

Active Methodologies: bases, counterpoints and epistemological (con)fusions

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ABSTRACT – Active Methodologies: bases, counterpoints and epistemological (con)fusions. This paper investigates the bases and foundations of active methodologies. To do so, it uses a bibliographical survey that analyzes the contributions and weaknesses of the pedagogies of essence and existence. The reflections developed are guided by the following questions: What are the strengths and weaknesses of learning by doing? What are the contributions of authors such as Dewey, Freire and Vygotsky? What are the convergences and divergences between these authors' formulations? The synthesis achieved highlights substantive differences between the thinking of these theorists, as well as pointing out that the complexity of pedagogical practice must be removed from any kind of epistemological reductionism that dichotomizes categories such as passive and active methods.

Keywords: Dewey. Teaching and learning. Freire. Active Methodologies. Vygotsky.

RESUMO – Metodologias ativas: bases, contrapontos e (con)fusões epistemológicas. Este trabalho investiga as bases e os fundamentos das metodologias ativas. Para tanto, recorre a uma pesquisa bibliográfica que analisa os contributos e as fragilidades das pedagogias da essência e da existência. As reflexões desenvolvidas são conduzidas pelas seguintes questões: O que se apresenta como potência e como fragilidade sob a insígnia do *learnig by doing*? Quais os contributos de autores como Dewey, Freire e Vygotsky? Quais as convergências e as divergências entre as formulações desses autores? A síntese conseguida evidencia diferenças substantivas entre o pensamento desses teóricos, bem como aponta que a complexidade do fazer pedagógico deve se afastar de qualquer tipo de reducionismo epistemológico que dicotomiza categorias como métodos passivos e ativos.

Palavras-chave: Dewey. Ensino-Aprendizagem. Freire. Metodologias Ativas. Vygotsky.

Teachers need to go to school well fed so that they can face the very hard work of planting trees or simple shrubs of wisdom in soil that, in most cases, is more likely to be sage than fruitful (Saramago, 2014, p. 37).

Introduction¹

The spread of active methodologies in contemporary times has become almost commonplace among teachers and researchers who reflect on education. Initiatives to share methodologies, teaching tips, tools, strategies, etc. that can be used at different levels and in different teaching methods are multiplying around the world among education professionals.

In the current scenario, but not only now, educational investment in active methodologies is practically an imperative, otherwise we will have passive, submissive, unmotivated students and inhabitants of a school *out of touch* with reality. The quantity and variety of psychosensory stimuli to which we are subjected, the advance of mobile technology and the expansion of the network society are also important forces for transforming schools and the ways in which we learn and teach. Social transformations, including technological advances, certainly impose constant challenges on schools.

In this sense, educational research into methods and tools is legitimate and necessary in a world that is constantly changing. Overcoming a paradigm centered exclusively on the teacher's monologue is an urgent action. It turns out, however, that didactic-pedagogical actions do not take place in an epistemological *vacuum*, removed from ways of reading, knowing and conceiving reality. More than that, pedagogical actions, even if they supposedly want to be, are not separate from the world we have and, above all, from the world we want.

Therefore, rather than uncritically adhering to any model, it is important to reflect on the foundations, the conception of the world and of learning on which active methodologies are built. Reflection on action and awareness of what underpins teaching (theoretical basis) are, after all, basic conditions for responsible teaching.

From this perspective of pedagogical praxis, theory and practice come together and feed back into each other in a continuous and inseparable movement aimed at transforming reality (Freire, 1987). Thus, in view of the practices so much in evidence, related to active methodologies, I believe it is necessary to take an *epistemological step back*, to look in depth at the theory that underlies action, a fundamental exercise of teaching activity.

Going back, in this case, doesn't mean a mere, unpretentious return to theorists and theories from the beginning of the last century, but rather questioning and reflecting on how the ideals of the New School reverberate today, especially with regard to the dissemination of active methodologies. What does education, in general, have to gain? Does it also have something to lose? What are the strengths and weaknesses of *learning by doing*? Does teaching, in its most varied

contexts, allow for the importation of teaching and learning *models* or should they always be forged in specific situations? What are the contributions of authors such as Dewey, Freire and Vygotsky, often cited in works on active methodologies? What are the convergences and divergences between these authors' formulations?

These are the points that drive the reflections developed here, without the intention of exhausting them. Given the way and speed with which many experiences of active methodologies are shared, I assume that a good number of the teachers who use them do so without necessarily knowing, understanding or questioning their foundations.

In this paper, then, I seek to critically reflect on the foundations on which active methodologies are built. The aim is not to present the characteristics of this or that strategy, but to understand what lies beyond a didactic action. In order to achieve this goal, I conducted a bibliographical survey that presents, compares and problematizes some of the assumptions of John Dewey, Lev Semionovitch Vygotsky and Paulo Freire.

