCID: 0000-0002-4701-2872

## Abstract

Freedom as a concept has been investigated by countless areas of human knowledge such as Art/Poetics, Philosophy, Law, Education, Psychology, among others. In the present article, we develop a theoretical essay on freedom emphasizing the contributions of Paulo Freire and Lev Vygotsky from the perspective of education in and for human rights. Therefore, we also discuss some historical, etymological and philosophical contributions of the term in question. In this regard, we highlight the relationship between freedom, education and politics, enduring since antiquity. The relations between education, freedom and politics are also emphasized when dealing with Freire's contributions, which discuss education as praxis of freedom, considering the capacity for reflection/criticism, mobilization and human creation based on the concept of awareness. Lev Vygotsky, on the other hand, while developing his psychological theory which emphasizes the social constitution of the psyche, reflects on consciousness and freedom, pointing up the emotional dimension. In this bias, based on some approximations between authors, we aim to contribute to the debate regarding freedom, education and democracy or, still, to the creation of more just and solidary social models, which take affectivity and responsibility/commitment as fundamental aspects of freedom itself.

## Keywords

Freedom – Fair School – Human Rights – Paulo Freire – Lev Vygotsky

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**1-** Universidade de Brasília - Brasília, Distrito Federal, Brazil. Contacts: andressamoreiraprof@gmail.com; luciahelenaczp@gmail.com.



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## Introduction

In this article, we have developed a theoretical essay on freedom, considering the nature of an essay of not intending to give exact or unique answers about a given human problem/concern, but to promote discussions that aim at the enhancement and orientation of a specific field of study (MENEGETTI, 2011). Thus, our goal is to reflect on the notion of freedom from a dialogue between propositions of authors Paulo Freire and Lev Vygotsky, funded on the perspective of education in and for human rights (EHR). This perspective is forged in the transition from a military dictatorship to a democratic regime in various countries, now referred as political opening, and points up the wrestles and achievements of the so-called social minorities in the face of authoritarian government and other authoritarianism (SOUSA, 2016; SOUSA JUNIOR, 2016).

Currently, the theoretical dialogue between authors such as Freire and Vygotsky has been relapsing in several works - among which we find the present study - that aim to contribute to educational and psychosocial development based on social justice and solidarity (CABRAL *et al.*, 2015; CASTRO, 2015; TORRES; ALVARADO, 2019). For Alves (2012, p. 33), Freire and Vygotsky:

[...] they share a theoretical-epistemological and political position [materialist, historical and dialectic] in defence of [the human being] as [subject] in transformation, product and process of the dialectical movement of socio-cultural relations in which they are immersed.

From this theoretical-epistemological conception, which defends the notion of human beings as a historical, cultural, active, and political subjects, initially we debate about some of Freire's contributions with emphasis on the work *Educação como prática da liberdade* [*Education: the practice of freedom*]. In this context, we investigate the social aspects of freedom relating to pedagogical praxis. We also discuss some of Freire's contributions to EHR based on the concept of popular education.

In addition, we analyse the concept of freedom funded on some historical, etymological and philosophical perspectives on the term. In this section, we highlight the relations between freedom, education and politics, enduring since antiquity.

Further on, we weave some approximations between Freire's pedagogy and historical-cultural psychology proposed by Vygotsky. In the light of this dialogue, we discuss social freedom from the notion of consciousness (in Freire and Vygotsky) and awareness (in Freire); relevant concepts to comprehend the propositions of both researchers. In this sense, we also present affection, responsibility and solidarity as fundamental dimensions to human emancipation.

Thus, based on this theoretical dialogue between Freire's pedagogy, historical-cultural psychology and EHR, we inquire: are we born free or do we achieve our freedom? Is it possible to be free or to conquer our own freedom in isolation (individually)? After all, is freedom a social achievement?

## **Education: the practice of freedom: considerations on the work and its author**

The 1960s in Brazil have historically been marked by various social movements against the military regime, which, years later, boosted the so-called democratic conquests. During this period, more precisely in 1967, Paulo Freire [1921-1997] published his first book, called *Education: the practice of freedom* in which education is discussed based on the concepts of humanization, awareness, democracy, emancipation, among others.

In the presentation of the book, philosopher Pierre Furter (1967) discusses Freire's writing, characterizing it as dialogue - as a pedagogical activity for excellence. Furter affirms Freire's writing is such as a dialectic of continuity/discontinuity of the word that, in turn, encompasses the flow of speech and the reflexive pauses necessary for the transformation of writing itself (or theory) into concrete actions (in practice). In Freirean terms, it is a generating writing (generating word), which mobilizes to a pedagogical praxis aligned with social justice.

