

Paulo Freire and Latin American pedagogy: the construction of a pedagogical identity

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ABSTRACT

The argument in this essay is that Paulo Freire's pedagogy represents both a consolidation of Latin American pedagogical thinking and the starting point for new developments in the area. The text is divided into four parts. In the first, an attempt is made to look at how Paulo Freire builds his vision of Latin America, with special attention to his time of exile in Chile. The second part deals with understanding the context of praxis at the time when the pedagogy of the oppressed was formed, highlighting the relationship with theology and social research. It follows the identification of sources of the pedagogy of the oppressed, exemplifying how Paulo Freire's work is constituted within a rich pedagogical tradition. Finally, in the fourth part, marks of Latin American pedagogy are highlighted, in which the presence of Paulo Freire is more evident. The conclusion points to perspectives for future research in the context of the follow up of the centenary of Paulo Freire's birth.

KEYWORDS

Paulo Freire; Latin American pedagogy; Latin America; popular education.

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PAULO FREIRE E A PEDAGOGIA LATINO-AMERICANA: A CONSTRUÇÃO DE UMA IDENTIDADE PEDAGÓGICA

RESUMO

O argumento neste ensaio é que a pedagogia de Paulo Freire representa tanto uma consolidação do pensamento pedagógico latino-americano quanto o ponto de partida para novos desenvolvimentos na área. O texto está dividido em quatro partes. Na primeira, procura-se olhar como Paulo Freire constrói a sua visão de América Latina, com especial atenção para o tempo de exílio no Chile. A segunda parte trata de compreender o contexto de práxis na época em que se forma a pedagogia do oprimido, destacando a relação com a teologia e a pesquisa social. Segue-se a identificação de antecedentes da pedagogia do oprimido, exemplificando como a obra de Paulo Freire se constitui dentro de uma rica tradição pedagógica. Por fim, na quarta parte, são destacadas marcas da pedagogia latino-americana nas quais se faz presente de maneira mais evidente a presença de Paulo Freire. A conclusão aponta perspectivas para futuras pesquisas como seguimento do centenário do nascimento de Paulo Freire.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Paulo Freire; pedagogia latino-americana; América Latina; educação popular.

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RESUMEN

El argumento de este ensayo es que la pedagogía de Paulo Freire representa tanto una consolidación del pensamiento pedagógico latinoamericano como el punto de partida para nuevos desarrollos en el área. El texto se divide en cuatro partes. En la primera parte, tratamos de mirar cómo Paulo Freire construye su visión de América Latina, con especial atención a la época del exilio en Chile. La segunda parte trata de comprender el contexto de la praxis en el momento en que se formó la pedagogía del oprimido, destacando la relación con la teología y la investigación social. Sigue la identificación de antecedentes de la pedagogía del oprimido, ejemplificando cómo la obra de Paulo Freire se constituye dentro de una rica tradición pedagógica. Finalmente, en la cuarta parte, se destacan marcas de la pedagogía latinoamericana en las que se hace más evidente la presencia de Paulo Freire. La conclusión apunta perspectivas para futuras investigaciones en el contexto del seguimiento del centenario del nacimiento de Paulo Freire.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Paulo Freire; pedagogía latinoamericana; América Latina; educación popular.

INTRODUCTION

Paulo Freire's work is now definitively incorporated into international pedagogical reflection. This is proved by the broad repercussions of the centennial of his birth (1921–2021) worldwide, especially in Latin America. Nonetheless, this does not mean that there is consensus regarding the relationship which it represents in each sociopolitical and theoretical context. In the same way as his professional performance due both to exile and to personal options led Freire to wander over all continents, so too his pedagogy was translated into different cultures and teaching traditions. Translation, in this case, does not refer only to the written text, but to the transculturation of its pedagogical ideas. This is found both in the prioritization of given concepts and in the meaning attributed to them and to the respective practices. An inventory of these different appropriations of the work of Paulo Freire, preferably international and comparative in nature, still remains to be done.

The point of interest in this text is to understand the work of Paul Freire and its relationship with Latin American pedagogy. The argument that I propose and construct is that his pedagogy represents both a consolidation of Latin American pedagogical thinking and the point of departure for new developments in this field. The work of Paulo Freire, even if implicitly, arises within a pedagogical tradition that has been largely ignored by educators, and little studied.¹ At the same time, it represents an anchor for a great diversity of educational practices with their respective theorizations.

This article is divided into four parts. In the first, it is sought to look at how Paulo Freire constructs his vision of Latin America, namely his Latin Americanness. Relations between Brazil and the other countries of Latin America are known to be ambiguous. Even sharing the history of predatory and genocidal colonization, it is difficult to recognize this as belonging to a same past and probably to a same destiny. The expression “Brazil and Latin America” shows this tension, if not separation, between “us” Brazilians and “them” Latin Americans. Paulo Freire, like most Brazilians, had to unlearn this vision and construct a more integrating perspective of Latin America.

The second part deals with understanding the context of praxis at the time when the pedagogy of the oppressed was formed. I do not refer explicitly to the book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, but to his work as a whole, which, as he himself says, represents extensions, explicitations and revisions of the idea of pedagogical praxis of the oppressed in their struggle for freedom. The pedagogy of the oppressed appears at a time of “cultural revolution” that ranges from customs, to art, to the academy.² This text will give special attention to theology and the research methodology.