As a form of organization, I initially present a discussion on the pedagogy of essence and the pedagogy of existence, in light of the contributions of Saviani (1999; 2012) and Suchodolski (2000). Next, I look at the formulations related to the purposes of the New School, of which active methodologies are a tributary, as a way of raising some counterpoints and apparent fusions between different theories. I present and analyze the contributions of Dewey (1965; 2007), one of the precursors and exponents of the New School. These formulations are compared with key points in the theories of Vygotsky (1988; 1998; 2010) and Freire (1987; 2000; 2008).

Pedagogy of essence

The first point to understand is that what we currently call active methodologies is linked to a pedagogical current, which in turn is associated with a philosophical current. Suchodolski (2000) points to two major philosophical currents from which two pedagogical trends also derive: the pedagogies of essence and existence.

The first, which is the subject of the reflection proposed in this section, refers to an idealized world, with a rationalist tradition in Plato and a Christian tradition in Thomas Aquinas (Debesse, 2000). Plato, by distinguishing, in man, what belongs to the shadows from what belongs to the splendid world of ideas, builds, still in antiquity, "the classic motive that led the pedagogy of essence to disregard everything that is empirical in man" (Suchodolski, 2000, p. 16) so that he could prepare himself for an idealized reality.

In this sense, the ideal reality, present in the essence of each individual, is infinitely superior to everyday empiricism, to the prosaic, to immediate desires. According to Plato, it was up to education to lead individuals towards the discovery of the true world, of intelligible, higher knowledge, which was beyond the sensible world. The

proposed task considered that "knowledge of the immutable world of the Idea is only possible as a reminiscence of the life that thought observed in that world, before animating the body and appearing among the reflections of things" (Suchodolski, 2000, p. 16). In other words, education would always be a preparation *for life*, not for the one we have, contaminated by the pettiness of everyday activities, but for another, with the aura of a higher truth, which belongs to the world of thought.

When we think of another life, even if it is anchored in a rationalist vision, it is not difficult to establish links with Christian thought, which emphasized the opposition between a true and eternal reality and an apparent and temporal one (Suchodolski, 2000). If in Plato true reality, the essence of men, was only present in a world of thought, of ideas, in Thomas Aquinas, the encounter with this truth, essence, would only be possible in a heavenly world. Thus, "true education must connect man to his true homeland, the heavenly homeland, and at the same time destroy everything that binds man to his earthly existence" (Suchodolski, 2000, p. 17).

Whatever the perspective, or reasons for its justification, we find in this pedagogy, that of the essence, a move away from the everyday, the common, the empirical. In this sense, education is always a preparation and cannot be confused with the ordinariness of life. In this type of education, there is a clear, and even desirable, gap between the educator and the learner. It is up to the latter to be prepared by the former for a future, higher life, whether in the field of thought or in the field that exceeds the very limits of the condition of human finitude.

This conception of education/society, like any other, already points out, in its assumptions, some of the elements that make up the teaching method. In the pedagogy of essence, with the aim of achieving another life, the gulf that is established between educator and student marks out very well-defined roles. It is up to the former to transmit the knowledge necessary to achieve the proposed objectives. The latter is to receive this knowledge, since what they know so far falls far short of what they need to know in order to achieve this other life.

The pedagogy of essence is the result of what is known as traditional pedagogy, in which the school is seen as a remedy for ignorance and is organized "as an agency centered on the teacher, who transmits the cultural heritage to the students in a logical gradation. It is up to the students to assimilate the knowledge transmitted to them" (Saviani, 1999, p. 18).

The idea of an education that merely transmits is certainly not in line with more recent studies, or even many older ones. Traditional pedagogy carries with it the idea of banking education, which was widely criticized by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. However, the nature of teaching activity, which must move away from any form of Manichaeism, as well as dialectical thinking, which invites us to investigate the antithesis of our own thinking, would be sufficient reasons,

in my opinion, to investigate the contributions of traditional pedagogy.

For example, despite all its problems, traditional pedagogy has a revolutionary character. Although it may seem paradoxical to bring tradition and revolution together, the philosophy of essence, from which traditional pedagogy derives, will be invoked at the historical moment when the bourgeoisie emerges as a revolutionary class. In the transition from the feudal world to modernity, and with the inoculation of ideas that would later become what we know today as capitalism, "[...] the bourgeoisie, a rising class, will manifest itself as a revolutionary class, and, as a revolutionary class, will advocate the philosophy of essence as a support for the defense of the equality of men" (Saviani, 1999, p. 50).