According to Furter (1967, p. 2), "education as practice of freedom can only be entirely fulfilled in a society where they exist as social and political conditions of an existence in freedom". For this reason, it is impossible to conceive a liberating pedagogy displaced from these dimensions (political, social and economic). Freire, in addition to being an education theorist and educator, was also a thinker and mobilizer of Brazilian society. Nowadays, his contributions have intertwined with different areas of human knowledge; such as educational, social and community psychology (CABRAL *et al.*, 2015; LIMA, 2005; OLIVEIRA *et al.*, 2008; PETRONI; SOUZA, 2010), for instance.

In the book in question, the author emphasizes the importance of understanding his work from a specific historical, political and cultural context - to which he and his collaborators dedicate much of their writing narrative. However, this does not mean that the reflections proposed in the work deplete in their time, but without a historical understanding of the demands and social conditions such knowledge is susceptible to misinterpretations. Thus, when reflecting on the Freirean notion of freedom, we will seek, as the author defends himself, a critical perspective - which presupposes dialogue, questioning (and doubt), research, the historical context and mobilization as fundamental aspects.

Because of this bias, we also pinpoint the concept of freedom has been present in humanity for centuries and still remains in our days, from anonymous poems on walls, songs or posts on social media to documents that guide Politics and the Law in various nations. Therefore, we aim to discuss some historical, etymological and philosophical notions of the term.

## **Freedom: brief historical, etymological and philosophical contributions**

Etymologically, the word freedom (in Greek) comes from *eleutheria* and refers mainly to movement. In Ancient Greece, the term was associated with the body, the right to *come* and *go* and the absence of limitations and constraints (PORFÍRIO, 2006). According to lawyer Porfirio (2006), the word *libertas*, in Latin, originated the term

*freedom* in Portuguese and means independence; another very complex concept to define. For the author, the most common use of the word is linked to domination, which limit or restrict the right to come and go of subjugated groups (PORFÍRIO, 2006). Consequently, freedom also appears as a kind of social emblem that denounces certain human conditions of dominance/limitation.

For researcher Forero (2016, p. 42), the definition of freedom is quite complex and the multiple semantic categories of the term “[...] are part of the horizons of meanings in the history of ideas, with their contrasts and multiseccular considerations”, hence there is no single convention on this concept. In an effort to understand the notion of freedom in its philosophical, historical and cultural variations, the author weaves a discussion that runs through ancient Greek notions and goes back to the 20th century with Sartre’s existentialism.

For the Greeks, freedom was related to the right to vote in the *polis*, which was exerted only by a certain social parcel recognized as citizens (FORERO, 2016). The construction of this concept was also articulated with a notion of destiny, based on the deterministic philosophical thought of the time: “slaves, women, freedmen and metics were not considered as Greek citizens. In the classical *polis*, citizenship was acquired by birth” (FINLEY *apud* FORERO, 2016, p. 47). Thus, being free - or not - was a human condition designed according to these premises; birth/destiny.

We note that, in Ancient Greece, the concept of freedom was related both to the notion of movement (in Porfirio), and to the right to vote and citizenship (in Forero). Still referring to the ancient Greek, Aristotle articulates the concept of freedom with politics and education (sciences and faculties). Politics, therefore, transcends the right to vote, directly guiding human life (*zoon politikon*). For the philosopher, it is politics that:

[...] determines *which sciences should be studied in a State, which are the ones that each citizen must learn*, and to what extent; and we see that even the faculties held most highly, such as strategy, economics and rhetoric, are subject to it. Now, as politics uses the other sciences and, on the other hand, legislates about what we should and should not do, the purpose of that science must encompass those of others [...]. (ARISTÓTELES, 1991, livro I [book I], p. 6, emphasis added).

Centuries ahead (XVII), Descartes deals with freedom from the notions of free will and knowledge: “knowledge itself matches freedom” (CUNHA, 2011, p. 94). In his book *Meditações [Meditations on First Philosophy]*, the philosopher relates freedom to opinion and the transformation of knowledge about the world and oneself. In this context, the author discusses the effort to achieve knowledge of true and existing things: “[...] I will apply myself seriously and with freedom to destroy in general all my old opinions” (DESCARTES, 1983, *Meditação Primeira [Meditation on First Philosophy]*, n. 2, p. 2).