Next is the identification of some background of the pedagogy of the oppressed, showing examples of how Paulo Freire's pedagogy echoes a rich pedagogical tradition, that is unfortunately little known and studied. These are educational practices constructed over centuries of resistance and search for emancipatory alternatives. Approximations to Guaman Poma de Ayala, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Simón Rodríguez, José Martí, José Carlos Mariátegui and Gabriela Mistral have been identified.

1 The work *Modelos educativos en la historia de América Latina*, by Gregório Weinberg (2020), is a major contribution to a broad understanding of Latin American education and pedagogy.

2 See the first footnote of the first chapter of *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Freire, 1981).

Finally, in the fourth part, I highlight a few marks of Latin American pedagogy, in which there is a clearer presence of Paulo Freire. The identification of these marks necessarily requires our understanding of Latin America. Even if we were to consider Latin America only as a geographical magnitude on the world map, it would be difficult to ignore that cultural diversity provides the creation of specific educational projects. The marks, however, acquire greater evidence and forcefulness if we look at Latin America as a socio-political reality constructed on the pillars of oppression of a large part of the population, conjugated with the predatory exploitation of nature. As a counterpoint, respectively, the marks of what we call Latin American pedagogy are constituted among the struggles to overcome this reality.³

THE FORMATION OF LATIN AMERICANNES

The first books by Paulo Freire, *Educação e atualidade brasileira* [Education and the current Brazilian situation] and *Educação como prática da liberdade* [Education as a practice of freedom] show the typical university education in Brazil. *Educação e atualidade brasileira*, originally presented as a dissertation in the admission exam for the chair of History and Philosophy of Education at the Fine Arts School of Recife, in 1959, discusses Brazilian reality without an explicit connection to other countries of Latin America. The books published in Argentina and in Mexico are used, together with those published in the United States and in Europe, to handle the Brazilian political formation as regards its inexperience with democracy, the sociopolitical context in which education would have a role in fostering the transition from naïve consciousness to a critical one.

Adriana Puiggrós (2010, p. 42, our translation) observes this lack of articulation which is explicit in the work of Freire with the Latin American pedagogical tradition:

There is a certain lack of explicit articulation between Freire's discourse and the events of Latin American history. More than the topic of fundamental roots (that are never found in the national or regional social past) one misses its inscription in a political-educational heritage.⁴

According to her, it is an unfortunate inheritance from the Treaty of Tordesillas that continues to present itself as an obstacle for a more organic integration among the peoples. This finding still applies today to most of the university education curricula in Brazil, including teacher training.

3 Sometimes one seeks another name for Latin America and the Caribbean using the name Abya Yala, a denomination given to a fraction of the subcontinent by one of the peoples inhabiting Central America. It is a major symbolic acknowledgement of the names that have been erased. On the other hand, the name Latin America brings us to the fact of a reality "invented" (Mignolo, 2005) from outside that, likewise, should not be forgotten.

4 *Hay una cierta insuficiencia de articulación explícita del discurso de Freire con los acontecimientos de la historia latino-americana. Se extraña, más que el tema de las raíces fundamentales (que nunca se encuentran en el pasado social, nacional o regional) las inscripciones en una herencia político-educativa.* (Puiggrós, 2010, p. 42).

The commentary by Adriana Puiggrós, who is one of the most important historians of Latin American education, cannot be seen as a demerit for Paulo Freire. On the contrary, it shows a person who overcame exile, to make of it a unique learning experience, including learning about his *Latin Americanness*. When he left Brazil, Paulo Freire spent about 70 days in Bolivia where, besides the difficulty of adapting to the altitude of La Paz, he experienced another *coup d'état* (Freire, 2006). Although the Bolivian experience was brief and generally dealt with *en passant*, it is difficult to imagine that the indigenous culture present on the streets and in the schools did not have an impact on Freire. Coincidentally, when he stayed in Bolivia again, in Cochabamba, in 1987, Paulo Freire (1987, p. 6) says: "In exile, I learned the need to become uncertain about certainty; it is the only way of being certain. If I come open: I learn and I teach".⁵ Here, after more than two decades, there is the explicit recognition of his learning in terms of a common history and destiny in Latin America:

What we do, we have to do clearly and lucidly regarding the destiny of Latin America. Latin America will not be rehabilitated except by ourselves, fighting for our independences, for our affirmation, for the security of being ourselves, for our coherence with our past, transforming the present to be able to create and invent a better future (Freire, 1987, p. 6, our translation)⁶

After Bolivia comes Chile, where the pedagogy of the oppressed gains the form in which it will henceforth be known and recognized worldwide. The founding experiences of the Brazilian Northeast are tested in a new situation that gives the pedagogy of the oppressed the potency that places it in the world scenario of pedagogy. The stay in Chile, which lasted from November 1964 to April 1969, provided the context for writing some of his most important works,⁷ among them the now classical *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. This was a period of maturing his work that, after Chile, also underwent its academic and international relevance test at the University of Harvard and in the World Council of Churches, between 1970 and 1979.