At that moment in history, the revolution consisted precisely of demanding equality between men. To this end, it was necessary to combat the privileges of the classes that held power, prestige and schooling. The aims of the rising social class converged towards a movement to transform the social *status quo* (Saviani, 1999). The revolution that needed to take place, also through education, had the mission of transforming "subjects into citizens" who could participate widely in a society that was moving from a supposed natural right to a contractual right (Saviani, 1999). In this sense, "the philosophy of essence, which will later result in the pedagogy of essence, will make an uncompromising defense of the essential equality of men" (Saviani, 1999, p. 50).

There was also some virtue in the traditional method, albeit questionable, especially if we consider recent production in education: scientificity. The steps of pedagogical action proposed by Herbart (2003) in *General Pedagogy* were in line with the modern scientific method proposed by Francis Bacon. Preparation, presentation, association, system and application (Herbartian steps of pedagogical action) were, in education, to observation, generalization and confirmation (stages of scientific investigation proposed by Bacon), in science (Saviani, 1999).

Therefore, when we look at the surface, the immediate tendency is to criticize based on platitudes, which takes us away from a deeper and more holistic look at phenomena, in this case what is conventionally called traditional teaching. Not that this type of teaching doesn't deserve to be criticized, but in order to do so, we need to get to know it in greater depth.

On the other hand, would a more progressive pedagogy, connected to the current historical moment, which places the student at the *center of* the teaching-learning process and encourages them to develop autonomy, be free of problems and contradictions? What are its gains and limits in terms of promoting education? I'll reflect on these questions in the next section, initially discussing the foundations of the pedagogy of existence until moving on to active methodologies.

Pedagogy of existence

One of the first modern intellectuals to reflect on the limits of traditional education and propose a "pedagogy of nature" (Suchodolski, 2000) was the Czech philosopher John Amos Comenius (1593-1670), considered "the creator of Modern Didactics" (Walker, 2001), who already pointed to a pedagogy that saw the student as a subject with *needs*. For Comenius, it was important to consider the needs and natural aptitudes of students, who should not be coerced into doing something against their will. This is how the educator put it: "[...] when no pupil is forced to do anything against his *will*, there will be nothing to generate nausea and dull the mind, whoever he may be, but each one will progress easily in those studies [...]" (Comênio, 2015, p. 301, my emphasis).

The concession that Comenius, in the 17th century, made to the real life of the student, with the revision of traditional teaching methods, would find further development with Rousseau, in the following century. If, for Comenius, empiricism, although important, was dangerous because it was the fruit of the corruption of souls, for Rousseau it was the *source of* education. For Rousseau, education was far from being a preparation for life, education was life itself, based on actions, experiences: "Those of us who can best bear the goods and evils of this life are, in my opinion, the best educated; it follows that true education *consists less in precepts than in exercises*" (Rousseau, 1995, p. 16, my emphasis).

Here we can already see a kind of *pedagogical turning point*, which will be the source of many subsequent theories, including active methodologies, which place the student at the center of the educational process. The student is not simply the object of education (pedagogy of essence), but its source (pedagogy of existence) (Suchodolski, 2000). The empirical subject, rather than someone who needs to search for or (re)discover their essence, is someone who has a real existence and is the beacon of educational processes. If (self-) education begins with life itself, we shouldn't talk about education *for* life (preparation), but education in life (perennial process).

In the philosophical questions that drive Rousseau's thinking, we find strong interfaces with what we now call active methodologies. What is living experiences in order to learn (Rousseau, 1995) if not active learning from a given context that is meaningful, relevant and close to the level of skills that the student already possesses (Moran, 2018)? Or even abandoning the student's receptive position and inviting them to participate in the process from new and different perspectives (Mattar, 2017)?

Moreover, what is the desire to learn, proclaimed by Rousseau in the 18th century, if not the motto learning to learn/know, proclaimed by Delors in the 20th century as one of the global challenges for education in the 21st century? For Delors, society must move towards an *educational society*, in which personal life itself already of-

fers individuals many opportunities to progress in knowledge and it would be up to the school to pass on to them "even more the taste and pleasure of learning, the ability to learn even more, intellectual curiosity" (Delors, 2000, p. 18). More than two centuries separate the writings of Rousseau and Delors, but spontaneism, experience and the centrality of the individual in educational processes seem to unite them.

Rousseau's pedagogy is undoubtedly an important milestone for understanding education that aspires to the development of experiences geared towards life, towards the *existence* of individuals. It was also "the first radical and passionate attempt to fundamentally oppose the pedagogy of essence and to create perspectives for a pedagogy of existence" (Suchodolski, 2000, p. 33). Perspectives followed, despite their differences, by theorists such as Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) and Friedrich Wilhelm August Frobel (1782-1852), who helped build the foundations of a movement that would become known as the *New School*, from which active methodologies derive.