In the same century, Spinoza questions the limits of freedom opposing the defense of free will, as he sees the human as part of nature and, therefore, subject to the laws that govern the universe (FORERO, 2016). Thus, freedom is defined as a natural right that is not restricted to human beings and their ends, but embraces an infinite and absolutely free power, the divine substance:

[...] every natural thing has its power in God, the right to *exist freely* and to act according to the laws of its own nature. But nature implies an infinite number of laws [...]. Thus, the right of each thing *depends on its links with others*. (ROMANO, 2014, p. 25-26, emphasis added).

The philosopher thinks of freedom as a right that transcends humanity and its utilitarian needs:

[...] indeed, [human beings] could not believe, after having considered things as means, that they were created by themselves; but drawing the conclusion from the means they are habituate to using, they were persuaded that there was one or more rulers of nature, endowed with human freedom, having ensured satisfaction to all their needs and everything done for their usage. (SPINOZA [ESPINOSA], 2014, p. 125).

In the twentieth century, Sartre's philosophy radically reverses the history of metaphysics, and human existence takes a central role in face of essence (CUNHA, 2011). According to Cunha (2011), the notions of consciousness, responsibility and choice are the foundation of Sartrean philosophy in reference to a conception of being free, as well as ethics. For the philosopher:

[...] the essential consequence of our previous observations is that the [human being], being condemned to be free, carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders: he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being. (SARTRE, 1943, p. 677).

However, the innumerable philosophical currents, which have guided the history of human thought about freedom for centuries, do not cease the discussion of the topic. As we enter the field of psychology and education, the concept of freedom takes on new meanings. Therefore, it is essential to clarify which theoretical foundations are considered when we approach it. After all, what is our starting point to discuss the topic? In this journey, however, we can possibly realize that a specific conceptualization of the term dialogue with several other propositions that, at times, sound radically distant from the adopted theoretical perspective. This is because freedom, as a theme, is not intended for just a single strand of human thought. Thereby, an alleged absolute definition of the concept, coming from any orders (academic, religious, etc), would be the very annihilation of freedom as praxis; as we will see in Paulo Freire, from the perspective of education in/for human rights.

## **Education in/for human rights: freedom as pedagogical praxis**

The post-war period (World War I and II) led to a series of traumatic consequences for countless peoples and nations. The cold war and totalitarianisms have given rise to new discussions on the notion of freedom (FORERO, 2016). One of the most relevant actions on the subject, at a global level, was the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*; held by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948.

We note that this Declaration, in its preamble and articles, deals with human freedom from different nouns such as freedoms, free and freely, for example. Each variation has different attributions: freedom of speech, freedom of movement, right to participate freely in cultural life, free and full consent, fundamental freedoms, among others.

In this context, we understand freedom as a fundamental right that bases and constitutes a singular meaning to the other rights present in the Declaration, such as opinion and thought, as pointed out in Article 18: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought [...]” (UN, 1948, p. 25). To promote respect or validation of these rights the document points, still in its preamble, to teaching and education as essential dimensions. Further, in Article 26, instruction is mentioned as a right that must be accessible to all and offered free of charge in its elementary and fundamental degrees. Thus, we understand that education, in addition to being defended as a right for all, is a primary requirement in reference to the warranty of freedom.

From this dialogue between the field of education and the proclaimed human rights, a series of actions/researches - in several countries - that shape the perspective of EHR, such as: the Brazilian Network of Education in Human Rights (created in 1994), the National Human Rights Education Committee (created in 2003), *I Inter-American Colloquium on Human Education and Rights* (held in Argentina in 2006), resolution 16/1, approved by the UN General Assembly (in 2011), the United Nations Declaration on Education and Training in Human Rights, among others (SOUSA, 2016). From that, we note that Latin America has been mobilizing around the theme for decades. In the 1980s, the Inter-American Institute on Human Rights worked to train teachers, researchers and political activists who fought against authoritarian governments restricting democratic processes (SOUSA, 2016); still quite embryonic in the history of Brazil, specifically.

EHR, then, relates directly to actions of a political nature motivated by different groups, such as “NGOs, centers for the defense of human rights and social movements, among others” (SOUSA, 2016, p. 74). In this situation, popular education (PE) practices are rescued, for example, which outline important strategies for mobilizing, denouncing, defending and repairing violations of these rights (ZENAIDE *apud* SOUSA, 2016).

In Brazil, Paulo Freire was one of the main creators and mobilizers of PE. According to this author, the PE displaces the governmental assistentialist/paternalist logic (of doing *for* the people) and promotes actions aimed at autonomy and social emancipation from the perspective of dialogue, therefore, an education that is done along with the people, *by* and *for to* people themselves (FREIRE, 1967, 2005). For Freire (1967, p. 57), “in assistance, there is no responsibility. There is no decision. There are only gestures that reveal passivity and ‘domestication’ of [human beings]”, so there is no effective dialogue. The author remarks, thus, the importance of the active participation of students in the constitution of their own lives, opposing a passive notion found in assistentialist logic (vertical).