It should be asked how the experience in Chile, actually his first great international experience, contributed to the fact that Paulo Freire's work became a reference for Latin American pedagogy. The following deepening or extensions, that are provided by this experience and reported in *Pedagogy of Hope* and other testimonies, can be highlighted.

1. The contextuality of the act of knowing: Pedagogical work with new subjects requires relearning the act of producing knowledge on reality. "Chilean reality, he writes, helped me, in being different from ours, to better understand my

⁵ *En el exilio aprendí la necesidad de dejar de estar seguro de la certidumbre; es la única manera de estar seguro. Si vengo abierto: aprendo y enseño.*

⁶ *Lo que hacemos lo tenemos que hacer clara y lucidamente en relación con el destino de América Latina. América Latina no será rehabilitada sino por nosotros mismos, peleando por nuestras independencias, por nuestra afirmación, por la seguridad de ser nosotros, por nuestra coherencia con nuestro pasado, transformando el presente para poder crear e inventar un futuro mejor* (Freire, 1987, p. 6).

⁷ In Chile the book *Education as a practice of freedom* was concluded, and, besides *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, *Education and change* and *Extension or communication* were written.

experiences and these, re-viewed, helped me to understand what occurred or might occur in Chile” (Freire, 1992, p. 44, our translation).⁸ Chilean workers were differentiated in terms of level of education and political awareness, besides the presence of the mapuche indigenous culture in certain regions of Chile. In another testimony, 20 years after he left Chile, we have this statement of humility by someone who knows that one does not teach without learning: “Chile taught me many things. I learned with the Chilean friends and comrades how to learn too” (Freire, 1991, p. 1, our translation).⁹

2. More explicit power relations: In Chile the clash between social classes with antagonistic interests becomes more explicit and is formulated in terms of oppressors and oppressed. Paulo Freire arrives in the country during the rule of Christian democracy led by Eduardo Frei, who had promised a “revolution in freedom” (Triviños and Andreola, 2001, p. 25, our translation). Freire’s thoughts reflect the political disputes that culminated in the election of socialist Salvador Allende, in 1970, then deposed by the military coup in 1973. In a way this anticipated his view on the impossibility of democratizing power between oppressors and oppressed. The dictatorships that took office in several countries of Latin America showed that the metaphor of transit (transition from the object man to the subject man; from object, closed society to subject and open society) proposed in *Education as the practice of freedom* needed to be re-thought.¹⁰
3. Inter and transdisciplinary research integrated with teaching: Ever since his experience in the Brazilian Northeast, Paulo Freire had insisted on the principle that an adult to whom literacy is to be taught is not a void in terms of culture. It was therefore necessary to begin with the everyday life of people for new learning, including literacy skills. In Chile, contact with new cultures provided an opportunity to consolidate this methodology (Gajardo, 2021).
4. A fruitful theoretical context: Paulo Freire recognizes that Santiago, in those days, may have been the best intellectual center of the time in Latin America. According to him, “we learned from the analyses, the reactions, the critiques made by Colombians, Venezuelans, Cubans, Mexicans, Bolivians, Argentinians, Paraguayans, Brazilians, Europeans”. In the same paragraph, however, Freire acknowledges learning with “knowledge of experience made”, “of the dreams, clarity, doubts, ingenuity, ‘tricks’ of the Chilean workers who were more rural than urban in my case” (Freire, 1992, p. 45, our translation).

8 *A realidade chilena, escreve ele, me ajudava, na sua diferença com a nossa, a compreender melhor as minhas experiências e estas, re-vistas, me ajudavam a compreender o que ocorria ou poderia ocorrer no Chile* (Freire, 1992, p. 44).

9 *Chile me enseñó muchas cosas. Aprendí con los amigos y compañeros chilenos como aprender también* (Freire, 1991, p. 1).

10 Marcela Gajardo (2021) highlights that, in this context, strong criticism arose of the work by Paulo Freire, which led the Chilean government to not renew the international consultancy contract through the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization — Unesco.

During his stay in Chile, Paulo Freire was a marked presence in the Intercultural Center of Documentation (1961–1976), founded by Ivan Illich in Cuernavaca, which was the meeting place for important progressive intellectuals of Latin America and the United States, including John Holt, Peter Berger, Paul Goodman, Erich Fromm, and Salazar Bondy (Silva, [s.d.]). In this sense the Center was both the space to strengthen the Latin American perspective in the confrontation with the international vision, and to begin the process of internationalization of his ideas.

It should not be forgotten that, beginning in the 1950s, Latin America was a Cold War space of dispute, with strong ideological clashes. It is symptomatic, for instance, that in his literacy project Paulo Freire did not mention the Literacy Campaign in Cuba, performed in 1961, which practically eliminated illiteracy on the island.¹¹ Nevertheless, Freire will be present during the Literacy Campaign of Nicaragua in 1979, and will continue to wander through Latin America and the Caribbean, learning to be a citizen of this subcontinent where the colonial wounds clamor for justice.