Araújo (2015), in elucidating the foundations of active methodologies in the context of the New School movement, lists a number of important thinkers for the formulation of the thinking that guides school innovation, namely: William James, Adolphe Ferrière, Edouard Claparède and John Dewey. The latter, for some time, has been widely referenced in works dealing with active methodologies (Bot et al., 2005; Diesel; Baldez; Martins, 2017; Uzun, 2021), which is why I believe it is worth knowing and problematizing his foundations, which I do here, comparing his ideas with those of two other authors who are also widely cited, Lev Semionovitch Vygotski and Paulo Freire.

Counterpoints and (con)fusions

In the wake of the dialectical thinking that I propose, which points out advances and even advantages of what is commonly defenestrated, such as Traditional Teaching, I will now reflect on some weaknesses and controversies of what is often enthroned, active methodologies, more specifically their foundations. Throughout history, these have been built on the thinking of a group of theorists, of which the American John Dewey undoubtedly occupies a prominent place, and which I will now discuss.

I start by reflecting on education as *transmission*, a word that is so much abused today. One of the first points made by Dewey (2007, p. 22) concerns "the renewal of life through transmission" as a process that guarantees the continuity of life. For him, "Society exists through a process of transmission, just as biological life does. This transmission occurs, from the oldest to the youngest, through the communication of habits of behavior, thought and feeling."

When dealing with education as a process of *transmission*, the author is not referring to didactic or procedural aspects, but to a more ontological dimension of the process of human formation. We only become human by appropriating what has already been discovered, creat-

ed and built by our predecessors. And this knowledge needs to be communicated and *passed on*. The author recognizes that schools are an important means of transmission, but that, when compared to other agents, they are a "relatively superficial" means (Dewey, 2007, p. 22).

One of the reasons for this superficiality concerns the distance, as civilization advances, between the abilities of the youngest and the interests of adults, who begin to delegate the task of "educating" the youngest to other people in another space. Dewey (2007, p. 25) points out that, "for savages, it would be illogical to look for a place where only learning and teaching took place" and that the knowledge accumulated in these societies, unlike formal "abstract and bookish" education, "is at least put into practice; it is transformed into character; it exists with a depth of meaning that links its practice to the urgent interests of everyday life".

From this information, it is possible to infer that Dewey recognizes the importance of school as a means of transmission that guarantees the continuity of life, but that this institution fulfills its role only partially, since, in general, it distances itself from *practice* and the most urgent interests of the student. Practice, as well as democracy, are values dear to Dewey's thinking, as one of the exponents of American pragmatism and for whom "the connection of consciousness and the world through action was the essence of democracy as a mode of living" (Popkewitz, 2005, p. 19). Education should therefore awaken individuals' consciousness through action and *experience as ways* of participating in the democratic world, which is more than a form of government, it is a collectively shared experience (Dewey, 2007).

Practice and democracy are also values dear to Freirean education. However, Freire was opposed to what he called Deweyian pragmatism, which, according to him, had a neoliberal hue, focused much more on training than on human formation that leads to the transformation of society (Freire, 2000). There is therefore a political difference between these authors. While Dewey's writings seek to overcome the ignorance and cognitive passivity of individual subjects in a given society, Freire advocates the emancipation of subjects who "concomitantly suppress relations of oppression. With it, the 'how' and the 'what for' of education become inseparable: Paulo Freire unifies educational means and ends" (Simon et al., 2014, p. 1357).

Freire's approach to education, like Dewey's postulates, values the students' reality and practice as its foundations. However, the Freirean perspective, rather than practice, envisioned praxis, the articulation between theory and practice, action and reflection, aimed at transforming reality, which is not given, but is continually constructed (Freire, 1987; Freire; Faundez, 1985). In Freire's pedagogy, action/reflection takes place in a "dialogical and non-passivated" way, in which "what [matters most] is that teachers and students assume themselves to be *epistemologically curious* (Freire, 2008, p. 86).

Here is another point that I consider fundamental to the differentiation between Freire and Dewey in terms of learning through ac-

tion. While Dewey overemphasizes the centrality of one of the poles of the teaching-learning process, in this case the learner's experience, for Paulo Freire pedagogical action is shared. The center is essentially the dialogical relationship established between the subjects who teach and learn together. In this relationship, Freire points out that a good teacher's lesson makes the students *tired* and they don't *sleep*. This is because they are brought into the intimacy of the movement of the teacher's thought (Freire, 2008). In other words, the learners' *actions* are mobilized by the teachers' *actions* in a dialogical process.