In the context of the PE, we also observe that the concept of dialogue goes beyond the right to freedom of expression or opinion and covers freedom in a historical and cultural perspective. On this theme (of freedom), Freire dedicated a considerable part of his studies. In this article, as we have pointed out, we emphasize the book *Education: the practice of freedom*, to reflect on some of his ideas on the subject.

Written in Chile, aforementioned work was produced during Freire's political exile in the period of the military dictatorship, who considered him "a subversive author, enemy of the people and of God", in the words of the author himself, during a public television network interview<sup>2</sup> - still in the 1990s. Years after the end of dictatorship in Brazil, this misperception about the author and his work allowed validation and recognition of his numerous contributions in education; nationally and internationally. This led the government, in 2012, to enact law 12.612 declaring Paulo Freire as Patron of Brazilian Education.

In his trajectory, Freire was openly opposed to any conceptions of society that aimed at exclusion of the people - above all, social minorities - emphasizing the work on youth and adult literacy. Such literacy work transcended the simple mechanical acquisition of reading and writing, encouraging a critical approach of the world (FREIRE, 2008).

Therefore, the PE starts from an inclusive logic, aiming to denounce the various forms of social injustices and their possible transformations. When reflecting on the concept of freedom, Freire (1967) is also based on denouncing these situations of oppression, influenced by Marxist authors such as Fantz Fanon, among others, the educator emphasizes the study of experiences of oppression of/in Latin American countries.

For Weffort (1967, p. 8), "the idea of freedom acquires full significance only when it communes with the concrete struggle [of humanity] to free itself". If different situations of social oppression are not elucidated, there will be no real possibility of mobilization or transformation; not being perceived oppressed, the individual lives an apparent freedom. Thus, the consciousness of one's own condition is a key element, so that studying freedom in Freire also involves reflecting on the notion of the term consciousness.

But, before we approach the Freirean concept of consciousness, we must return to the notion of generating word since, for this author, freedom as a word/concept only acquires meaning when it assumes specific meanings to given groups of people, driving their concrete transformations. Therefore, Freire (1967) invites us to think about the applicability of the term in the daily life, thus, in Freire's pedagogy, it is impossible to conceive a notion of freedom devoid of historical and cultural contextualization.

Freedom takes on specific dimensions based on the social experiences and demands of each era. Without awareness of these demands, freedom itself vanishes and can even be used in the opposite way: in speeches/actions that, in the name of freedom, end up corroborating with the maintenance or creation of new forms of social oppression and violation of humans rights. In post analysis, we observe an important characteristic on Freire's concept of freedom: it is not exclusively conquered by one or another individual, as it can only be carried out in society. Therefore, freedom is collectively and socially conquered. This does not mean that the singularities of subject's experience of freedom are not respected, but, as an effectively generating word, freedom is accomplished in social bases.

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**2-** Video from the collection of the Paulo Freire Reference Center, referring to the television program *Matéria Prima*, from TV Cultura (31min). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zx-3WVDLzYQ>. Accessed on: 12 abr. 2019.

Based on this contribution, the fight for freedom or human emancipation is, in essence, the fight for humanization itself or for becoming human, in the sense that we are, at all times, constituting ourselves, developing or becoming:

[...] this is the notion – it is good to remember – contained in Hegel’s classic assertion, when he emphasizes that the human condition is not a result of the need for its biological origin, but is a process that is constituted in history. According to him, one is not born a man [...], but becomes a man, as a result of our humanizing action. Or, in a paradigmatic update, to say with Simone de Beauvoir that “one is not born a woman, but becomes a woman”. (SOUSA JUNIOR, 2016, p. 37).

For the historical-cultural psychology, proposed by Lev Vygostky [1896-1934] and other collaborators, human development is a dramatic experience that involves the fabric of social contradictions as well as a clash of systems generated by the conflicting social positions experienced inside the person: “The drama is really full of internal conflict [...]: the dynamics of the personality is the drama” (VIGOTSKI, 2000, p. 35). These internal conflicts are composed by the exercise of otherness, of experiencing the place of the other (SMOLKA, 2009), of being constituted by the other from these contradictions and tensions.