THE CONTEXT OF PRAXIS

There is a consensus in pedagogical literature that in the mid-20th century, more precisely in the 1950s and 1960s, a new phase of popular education was configured. Before this, since the time of independence and constitution of the republics, popular education was synonymous with public education, with all the limitation inherent to this understanding of public, both in terms of access and in terms of quality within a republican vision. The notion of popular education is common to thinkers, politicians and educators as different as Sarmiento (Argentina), Varela (Uruguay) and Martí (Cuba).

What changes in the abovementioned period is the redefinition of popular, giving it a class-conscious character, not necessarily in a more restricted sense of the Marxist tradition, but always with a clear recognition of the social production of inequalities in Latin America. According to the terminologies, this is a reality that allows different looks, but that coincide in the same recognition that we are faced with a situation of social injustice which is condoned by the hegemonic education and that ultimately reproduces it. The terminologies are metaphors that express different images of society: the marginalized from a system constituted by a center and a periphery; the subjugated who are inferior in power relations; the oppressed who are exploited in labor relations and robbed of their humanity; more recently, the excluded who either are included in the measure of the needs of the “insiders”, or are simply disposed of as though they were no longer of use.

In several fields of knowledge and practice there is the acknowledgment that changes would come neither by chance nor as a concession from those who are “at the center”, “on top” or “inside”. Thus, a context is formed of transforming praxis with the groups

11 In the 1950s there was an international movement in favor of literacy education. The book *The Teaching of Reading and Writing, An International Survey*, by William Gray (1969), published in 1956 under the auspices of Unesco, offers an overview of the literacy teaching methods. It was a field of pedagogical experimentation based on the principle of integration of the masses into the new industrial society.

that are on the other, weak, hidden or silenced side of the spectrum of power. Pedagogy of the oppressed is thus part of a political, social and cultural movement that radically questions power relations that produce and maintain inequalities. For our reflection, I highlight two of these fields with which the work of Paulo Freire has a special affinity.

One of them is theology. In several autobiographical reports, Paulo Freire (1971) refers to the religiosity with which he was educated since childhood. He chose the religion of his mother, who was Catholic and helped him make an effective choice. Nevertheless, there was a temporary separation, due to the distance that he saw between what was preached from the pulpits and what one experienced. He returned under the influence of authors such as Tristão de Atayde, Maritain and Bernanos, who identified with the Catholic Action Movement which utilized the see-judge-act method conceived by the Belgian priest Joseph Cardijn.

I mention only two works that arise in what I characterize as the context of praxis in which *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was gestated. In 1969, Rubem Alves published his book *A Theology of Human Hope*, that, according to his testimony, was not published under the title of *Theology of Liberation* only due to a choice made by the North-American editor. In his book he affirms the historicity of salvation, and does not dichotomize transcendence and immanence. "History is thus the medium in and through which God creates for history, man, and himself, a future that does not yet exist, either actually or formally" (Alves, 1969, p. 97). In another passage, love is defined as the dialectics of liberation in history. "From the point of view of the historical experience of community of faith, love is the name for the dialectics of liberation in history. Love is what God does in order to make man free" (*ibidem*, p. 126).¹²

The other work that marks this context of praxis is *Theology of Liberation*, by Gustavo Gutierrez. In the dialogues with Australian educators and theologians¹³ Freire (1974b) cites Gustavo Gutierrez, whom he refers to as his great friend:

I have a great friend who is currently one of the most important theologians in Latin America. He is from Peru, Gustavo Gutierrez. He wrote a lovely book, *Theology of Liberation*.¹⁴ And when we met in Geneva, he told me something very symptomatic... he told me that he had a meeting with some high ranking people

12 Rubem Alves (1987) cites the book *Education as a Practice of Freedom*, published in Brazil in 1967. During that same period, Richard Shaul, a theologian at the Princeton Theological Seminary, where Rubem Alves did his doctorate, already used the manuscript of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* with educators and theologians, and in contact with Paulo Freire acted as an agent for the publication of the book in English, which took place in 1970, by Herder & Herder. Rubem Alves' book was published in Portuguese in 1987 under the title *Da esperança* [On hope].

13 In the same debates, now already as a consultant for the World Council of Churches, Paulo Freire confirms his affinity with theology. "I think, my friends, it is something that I am not, a theologian, however I adore theology. Because, for me, good theology has many things to do, I don't agree with those who say that theology makes no sense. I think that medieval theology does not make sense. But real, historically engaged theology, has many things to do" (Freire, 1974a).

14 The book *Theology of Liberation: Perspectives*, was published in Lima, Peru, in 1971.

of the Church in Rome. And the men who were at a high level in the hierarchy were interested only in testing his faith. So, the greatest concern of these men was to know, pursue, discover in different ways, whether Gutierrez still had faith.

Just like Rubem Alves, for Gustavo Gutierrez (1973) salvation is translated as liberation from all forms of oppression that limit human fulfillment in its plenitude, here and now. He (Gutierrez, 1973) identifies three dimensions in the process of liberation:

1. as an aspiration of all oppressed people and classes, revealing the conflictive character of the economic, social and political processes;
2. as men and women taking on responsibility, conscious of their destiny;
3. as a concept that echoes biblical sources, Christ being the figure that personifies the most profound sense of liberation.