In this joint action, subjects progress from "spontaneous curiosity" to "epistemological curiosity" (Freire, 2008, p. 88). For Freire, this movement is carried out with the rigor and systematization that teaching requires. In fact, in his classic work *Pedagogy of Autonomy*, every section begins with the expression "Teaching requires [...]". Thus, in order to overcome "banking education", Freire highlights both emotional and affective aspects (humility, tolerance, joy, generosity, etc.) and technical aspects related to teacher training and performance (methodical rigor, research, criticality, professional competence, etc.).

Dewey, on the other hand, when dealing with *learning by doing* and the everyday experience of students (Gadotti, 2003), does not go into more systematic issues in relation to teaching, seeming to revive Rousseauian principles, albeit with distinctions. With regard to Rousseau's propositions, Dewey advances his thinking. For Dewey, unlike Rousseau, "natural or innate capacities provide the initial and limiting forces of all education; but these do not provide its ends and objectives" (Dewey, 2007, p. 110).

Despite this caveat made by Dewey, his ideas are very much influenced by Rousseau and still carry, in my understanding, the belief in a *natural impulse* and in the immediate interests of the learner, which hinder rather than help formative processes. In this case, *learning by doing* is a principle that is more in line with a student's desire or natural *aptitude* than an action forged through the *artifice* of pedagogical intentionality. For Dewey (1965, p. 72), in the same way that "canvases, brushes and paints interest an artist, for example, because they help him to realize his already existing artistic ability", students would only be interested in the experiences/content in which they already had an interest or *predisposition*.

In this case, it would be up to the school to try to find out what these impulses might be and, from there, provide the necessary means for students to experiment. In the example given, a canvas would only be interesting for those who already have *artistic ability*. My questions are: How did some people manage to develop this ability? Is it a kind of natural gift? Would reproducing everyday life at school, based on the student's interests, be enough for their intellectual growth? Would the complete fusion of home life and school life, with the latter guided by the former, be a demonstration of *respect for* the students?

Vygotsky (1988) states that functions in the child's development necessarily appear twice, in this order: at the social level, between people (interpsychological) and then within the child (intrapsychological). The author asserts that "the internalization of *socially* rooted and *historically* developed activities constitutes the characteristic aspect of human psychology [...]" (Vygotsky, 1988, p. 65, my emphasis). Thinking in this way, there is no need to consider an individual's innate capacity for certain activities or an interest that *springs up* spontaneously in students' lives, especially in the lives of those with fewer material resources. The development of the individual is always socially, materially and historically conditioned. In fact, the historical and dialectical materialism of Marx (1818-1883) and Engels (1820-1895) is one of the fundamental bases for Vygotsky's thinking (Oliveira, 1993), information that is sometimes omitted in research, but which I consider necessary.

Curiously, when dealing with active methodologies and the importance of *learning through action*, many works, on the pretext of highlighting the centrality of the learner in pedagogical processes, put Vygotsky and Dewey in parallel as if they were tributaries of a similar vision of society and education, which is a misconception. While Dewey is affiliated with liberal thinking, focusing on the individual, Vygotsky is a cultist of historical and dialectical materialism. This view considers the conditions and contradictions of the ways in which society is organized at a certain historical moment as forces that do not determine, but condition everything that derives from these arrangements. Vygotsky himself was the product of very favorable material conditions, with a family that had resources and a private library (Oliveira, 1993). It was these conditions that enabled him, in his short lifetime, to develop research so relevant to the arts, education and psychology.

The predominantly individual and internal nature of learning is a striking feature of Dewey's work and one that still reverberates today. For Dewey, schools should teach without imposing, without *violating* the internal dispositions of the child or learner, since "one does not teach by externally imposing a subject on the child. Learning involves an active process of organic assimilation, initiated internally" (Dewey, 1965, p. 46).

Taking into account the stage of development of learners, as well as the knowledge they already possess, is very important in school activity. However, *being child-led* is fraught with serious misunderstandings, both at the individual level of cognitive development and at the social level. In the first case, we have to consider that for Vygotsky (2010), learning is not restricted to following internal development, but to driving it forward, since "learning is an intrinsically necessary and universal moment for those *non-natural, but historically formed*, human characteristics to develop in the child" (Vygotskii, 2010, p. 115, my emphasis).

This understanding rules out any kind of innatism or predisposition to study, since this exercise is not *natural*, but forged in the relationships that people establish. There is no hereditary transmission of aptitudes. These are acquired throughout life in a process of appropriation of the culture created by the whole of humanity that preceded us (Leontiev, 2004). It is not only internal development that will guide learning. Mental development will be enhanced by teaching and learning situations. In other words, it is not the young learner's will or *natural aptitude* that should guide study, since this need is produced in the very movement of studying, which allows the student to appropriate knowledge that goes beyond what their everyday life *offers* or what their current development *allows*.