With respect to freedom, we note that these tensions and internal conflicts of each subject have reflected and refracted the socio-political dimension of different cultures, for centuries. The wrestle for freedom announces, in reality, the fight for the end of given human conditions, such as: slavery, the sexual exploitation of children and young people, the countless precarious conditions of work and existence, among others. In addition, this dramatic social constitution, in many historical contexts, also involves the fight for the recognition of humanity itself in those considered inferior or less human, such as: women, black and indigenous peoples, people with special needs and children (SOUSA JUNIOR, 2016).

Regarding this recognition of humanity (in oneself and others), Souza Junior (2016, p. 34) reports an interesting episode, in which a murderer of an indigenous/native man (called *jagunço* in Brazil) upon realizing the cry of his victim utters: “it seemed like a person!”. The word seemed, in this context, may presume a certain astonishment and a faint recognition of the victim’s humanity in his last moments of life. This example alerts us to the complexity involved in recognizing humanity itself, so that, just as freedom is a social achievement, so is humanity. Therefore, we become human in the eyes of each other, according to the singularities, plots and dramas of each time and society.

From this example, Sousa Junior (2016) also warns of the countless similar cases that have occurred in history, in which the violation of rights begins with the mischaracterization of the human being; sometimes brutalized. Thus, depending on socio-political circumstances, actions that involve the defense of proclaimed human rights (and freedom itself, as discussed in this study) assume contradictory characteristics and that go against dehumanization. This is because, in certain contexts, one chooses who has or does not have the right to be – who is and who is not considered human. For this reason, EHR’s perspective assumes that human rights extend to the legal dimension or to abstract theories and are formed from:



[...] a path guided by organized human action in the process of liberation. [...] So that they can be constructed and deconstructed, recognized and denied, made effective and violated in the dialectic of History. (ESCRIVÃO FILHO; SOUSA JUNIOR *apud* SOUSA JUNIOR, 2016, p. 36).

Still on the tensions that encompass human rights and the recognition or denial of humanity, geographer Milton Santos weaves valuable reflections on the concept of citizenship; which, as discussed, has been present in the notion of freedom since ancient philosophy. For Santos (1997, p. 135), citizenship is related to the degree of consciousness people have about their own rights and “the ability to claim their full exercise [...]”, not limited to the laws that deal with the subject. Because of this bias, Santos reinforces that, in Brazil, there are few individuals that can effectively be considered citizens. To defend this idea, the author develops the concept of mutilated citizenships, from which he denounces the conditions of exclusion/oppression experienced by most Brazilians in labor relations, compensation, the right to come and go, in education, among others (SANTOS, 1997).

In this perspective, education – above all, in its institutionalized dimension – can become not a means of guaranteeing and accessing basic rights, as pointed out by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but a way of maintaining exclusions. According to Santos (1996/1997), education can mutilate citizenship by denying people’s access to schools and universities and their permanence in these institutions, for example.

Based on these considerations, we note some interesting relationships between the reflections of Santos and Freire, especially dehumanization and the denunciation of the various forms of social oppression in Brazil. In his work, Freire (1967) highlighted aspects that curtailed freedom and contributed to the objectification and domestication of humanity, in terms of the author himself. Among these constraining aspects, we highlight the lack of dialogue and choice: “few decide for many in a closed perspective” (FREIRE, 1967, p. 48).

For the researcher, the welfare character of the government, the result of a closed society, silenced the people’s choices, or still, did not encourage people to develop capacities for their own choices. In this context, the author states that education is in danger of becoming oppressive; or mutilating the citizenship of the subjects, according to Santos. The Freirean concept of a closed society also denounces a model of society that promotes individualism, a factor that creates the impossibility of being supportive in the public sphere. In this context, the private overrides the public and solidarity becomes very selective. In opposition to the principles of this individualistic model of society, Freire defends an open society, highlighting the importance of education as a practice of dialogue, research and, above all, of transforming reality itself:

[...] an education that would take [humanity] to a new posture in the face of the problems of its time and space. The intimacy with them. That of research instead of the mere, dangerous and boring repetition of passages and statements disconnected from their very conditions of life. The education of “I marvel” and not just “I manufacture”. That of vitality instead of that which insists on the transmission of what Whitehead calls inert ideas - “inert ideas, that is, ideas that the mind

limits itself to receiving without using, checking or transforming them into new combinations". (FREIRE, 1967, p. 93).

The author emphasizes awareness as a fundamental process in this new posture; aimed at social mobilization. But, according to Freire (1967), awareness goes beyond consciousness. However, without consciousness there is no awareness. Thereat, we consider it important to discuss both concepts; consciousness and awareness. To this end, we also fund our analysis in historical-cultural psychology, in which we find a fruitful dialogue with Freirian propositions.