Investigación acción participativa (participatory action-research) is another practice with the same emancipatory impulse of the time. Since the 1950s, Orlando Fals Borda had worked with the agrarian issue in Colombia and sought to break with forms of knowing the peasant reality that describe it and interpret it from outside. I take as reference for this reflection the book *Las revoluciones inconclusas em América Latina* [The Latin American unfinished revolutions], published in 1968. Just like the theologians mentioned above and Paulo Freire himself, Fals Borda (2009, p. 390, our translation) feels that one is living, on the one hand, the great possibility of transformation of society: “We live in the decisive time of a historical subversion on which one seats the bases of a new society”. At the same time he points out an unsolved ontological problem: of knowing who we are and where we are going. And he goes on to warn:

If the Latin Americans—so long-suffering in their perplexity as I myself am today—want to know who we really are and where we are going, we should probably continue to prepare science and patience, and with all our resources the decisive strategy and action that promise to construct a new and better society among us. (*ibidem*, p. 417, our translation)¹⁵

One of these strategies requires recreating social research, moving it away from the positivist precepts. A new social science of the people and for the people should generate knowledge in action itself to potentiate and/or redirect the transformations. For this, there would also be the need to perform interdisciplinary work, breaking up with the fragmentation of knowledge typical of the academic world. This search occurred also in a fruitful dialogue with similar experiences in other parts of the world, as reported in his lecture “*La investigación-acción em convergencias disciplinarias*” [Action-research in disciplinary convergences] (Fals Borda, 2010).

This context of praxis could be expanded to include the fields of communication, arts, philosophy, sociology, psychology, and others. What unites them is

15 *Si los latino-americanos—tan sufridos en la perplexidad como yo mismo lo estoy hoy—queremos saber lo que realmente somos y a donde vamos, probablemente deberíamos continuar preparando a ciencia y paciencia y con todos nuestros recursos aquella estrategia y acción decisivas que prometan construir en nuestro medio una nueva y mejor sociedad (ibidem, p. 417).*

the break with a knowledge that is disconnected with the reality seen from the perspective of the oppressed. The academy, so to say, comes down from its pedestal to relearn a world that it had forgotten or that only served as a source of research.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED

Paulo Freire's work presents a vast and varied range of references. A survey of his writings identified more than 500 sources cited, that go from classical authors to contemporary ones, from philosophy to physics (Pitano, Streck, and Moretti, 2019). There is, nevertheless, as mentioned in the introduction, an absence of female and male thinkers who compose the historical heritage of Latin American pedagogy. This, however, does not devalue his work, nor does it mean that it is disconnected from a pedagogical inheritance which, even if implicitly, we are indebted to. We have the task of completing the picture of whose frame Paulo Freire was one of the most important makers.

I identify only some of these inheritances that echo in the work by Paulo Freire, giving substance to Latin American pedagogy.¹⁶ At the end of the 16th century, Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala denounces, in his *Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno* [New Chronicle and Good Government], addressed to the King and Queen of Spain, the cruelties committed by the *conquistadores*, who created, in our lands, nothing less than an upside down world, the *pachacuti* (Streck, Moretti, and Adams, 2019). It is at the same time a chronicle of resistance, when, for instance, the author attempts to show that, after all, this religion which was being imposed was in fact already present in these lands. Those are the "tricks" (Freire, 1992, p. 107, our translation), sometimes for survival and always for resistance, developed by the oppressed to defend themselves from the violence to which they are being submitted.

Sóror Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651–1695) bears witness to the fact that erudition is not the privilege of a select group, in the case of theologians and religious figures (Streck, Moretti, and Adams, 2019). Her life and work reveal how a woman overcomes misogyny, subordination and exclusion, and achieves scientific and theological knowledge that renders her capable of debating with the intellectuals of her time. It is the voice of a woman present in the formation of Latin American pedagogy, in the struggle for equality and equity.

Simón Rodríguez (1771–1854), known as Simón Bolívar's teacher, is another figure that cannot be absent in the reconstruction of our pedagogical memory. The conquest of political independence should be accompanied by education of the people, and of all indistinctly, as a duty of the State (Streck, 2010). Enlightenment of a few and ignorance of the majority would, according to him, form nothing less than a social monster. Simón Rodríguez launches the roots for a popular education that recognizes the peculiarities of the newly formed republics, that, for this reason, they would be condemned to invent, because the transposition of policies and practices would lead to error and failure.

16 The female and male thinkers mentioned here are referred to in *Fontes da pedagogia latino-americana: uma antologia* [Sources of Latin American Pedagogy: an Antology] (Streck, 2010) and *Fontes da pedagogia latino-americana: heranças (des)coloniais* [Sources of Latin American Pedagogy: (De)colonial Heritages] (Streck, Moretti, and Adams, 2019).

José Martí (1853–1895) translates into his life and work pedagogical principles that compose Latin American pedagogy (Streck, 2010). He perceives that it is necessary for the emancipation of the peoples of our America (*nuestra América*) to have a solid scientific formation along the lines of the best schools in Europe and in the United States, but at the same time an ethical and political formation to promote justice and equality. Anticipating the education in the social movements, he recommends that the itinerant teachers take to the men and women in the rural areas technical knowledge but also the tenderness that is lacking for those who were not spared from the harshness of life.