Thus, when Vygotsky (1988) talks about the Zone of Proximal Development (ZDP), the principle goes deeper than the idea that we learn more and better in interaction with people who are at a more advanced stage of development. In Vygotsky's thinking, learning is seen as a constant challenge, as something that breaks the limits of a certain stage of development, as a movement that takes place in a spiral, in an ascending and progressive way. The theorist also makes it clear that good learning not only goes beyond the learner's current development, but also pushes them forward and creates new learning needs.

Returning to Saramago's (2014) epigraph, which opens this article, if the *soil* in which teachers have to *plant* trees of wisdom is more sage-like than fruitful, what would be the best alternative for teachers? Sow the soil and wait for sprouts to appear in the areas that are already fruitful, or intentionally and systematically *produce fruitfulness by plowing and fertilizing the entire soil*? Faced with the specificities of training professionals who are committed to transformation (cognitive, emotional, personal, social), the second alternative seems more coherent to me.

With the allegory I've used in the Portuguese writer's text, I'm not trying to defend a prominently traditional education. *Planting trees of wisdom*, in this case, is not to be confused with banking education, but with the deliberate action of teaching. There is only an *active student* if there is an *active teacher*, since the teacher's job "consists of constructing teaching practices that lead students to learning" (Nóvoa, 2009, p. 3). There is only learning if there is mediation, even in informal situations where learning occurs *naturally*.

If we take Vygotsky's (1988) theoretical assumptions on board, we can't think, for example, of self-taught learning, *free from* any form of human mediation, since instruments and, above all, signs (language, writing, numbers) are social constructions that stand out from mere biological development and create "new forms of psychological processes rooted in culture" (Vygotsky, 1988, p. 45). So, when we say, for example, that someone learned to play the guitar or read without anyone's help, it doesn't mean that there was no mediation. Whether it's the *guitar* instrument or the *writing* sign, we are dealing with hu-

man objectifications that provide the transmission and appropriation of knowledge built up throughout history so that others could be built. Therefore, in all educational processes, even the most informal ones, there is human mediation (Leontiev, 2004).

In the case of the school, this mediation takes place through teaching, which presupposes actions that go far beyond the mere monitoring of activities that are *useful* and *pleasing* to the desires of young learners exposed to all sorts of advertising and, in many cases, immersed in a harsh reality. What would teaching that imposes "something external on the learner" be today, to return to Dewey (1965)? Starting from the child is very valid, as long as this is really only the starting point, never the point of arrival, just like the beginning, since the school should not restrict itself to organizing the student's everyday experiences, but should reveal and expand what immediate experience circumscribes and hides (Saviani, 2012). If we think, for example, about teaching literature in public schools, my field of work, how many students would know *a priori* that they need Florbela Espanca, Mia Couto, Jane Austen, Machado de Assis and so many other men and women who have dedicated themselves to unveiling the bonds of affection and pain that unite humanity and therefore (humanize) us?

Does life itself, in an "educational society", already offer individuals opportunities to progress in knowledge, as proposed by Delors (2000)? To answer this question, we need to think about which life we are talking about. Again, I return to the example of literature. A student who, from an early age, lives with reading parents, who has books in his home, who participates in literary circles with family members, in short, who has a taste for books *created* by these circumstances, will not find a world that is foreign to him at school.

On the other hand, a student whose parents are illiterate or don't like reading literature, or who can't afford to buy books, when faced at school with a world he doesn't yet inhabit, will find in this place his only and final chance to appropriate a form of knowledge that everyday experience hasn't presented to him.

So *education*, like society in general, is very unequal. Therefore, if, under the pretext of valuing youth protagonism, the school only considers the most immediate interests of the students, it will bury the possibility of intellectual ascent for a large part of them, more specifically those with fewer resources. One of the consequences of the pedagogy of existence that I consider to be the most damaging in contemporary times is "curricular customization" (Silva, 2014), a situation in which "students themselves are called upon to produce their own training paths, based on their interests and the opportunities that the knowledge economy can offer them" (Silva, 2014, p. 131).

Being the protagonist of your education cannot mean, at school, *choosing* what you already have or reiterating *experiences*, to use a term dear to the pedagogy of existence, since "the role of the school is not to show the visible face of the moon" (Saviani, 2012, p. 2). In a

nutshell, the school's role is to be a school. This place must be in tune with the historical moment, with the evolution of the network society and with the potential offered by digital tools. It must also have teachers who respect and value the students' prior knowledge, without all of this representing a total (con)fusion between the reality that is captured in the immediacy of life, with its interdicts, and the reality that is revealed and unveiled *in* and *through* pedagogical action.