### **Consciousness and awareness: social freedom in Freire and Vygotsky**

Historical-cultural psychology conceives a central role for consciousness in human development, from a materialistic, historical and dialectical perspective. There is a constant tension between the natural and cultural history of the human; or between the history of nature, of a biological order, and the history of the senses, established through social relations (VIGOTSKI, 2000). In this perspective, meaning is directly related to language and emotions: "the affective is constituted by what language brings value, tones to the interior of the subject" (BARBOSA, 2011, p. 21). Sense is, then, a fundamental category of consciousness (NAMURA, 2003).

Luria (1991), one of the main collaborators of historical-cultural psychology, when analysing conscious activity, points out that language radically raises and transforms the level of human psychic processes, as well as work. The notion of work, in turn, is based (both in Vygotsky and Luria) from Karl Marx's contributions on social work.

According to Reale and Antiseri (2005), in the social theory proposed by Marx, work is anthropogenic, it is an ontological necessity. However, social inequalities and various forms of oppression have alienated work (REALE; ANTISERI, 2005). Thus, far from its ontological dimension, work dehumanizes and, from this perspective, we can affirm that work also makes people unaware<sup>3</sup>. This is because, if consciousness is a dimension of the constitution of human psychic itself that enables us to develop, at the same time, the consciousness of our historical condition and the consciousness of our own conscience (FÁVERO, 2005), contradictorily, it can be suppressed; when we bring it to social tensions and alienated models of existence or, in Freirean terms, when we re-objectify and domesticate ourselves.

Despite the risks that given social models, historically formed, offer in relation to consciousness (and human freedom), it is essential to emphasize that Freire and Vygotsky are authors who repudiate any determinisms about the constitution of conscience itself (ALVES, 2012). Thus, both emphasize the active dimension of being; concerning the field of psychological development (in Vygotsky) and education or pedagogical action (in Freire).

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**3-** The expression "unaware", in this context, is related to the idea of brutalization or alienation in the face of social reality.

Along this path, for historical-cultural psychology, the human being develops dialectically. Freire's pedagogy also points up this dialectic nature of human constitution, based on Marxist foundations:

Marx, based on his critical approach, structures important bases for understanding human subjectivity as a social, cultural and historical phenomenon. Marx - comments Freire - put an end to the determinism of subjectivism and built the basis for understanding the dialectical relationship between objectivity and subjectivity. Freire's argument here reflects his critical stance in relation to what he called psychologism or subjectivism, trends that, according to the educator, annihilate the subject and the possibility of becoming conscious [taking conscience] (ALVES, 2012, p. 121, emphasis added).

It is interesting to note the consideration of an active subject in the term to take conscience, since, when using it, Freire develops the notion of consciousness not only as a human characteristic (in general terms), but as a conquered characteristic, we emphasize. When inserting the word *becoming [taking]*, we realize that there is something that needs to be polished or developed; something that, despite belonging to the subject, needs to be worked on or, in other words, needs social work itself in its ontological dimension.

However, becoming conscious, in spite of displacing subjects from a point of mere expectation (or passivity) to a point of desire for participation is not, in itself, awareness (WEFFORT, 1967). However, it already involves a critical dimension (critical consciousness), in which the subject ceases to feel unrelated to his own social conditions, starting to question or problematize them:

[...] themes such as democracy, popular participation, freedom, property, authority, education and many others, [...] had a tonic and a meaning that no longer satisfy the [closed] Society. (FREIRE, 1967, p. 47).

In the closed society model, there are constant risks of suppression of the very act of questioning. Therefore, when people start to exercise it by becoming conscious, this already means a weakening of the surrounding social forces and the sprouting of a more open society, based on dialogue. In this process of becoming conscious, rethinking education is essential and transcends school practices. In reality, more than an action (or a pedagogical practice in itself), Freire defended an awareness of praxis, which aimed to overcome mechanical or automatic social actions, devoid of reflection (ALVES, 2012).

For this reason, when the author affirms education and politics are directly related, it is to say that education mobilizes subjects to transform their concrete lives, the world. In this sense, education does not only move towards becoming conscious, but it is a path of humanization, of awareness. One way:

[...] that would enable man [to humanity] to bravely discuss his problematic. [A] its insertion in this problematic. Let him be warned of the dangers of his time, so that, aware of them, he would

gain the strength and courage to fight, instead of being taken and dragged to the perdition of his own “self”, subjected to the prescriptions of others. Education that would put you in constant dialogue with each other. May it predispose you to constant reviews. Critical analysis of your “findings” [...]. To identify it with scientific methods and processes. (FREIRE, 1967, p. 90).