José Carlos Mariátegui (1894–1930) introduces in Latin American pedagogy the materialistic dialectical perspective, reinterpreting Marx's ideas for the Latin American context, especially the Andean context (Streck, 2010). The defense of a unitary school does not oppose, in this case, the specificities of the Peruvian indigenous culture. He emphasizes the relationship between the educational problems and economic and social reality, criticizing reforms that do not take the context into account. It is also important to have the international perspective, given the new conditions of circulation of ideas and connections in the world of work. "One of the physiognomic characteristics of our time is precisely the universal, fast and fluid circulation of ideas. Intelligence works, at the time, without limitations of borders or distance" (Mariátegui, 2007, p. 107, our translation).¹⁷

Gabriela Mistral (1889–1957), a Chilean poet and educator, gave special attention to children and everyday life (Streck, 2010). Through her, we also provide an example of how Latin American pedagogy is imbued with an aesthetic sense. Freire later emphasized the union of ethics with aesthetics, of beauty with acting fairly. In the message "To the women who teach", Mistral writes:

Teach always; in the yard and on the street, as in the classroom. Teach with attitudes, gesture and word./ Live the beautiful theories. Experience kindness, activity and professional honesty./ Make it unnecessary to undergo the surveillance of the female boss. If you do not surveil someone, you trust them./ If we do not have equality and culture inside the school, where can one demand these things? (*ibidem*, p. 219, our translation)¹⁸

The mentioned Latin American thinkers, women and men, are only one example of the wealth of pedagogical experiences accumulated over the centuries and that are reflected in the work of Paulo Freire. The list can be almost infinitely extended, giving increasing robustness to Latin American pedagogy. How would one not remember, among so many others, Elizardo Pérez with Warisata, the Ayllu school in Bolivia; or the Brazilian Maria Lacerda de Moura with the libertarian education of women? One of our tasks, in the context of the Freirean legacy, as Adriana Puiggrós (2010, p 103, our translation) reminds us, consists of continuing to populate the as yet desert-like pedagogical memory of Latin America:

17 *Uma das características fisionômicas de nossa época é justamente a circulação universal, veloz e fluida das ideias. A inteligência trabalha, nessa época, sem limitações de fronteira nem de distância* (Mariátegui, 2007, p. 107).

18 *Ensinar sempre; no pátio e na rua, como na sala de aula. Ensinar com a atitude, o gesto e a palavra. / Viver as teorias formosas. Viver a bondade, a atividade e a honradez profissional. / Tornar desnecessária a vigilância da chefe. Em quem não se vigia, se confia. / Se não realizamos a igualdade e a cultura dentro da escola, onde se poderão exigir essas coisas?* (*ibidem*, p. 219)

In a sense, my goal is to populate. This coincides with an Argentinian and Alberdian obsession, that of the empty territory. These are fundamental aspects of the symbolic territory, through which passes the nerve of the legacy that constitutes the patrimony we should balance, select, organize. In order to promote new subjects in the scorched earth of Latin American education, it is not enough to call up the new generations. It is necessary to name those of the past, relocate them and relocate ourselves in relation to them and with them. It is only thus that we will make the specter of an unresolved past become productive sediment for the continuity of our history.¹⁹

LATIN AMERICAN PEDAGOGY WITH PAULO FREIRE

Paulo Freire is a reference for a set of educational practices that identify a concept used by himself (Freire, 1992, p. 107, our translation) as progressive, for instance when he talks about the need for the “[...] progressive educator (woman or man) to become familiar with the syntax, with the semantics of the popular groups”. In another passage, he emphasizes that teaching from the progressive perspective, today, means to take a more post-modern than modern attitude. Teaching from the “progressive post-modern” point of view is only valid “[...] when the educatees learn, while learning the *raison d'être* of the object and of its content” (Freire, 1992, p. 81, our translation).

What are the educational practices that fit into the progressive perspective referred to by Paulo Freire? I believe that it is possible to identify at least four large groups:

1. The classical progressive pedagogies identified with the ideas of active education and of the New School are based on the student's experience, the defense of horizontality in pedagogical relations as we find them and the democratization of education. As a background of this school, we find a vast range of educators such as John Dewey, Maria Montessori, Jean Piaget and Célestin Freinet. All of them, in a way, clash with what they identify as traditional education and which, in Paulo Freire, is reflected in distinguishing between a “banking” and a “problematizing” education. The concept *progressive education* is recurrent in the work of John Dewey, as exemplified in the article titled “Progressive education and the Science of education”. A progressive school would be that concerned with growth, with the transformation of experiences, with subordination of achievements from the past to future possibilities, and the science of education would be above all concerned with the conditions that favor learning. Speaking specifically about science of education and its relationship with the schools, he says:

19 *En cierto sentido, mi meta es poblar. Coincide con una obsesión argentina y alberdiana, la del territorio desierto. Se trata de aspectos fundamentales del territorio simbólico, por los cuales pasa el nervio del legado, que constituyen el patrimonio que debemos balancear, seleccionar, ordenar. Para promover nuevos sujetos en la arrasada tierra de la educación latinoamericana, no es suficiente convocar a las nuevas generaciones. Es necesario nombrar las del pasado, reubicarlas y reubicarnos frente a ellas o con ellas. Solo así lograremos que el espectro de un pasado irresuelto se torne sedimento productivo para la continuidad de nuestra historia* (Puiggrós, 2010, p. 103).