In fact, in order to achieve the aims of education, it will even be necessary to temporarily suspend the freedom of choice of individuals in training (Duarte, 2018). This idea runs counter to a supposed respect for freedom or the overvaluation of students' choices, not least because this freedom, according to Duarte (2018), is illusory, since these *choices* are often dictated by fads and consumerist impulses.

So, if we want to train autonomous individuals, rather than reiterating what they already know *naturally* without school mediation, we need to *artificially* communicate and produce the needs that young learners don't yet know they have. The idea of something artificial associated with school education can lead to misunderstandings, which is why I think some clarifications are in order. The *artificial* production of needs I'm referring to has a Vygotskian basis and concerns the qualitative leap expected in education, from elementary functions to the development of higher psychological processes. While in the first case there is a *direct* relationship between the individual and a problem situation, in the second there is a relationship *mediated* by the sign, which is placed between the individual and the environment and will require an active and engaged stance from the individual in establishing this link (Vygotsky, 1988).

Artificial, in this case, has nothing to do with the idea of a school dislocated from its historical time or distant from the cultural reality that surrounds the students. Rather, it concerns a mediation activity that is not given by *nature*, but is *constructed*, created in human relationships with the deliberate purpose of promoting learning which, in turn, will uninterruptedly produce the need for new learning. If in Dewey (1965; 2007) the student's active attitude to learning is prompted by everyday experiences and needs, in Vygotsky (1988; 1998; 2010), this attitude is the result of mediation by the sign, which produces new needs that go beyond everyday life and are at the forefront of the students' development.

So, even though Dewey, Vygotsky and Freire are sometimes cited interchangeably in works dealing with active methodologies, there are, as we have seen, differences in their theoretical affiliations and in the way they understand learning. These differences are not mere subtleties; they reveal an understanding of the world and of education that must be taken into account when developing teaching and research activities.

In view of the ideas discussed in this section, it doesn't seem prudent to attribute the *paternity* of active methodologies to this or that theorist, or even to a small group of intellectuals from the 20th

century. What there is, in fact, is a group of thinkers from different eras who helped build what we know today as active *methodologies*. And although the idea of learning by doing prevails, there are substantive differences in the way each theorist conceives of society, education and mediation in formal teaching and learning processes. Placing them together as a theoretical basis for studying active methodologies not only considers only the surface of educational processes, but also obscures distinctions that I consider fundamental when drawing up a proposal that uses these methodologies.

It is also necessary to recognize that the contradictions of human activity are reflected in pedagogical formulations and that there are gains and limits in any of them. This implies that teachers and researchers need to distance themselves from any form of Manichaeism. With regard to active methodologies, there is not, or should not be, room among educators for uncritical enthusiasm, which dulls reflection, nor for counterproductive skepticism, which puts education in a state of inertia in relation to the movement of the world.

Still thinking about these contradictions, it is important to understand that, although several studies refer to a great potential for learning and valuable contributions to education, "active methodologies do not solve all the problems that exist in education, nor is it a guarantee that all students will learn meaningfully" (Uzun, 2021, p. 161). This is a point that is in line with the way I understand any teaching-learning methodology. The fact that there is a large body of work on active methodologies, and that many of them show positive results for learning, does not canonize them, much less make them *infallible*. In fact, research into active methodologies does not *promise* to solve all of education's problems, which are always multifactorial.

On this subject, Pischetola and Miranda (2019) problematize some issues that help to illuminate our understanding of the complexity of pedagogical practice which, under no circumstances, is limited to the *application of a method*. The authors point out that active methodologies are nothing new, criticize the discourse that attributes the power of pedagogical innovation to digital technologies and emphasize that

[...] this focus on mastering technology, which is also present in active methodologies, repeats the technicist pedagogy by considering teachers and students only as executors of so-called innovative proposals, decontextualized and created by education specialists (Pischetola; Miranda, 2019, p. 33, my emphasis).

The authors also highlight another point that I think is fundamental to thinking dialectically about the relationship between lectures and active methodologies. According to them, the association between lectures and school failure is yet another symptom of simplistic thinking, which disregards the fact that, from a critical perspective, lectures can also be transformative in students' lives. "We venture to say that the lecture can itself be considered an active methodology, if the teacher manages to establish dynamics of interaction be-

tween all the components of the class: teacher, environment, knowledge, student" (Pischetola; Miranda, 2019, p. 43). I agree wholeheartedly with what the researchers have said, especially as I am affiliated with the Bakhtinian dialogical perspective of discourse.