Thereat, awareness is also an act of social responsibility. It is the action of subjects who are willing to go beyond their own self, who act in solidarity, without, however, submitting to the pride of their time. Subjects who constantly remake themselves and fight for the achievement of their freedoms. Subjects of a subject-society, as the author calls it.

Therefore, when discussing education as a practice of freedom, Freire emphasizes the sense of joint responsibility in this process of emancipation, as it would be inconceivable the idea of freedom from a single subject, separately. Therefore, the exercise of freedom is also an exercise in social entrenchment, in raising awareness about the specifics of their time and culture (FREIRE, 1967). This includes thinking about the knowledge and actions of each people or community, not in the sense of validating them blindly, but of strengthening/recognizing what is proper: their history, their customs and traditions, their arts, their technological and scientific inventions etc. It is from this rooting that the desired and, more than that, concrete transformations (awareness itself) will be constituted; in dialogue (*versus* exploitation) with other societies.

The conquest of freedom then demands political action in the world. Regarding the subject, Freire (1967, p. 36) also warns that, in the intricacies of a closed society, many of these actions can be confused with “dangerous subversion” or “brainwashing”. Therefore, it is important that education constantly promotes a firm support (an attentive and critical stance) to the possible forms of restriction of freedom – historically constituted –, considering the existential dimension of social responsibility:

[...] responsibility is an existential fact. Hence it cannot be incorporated into the [human being] intellectually, but experientially. There is no responsibility in assistentialism. There is no decision. (FREIRE, 1967, p. 57).

For the author, an assistentialist society fears freedom, as it prefers to prescribe rather than to dialogue. There is no joint decision (such as in horizontal logic), but a prescription from one to many (vertical logic). It is a society that also fears the subjects’ own creative dimension: “[...] creating, reinventing” (FREIRE, 1967, p. 62). This is because it judges freedom threatening its own privileges or the privileges of few.

Still on social responsibility, the researcher Sawaia (2009) develops some valuable analysis, emphasizing freedom and social transformation based on the work of Vygotsky and Spinoza. In her studies, the author highlights the dimension of emotions and affections, referring to a political and responsible psychosocial constitution. In this context, responsible social mobilization – which we understand also dialogues with the notion of socially conquered freedom – is only possible:

[...] when the limits imposed on the body are felt as sad affections and its expansion is felt as joy, only when ignorance is experienced as sadness and thinking free as joy, from passions is passed to action. [...] Affections are responsible for joining efforts [...]. This union of bodies and minds constitutes a political and collective subject. (SAWAIA, 2009, p. 370).

Based on Marilena Chaui, Sawaia (2009) goes on to discuss a logic of affections that favors mobilization/union based on the perception of friendship and generosity as something useful<sup>4</sup>; that contributes to psychosocial praxis. The author also stresses social commitment as an ontological dimension; something that, in other words, is inherent in human beings or makes us human.

Freire (1967), as we have elucidated, defends solidarity as a fundamental dimension in the conquest of democracy that, in interpretative developments, we think is related to the conquest of freedom itself. In this perspective, freedom is related to the commitment to one's own existence; dynamic concept that "implies an eternal dialogue of man" (FREIRE, 1967, p. 59). In his solidary praxis, the author reinforced not only the need to fight against various forms of social oppression, but admitted the need for mobilization in the face of the dehumanization of all, including "the powerful" (FREIRE, 1967, p. 50), who in spite of being privileged in closed social models, they are also as dehumanized as the others, who dehumanize themselves: [...] it is essential to note that the in-depth exposure of the situation of the oppressed [in Freire] also involved, implicitly or explicitly, both poles of oppression" (BEISIEGEL, 2018, p. 11).

Furthermore, we emphasize that both historical-cultural psychology and Freire's pedagogy are about freedom in an optimistic perspective. Vygotsky "shares with Spinoza the subject ontology as *freedom* and *development* [...]" (SAWAIA, 2009, p. 369, emphasis added). Freire, on the other hand, defends self-confidence, critical optimism and movement (= transformation or reinvention) as fundamental dimensions of humanization. For this reason, we reinforce that both theories (pedagogical and psychological) repudiate any type of determinism about the human potential in reinventing, recreating, and designing solutions that aim to solve their true desires and needs.