But if one conceives that a social order different in quality and direction from the present is desirable and that schools should strive to educate with social change in view by producing individuals not complacent about what already exists, and equipped with desires and abilities to assist in transforming it, quite a different method and content is indicated for educational science. (Dewey, 1974, p. 175)

Maybe not one specific author, but rather many educational practices associated with teaching through projects and approaching the students' reality can be inferred from this more classical vision of progressivism. Into this perspective one may also insert a large part of the clashes over public education, which in Brazil had its greatest advocate in Anísio Teixeira. In the work of Paulo Freire, they would possibly be more closely associated with his first writings, notably *Educação e atualidade brasileira* and *Educação como prática da liberdade*.

2. The critical pedagogies are based on the tradition of historical materialism and their principles are to identify the contradictions in capitalist society, from the perspective of socioenvironmental justice and emancipation from the forms of economic and cultural domination. In Latin America, besides theoreticians of the Frankfurt School such as Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas, other important figures are Louis Althusser and Antônio Gramsci. What distinguishes these pedagogies from the classical progressive ones is an explicit recognition of the power relations that subjugate large portions of the population.

In *Mapeamento da educação crítica* [Mapping critical education], Apple, Au and Gandin (2011, p. 15, our translation) identify the following tasks of critical education, in which a resonance with Paulo Freire is indelibly recognized: to be a “witness to negativity”, showing the relationship between educational policies and practices and the relations of exploitation and domination; to engage in critical analysis, pointing out the contradictions and possible spaces for action; to redefine what is understood by research, taking on the task of a dense description of the transforming practices; to reconstruct the form and content of education, so as to serve the needs of the oppressed; to keep alive the traditions of radical work; to question at the service of whom one knows; to act together with the social movements, supported by their actions; to use the academic “privilege” to open a space in universities and other spaces for those who do not have a voice.

3. The decolonial pedagogies emphasize new manifestations of colonialism and have a historical and theoretical affinity with the post-colonial theories of Asia and Africa, having Catherine Walsh in Latin America as one of the main exponents. In the introduction of the book *Pedagogías de(s) coloniais: Prácticas insurgentes de resistir, (re)existir y re-vivir* [Decolonial pedagogies : Insurgent practices for resisting, (re)existing and re-living], she indicates what appears to be distinctive for decolonial pedagogies.

It is these complex moments of today that provoke movements of theorization and reflection, movements that are not linear but serpentine, not anchored in the search or project of a new critical theory or a theory of social change, but in

constructing paths—for being, thinking, looking, listening, feeling and living with a decolonial sense or horizon. (Walsh, 2013, p. 24, our translation)²⁰

The decolonial pedagogies have as as points in common the criticism of Eurocentrism, emphasizing the need to value regional and autochthonous knowledge. They share with the critical pedagogies the development of anticlass, antipatriarchal and antiracist theoretical perspectives and educational practices. As Walsh points out, they recognize the “serpentine” meanders of social construction which leads to an in-depth and long-term look, even as one rehearses other forms of existing in the world.

4. Popular education is a pedagogical expression born in the context of the emancipatory struggles in Latin America from the second half of last century. If, for authors like Sarmiento and Varela and others contemporaneous to them, popular education was the equivalent to public education, in this new historical context, popular education begins to be identified as the pedagogical dimension—as theory and practice—of the movement of marginalized sectors of society seeking not only insertion into an unjust and unequal society, but change in the power relations that generate this injustice and inequality. Among other aspects, there is an enhancement of the value of the culture of popular groups, seeking to identify and potentiate in this culture the elements that generate change. The fact that some authors speak today of popular educations suggests the multifaceted character of the movements and places in which this educational praxis is generated. It is important, however, not to lose sight of the historical ties that unite these different educational practices and historical and methodological perspectives, that are reconstructed by authors like Carlos Rodrigues Brandão, Oscar Jara, Alfonso Torres Carrillo and Raúl Mejía (Streck and Esteban, 2013).

There is a double plurality in the progressive perspective. First, the plurality of the progressive pedagogical field itself. I believe that when Paulo Freire refers to a progressive perspective in the singular he recognizes affinities of his praxis with each of these elaborations, that, despite having different origins, strategies and theoretical and methodological bases, have in common the goal of overcoming the “banking” education and the promotion of social justice. A second type of plurality is found in each of these theoretical perspectives. For instance, in critical theory, although all recognize the central place of the social and political conditions that produce the inequality, there are points of view as to the role of education in transforming the structures that generate inequalities. In popular education this plurality has been taken more recently as a recognition of the pedagogical differences in the struggle of women, of people of African descent, of indigenous peoples, and others.