Bakhtin (1997), when reflecting on the communicative process (which takes place, for example, in a classroom), proposes an overcoming of the traditional scheme hitherto adopted by Linguistics, which attributed *activity* to the speaker and *passivity* to the listener. For him, "[...] the comprehension of a living speech, of a living utterance, is always accompanied by an *active responsive* attitude" (Bakhtin, 1997, p. 290). If we take the *classroom* event as a communicative act and consider this sense of language, we can conclude that even in the most traditional, *banking* method, centered on teacher exposition, there is student action. In a class thought of in this way, students are *called upon* to assume a responsive attitude that is inexorably active. In other words, even in a *monologic* lesson, it is possible to glimpse the action of a *boiling* thought.

In no way does this reflection mean an uncompromising defense of the traditional model. My intention is really, in the light of a language theorist, to stress a concept from the field of education and, at the same time, to recognize that the technologies we have at our disposal and research into active methodologies today offer us countless ways of giving materiality to the action of thought, to the responses produced by students in teaching-learning situations.

In this sense, it is also necessary to overcome, in education, a dualistic vision, inherited from modernity, which dichotomizes categories such as: *traditional vs. active; student vs. teacher; individual vs. collective; transmission vs. construction*. There are *in-between places* in pedagogical processes that still need to be uncovered in greater depth.

Summary

I began by presenting the current demand for *active methodologies* and justifying the need to reflect on their foundations, potential and weaknesses. I then listed a set of questions that led to the reflections I proposed. Next, I put the philosophical/pedagogical currents of essence and existence in parallel, based on the theoretical framework pointed out, with the aim of better understanding the foundations of active methodologies, as well as their scope, limits and contradictions.

In the section dealing with counterpoints, I discussed some of the assumptions of the New School based on the thinking of one of its main representatives, John Dewey, an author who is widely referenced in works on active methodologies. His ideas were compared with those of other theorists who are also often cited in these works, such as Lev Vygotsky and Paulo Freire.

Through this bibliographical research, it was possible to see that both traditional and active methods need to be analyzed in the

light of the complexity of teaching. The superficial and Manichean view that associates the traditional method with failure and the progressive method with success ignores or obscures this complexity, an action that has been neglected in this work.

There is, for example, a genuine concern with the universalization of education and the systematization of teaching in a scientific way in the genesis of the pedagogy of essence, which I consider to be very positive characteristics. This, of course, does not hide its limits, such as the split between life and education and the centrality of teacher exposure in the teaching process, which gives students a *passive* condition. It is true that, even in this way of teaching, it is possible to glimpse, as discussed, action and critical reflection on the part of the students.

The pedagogy of existence was the topic to which I devoted the most attention because it encompasses active methodologies, which are the subject of this work. This pedagogy emerged as a reaction to the first, with the aim of promoting learning based on valuing the interests and aptitudes of young learners. Inspired by Rousseau, for whom activities should take precedence over precepts, it found greater systematization in Dewey, under the maxim of *learning by doing*. After analyzing his precepts and recognizing his great merits, it was possible to conclude that this author differs substantially from Freire and Vygotsky in terms of his understanding of the world and education.

If learning through experience unites them, the way they understand teaching and teacher mediation separates them. For this reason, I believe that any work that uses active methodologies, based on these theorists, must consider these differences. In the case of this work, the theoretical conception of active methodologies is directly linked to Freirean praxis and Vygotskian mediation.

Without pretending to establish a *decatalogue*, I present a synthesis resulting from this journey: (i) teaching and learning is a process built on the dialogical relationship between the actors; (ii) student action is mobilized by teacher action; (iii) theory and practice feed off each other in an inexorable movement towards personal and social transformations; (iv) the development of the individual, in their singularities, is always socially, materially and historically conditioned and situated; (v) the sensitive experience and daily life of students are (only) starting points for pedagogical processes; (vi) the school has a legal and ethical duty to value the idiosyncrasies of the subjects and, at the same time, present them with challenges that go beyond their *tastes and preferences*; (vii) a taste for study is not something given *a priori*, but built in the very movement of studying and in the objective conditions of individuals; (viii) it is necessary for schools to temporarily suspend the freedom of choice of individuals at an early stage of their education so that they can develop their autonomy over time; (ix) teaching, as a human specificity, does not dispense with methodological rigor and observance of the ethical dimension of teaching;

(x) good pedagogical practices anticipate the stage of development of students, as a way of boosting it.

The summary, of course, is my provisional answer to the questions raised in this work and takes into account the complexity of pedagogical practice. It is provisional because the world in motion constantly calls on us to produce new answers that are also capable of moving the scientific knowledge produced in the Education Sciences. The work is limited to the interpretation I have made of these theorists, which invariably does not escape the constitution of the historical subject who makes it, with all its singularities. Other researchers will be able to confirm, expand or refute the ideas discussed here, which will only enrich the academic debate.

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Note

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