## Final considerations

From the reflections presented in this essay, on the theme of freedom, we return to the questions, initially pointed out, about human emancipation such as: a) an individual/isolated or social and collective aspect? and; b) a condition or achievement? Regarding these questions, we note that, in common sense, the idea of freedom as a synonym for "doing what you want, when you want" is still recurring. This idea is related to a notion about the human being – and his multiple potentialities – directed, above all, to the isolated subject who can do everything ("do it yourself"); achieve ("you are capable"); having (*versus* being) or/and; conquer (by "own merit"). This notion directed at the isolated subject, in turn, is related to an individualistic and consumerist social logic.

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**4-** The expression "something useful" here does not have the same notion of "utilitarian needs", discussed earlier, based on Spinoza. But it concerns the relevance of affection in psychosocial *praxis*.

According to researchers Han (2015) and Aitken (2019), neoliberalism, as a social model present in many countries, has contributed to the maintenance of this logic; individualistic and consumerist. For philosopher Han (2015), this model promotes self-exploitation (alienation from oneself), which culminates in an increasingly sick society. According to this author, currently, people are losing the ability to mobilize together, because one of the hallmarks of neoliberalism is the loss of consciousness, at the social level, of the exploitations (governmental and large multinational companies) – above all, in the dimension of work. In this logic, if the subject does not “work” (he fails, he falls ill, etc.), the responsibility is exclusively his own (HAN, 2015). As for Aitken (2019, p. 11), “neoliberal ethics gives power and freedom to the market, with the argument that all people win”. It is, therefore, a kind of universalist / homogenizing ethics.

Thus, in this essay, we seek to develop a conception of freedom that refutes any individualistic and homogenizing perspectives, based on the theoretical contributions of Freire, Vygotsky and EHR. We emphasize that EHR has historically debated the relevance of a dialogue between education and politics, in view of the realization of ideal data ruling the notion of democracy – another complex concept to define –, such as social justice and freedom itself.

Presently, Brazil has been a scenario for debates about the political dimension in schools and universities. In this context, the relevance of Freire’s work for education has been questioned, even by government representatives. As we have discussed, it is important that the study or analysis of Freire’s pedagogy start from a critical, careful and responsible perspective, promoted from a broad dialogue with society (teachers, researchers, students etc.).

Considering this critical (optimistic) and dialogical perspective, we then discuss Freire’s notion of freedom as pedagogical praxis. In this context, we analyse freedom as a social achievement, in a direct dialogue with the political sphere of life, broadly. Thus, we reaffirm that we are political individuals, and that politics is not limited to party/government affiliations.

As we have indicated, since antiquity (in Aristotle), politics permeates education directly: it is the political sphere that, after all, guides which areas of knowledge will be most contemplated or neglected in school institutions, for example. In this sense, we think it is impossible to implement an inclusive and emancipatory pedagogy – in schools and other pedagogical spaces –, which avoids political and social dimensions of education itself, or its reflective, mobilizing and responsible capacity.

We also draw some approximations between historical-cultural psychology and Freire’s pedagogy, based on the concepts of consciousness and awareness, and the model of open society. This model deals with the importance of dialogue and respect for human dignity in its diversity. Thereat, we think that the referred social model is also related to the perspective of EHR, which, in turn, conceives human rights beyond the legal sphere.

In addition, we reinforce the need to recognize the dimension of affections and emotions, in the (socio-political) conquest of freedom, in order to create more solidary paths. In this process, we understand that the subjective dimension, which permeates the

discussion on the theme of freedom, is not refuted, but thought from the constant exercise of otherness, commitment, and social responsibility.

Furthermore, we understand that freedom, as a social achievement, is not related to a possible exploratory or colonial character of the term, such as, for example, conquering a given territory or people. However, it refers to the human being's active capacity (*versus* passive or conformist) to deliberate and mobilize together. An achievement that relates to the social potential of recreation and the involvement of subjects in their own processes and paths; that are historical and cultural. Thus, we seek to contribute also to new discussions on the current socio-political models, based on the notion of freedom and social justice; which transcends the idea of legal justice, we reinforce.

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**Andressa Urtiga Moreira** is a teacher at the State Department of Education of the Federal District, artist and doctoral student in human development and health processes – area of human development and education, at the Institute of Psychology at the University of Brasília. Develops research on education, art and developmental psychology.

**Lúcia Helena Cavasin Zabotto Pulino** is a psychologist and associate professor at the Department of Educational Psychology and graduate programs in Developmental Psychology and School Psychology (PGPDS), as well as in Human Rights and Citizenship (CEAM) at the University of Brasília. PhD in philosophy from the State University of Campinas (Unicamp), with postdoctoral stages in Philosophy (Aesthetics) and at Postgraduate Program in Education from the State University of Rio de Janeiro (Proped - UERJ).