Although all these progressive pedagogies have connections with Paulo Freire, it can be said that, from the point of view of Latin American pedagogy,

20 *Son estos momentos complejos de hoy que provocan movimientos de teorización y reflexión, movimientos no lineales sino serpentinis, no anclados en la búsqueda o proyecto de una nueva teoría crítica o de cambio social, sino en la construcción de caminos — de estar, ser, pensar, mirar, escuchar, sentir y vivir con sentido o horizonte de(s)colonial.* (Walsh, 2013, p. 24)

popular education is that to which he shows a more explicit relationship and also that whose origin and development are intrinsically tied to his praxis. In an official document as secretary of education to all schools of the municipal system of São Paulo, under the title “Constructing popular public education: learning is nice but requires effort”, he asks that “[...] the school be a space for *popular education*” (Freire, 2019, p. 61, our translation, emphasis in original). He emphasizes one of the main premises of popular education: “Popular participation in creating culture and education breaks with the tradition that the elite is competent and knows what the needs and interests of all of society are” (*ibidem*, p. 65, our translation). There is a democratization of the competencies and space is opened to other pedagogies.

All this leads us to state that Latin American pedagogy is, on the one hand, multifaceted, but that, mainly due to the convergences with Paulo Freire’s pedagogy, it presents a few distinctive characteristics. It should also be warned that this distinction or originality occurs in the interaction with pedagogies from other places, sometimes as a complementation, other times as a contraposition, and yet other times as an adaptation or integration. I highlight a few of these characteristics:

- An ethical-political commitment to the promotion of social justice. Latin American pedagogy is conscious of existing within power relations that have historically produced the unjust reality that is out there, and that education is only one of the indispensable means to overcome it, but insufficient if conceived in a form that is isolated from other social practices.
- A broader vision of the world. For Paulo Freire the world is history and social relations, but also the birds and plants in the yard, the sea and mangroves of his native country. A loving attitude toward people is extended to the more than human world that cannot be dissociated from the possibility of human achievement. Likewise, citizenship is at the same time situated in a given time and geographic space, but not limited to such time and space.
- Dialogism as a methodological mark. Dialogue is one of the concepts most identified with the Freirean praxis. It is a dialogue that requires commitment, trust in the other, hope for the possibility of change, among other conditions.
- The wholeness of any person, who, in their ontological incompleteness, is permanently seeking to *be more*. Humanization, in tension with the possibility of dehumanization, is not a fixed stage to be reached, but a project to be cared for and worked for in everyday life, with its joys, defeats and challenges. Hence the presence of values such as hope, caring and tolerance, but also indignation, stubbornness and fair rage.
- This is an insurgent and transgressive pedagogy. In Paulo Freire we see a political-pedagogical insurgence and transgression that is characterized by radicalness and affection. Radicalness does not allow the necessary commitment to social justice to become sectarianism. Radicals, on the contrary of sectarians who fix themselves into their positions, seek to go to the root of the problems, with an opening for diverging ideas. Affection, without losing the capacity for indignation, is a revolutionary attitude, as he emphasizes in the last paragraph of *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, where he discusses a theory of dialogical action as a condition for revolution: “If nothing

remains of these pages, something, at least, we hope will remain: our trust in the people. Our faith in men and in the creation of a world in which it is less difficult to love” (Freire, 1981, p. 218, our translation).

IN CONCLUSION

The reflection presented in this essay was based on the premise that, in Paulo Freire, Latin American pedagogy finds an anchoring point in two senses: on the one hand, as the consolidation of a pedagogical memory which is in large part unknown by virtue of colonialism, which is also present in academia, respectively, in the formation of educators (male and female). On the other hand, Paulo Freire also represents a platform for a pedagogical recreation, and this is reflected in the fact that the set of progressive pedagogies finds in him a point of support for their praxis. Here we do not discuss the type of *use* that is made of his pedagogical theory, but we highlight that giving Freire some thought has become a must, even if only by means of a random passage in an epigraph or quotation in a text.

Reflection also shows a few gaps that should be explored and filled. One of them is the more consistent insertion of the thinking of Paul Freire in the Latin American pedagogical ideas constructed over history. We sought to make the point that it does not matter that we do not find in Paulo Freire explicit references to authors like José Martí or José Carlos Mariátegui. The fact is that there is an undoubted proximity between the comprehension of the role of education and the principles that should guide educational practice.

Another front of investigation concerns the appropriation of the ideas of Paulo Freire in the educational practices identified by him as progressive. I believe that the differences are not only a matter of rhetoric, but hide theoretical affinities with and insertion in different discursive and practice communities. The methodical rigorousness and radicalness proposed by Freire are tools that help us find, using a term dear to him, *unity in diversity*. This is not a matter of erasing the differences or discussing who is more or less Freirean, but of identifying the convergences required to deal with the new and old forms of oppression.

Finally, it should be recalled that Latin American pedagogy never was and cannot be created in a bubble, isolated from other parts of the world. Paulo Freire’s work is an example of how originality does not grow in isolation, but in dialogue with other ideas and other projects. The fruitfulness of the pedagogy of the oppressed lies in this connectivity with other experiences that presents both the requirement of deepening and the possibility of broadening.

The centennial of the birth of Paulo Freire (1921–2021) remains a singular opportunity for the collective work of educators and researchers, who unveil new facets of his work, publish interviews and talks that have not been heard before, and establish new connection with thinkers, male and female, of the past and present. Considering the demands made of education in our time, the centennial of Paulo Freire may become Paulo Freire’s century.

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