

Interlocutions between the Educational Thought of Pope Francis and Paulo Freire

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ABSTRACT – Interlocutions between the Educational Thought of Pope Francis and Paulo Freire. This article analyzes the educational philosophies of Pope Francis and Paulo Freire, exploring potential dialogues and convergences between their perspectives. Employing a methodological approach based on documentary and bibliographic research, it examines speeches and official documents of Pope Francis alongside Paulo Freire's seminal works: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, *Pedagogy of Autonomy*, and *Pedagogy of Hope*. The analysis reveals significant areas of convergence, as well as nuanced differences, in their approaches to key themes such as humanizing education, integral education, education as an agent of transformation, education and hope, environmental education, and the interconnectedness of education, love, and responsibility.

Keywords: Pope Francis. Paulo Freire. Education. Pedagogy. Humanization.

RESUMO – Interlocuções entre o Pensamento Educacional do Papa Francisco e Paulo Freire. Este artigo analisa o pensamento educacional do Papa Francisco e de Paulo Freire, explorando possíveis interlocuções entre suas perspectivas. Utilizou-se uma abordagem metodológica baseada em pesquisa documental e bibliográfica, examinando discursos e documentos oficiais do Papa Francisco e as obras de Paulo Freire: *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, *Pedagogia da Autonomia* e *Pedagogia da Esperança*. Conclui-se que há uma convergência significativa, bem como diferenças nas abordagens do Papa Francisco e Paulo Freire em relação a temas como: educação humanizadora, educação integral, educação como agente de transformação, educação e esperança, educação ambiental e também educação, amor e responsabilidade.

Palavras-chave: Papa Francisco. Paulo Freire. Educação. Pedagogia. Humanização.

Introduction

Even in contemporary society, experiences of profound dehumanization persist, notably within educational processes. Numerous individuals and communities continue to call for humanization and liberation. Furthermore, exclusionary and elitist educational practices contribute to the marginalization of millions of children and young people from both basic and higher education.

In this context, the central question guiding this work is: What principles and practices can foster a truly humanizing education? This inquiry is particularly relevant given the prominent role of education in Pope Francis' pontificate and Paulo Freire's assertion of its transformative power within society.

Since his ascension to the Bishopric of Rome in 2013, Pope Francis has consistently voiced his concern for education. This commitment led to the establishment of the Gravissimum Educationis Foundation in 2015, dedicated to promoting Catholic education. In 2020, he launched the Global Education Pact, aiming to “[...] reinvigorate the commitment to and with the new generations, renewing the passion for a more inclusive and open education [...]” (Francisco, 2021, n. p.).

Paulo Freire (1921-1997), the esteemed Patron of Brazilian Education, remains a highly influential philosopher and educator of the 20th century. His extensive body of work includes foundational texts such as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), *Pedagogy of Autonomy* (1996), and *Pedagogy of Hope* (1992).

While Pope Francis' role as Bishop of Rome and leader of the Catholic Church primarily involves articulating principles for education, particularly within a Christian context, Paulo Freire was an educator in both theory and practice. His writings directly reflect his pedagogical experiences, presenting both educational principles and a distinct pedagogical framework.

This article analyzes the educational thought of Pope Francis and Paulo Freire, highlighting the principles and practices they advocate for the promotion of a humanized and humanizing education. To achieve this, a qualitative research approach was adopted, examining Pope Francis' speeches and official documents alongside Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, *Pedagogy of Autonomy*, and *Pedagogy of Hope*.

Pope Francis' Educational Thought

We believe that education is one of the most effective ways to humanize the world and history. Education is above all a matter of love and responsibility that is passed on over time from generation to generation (Francisco, 2020b, n.p.).

In a 2015 address at the World Congress promoted by the Congregation for Catholic Education, Pope Francis asserted that: “One cannot speak of Catholic education without speaking of humanity” (Francisco, 2015b, n. p.). That same year, speaking to the Association of Par-

ents of Catholic Schools, he emphasized the “[...] importance of promoting an education for the fullness of humanity, because to speak of Catholic education is to speak of the human, of humanism” (Francisco, 2015c, n. p.).

From these statements, it is evident that education as a means of humanization is a core tenet of Pope Francis' educational vision. He underscores the critical role of education in fostering humanization and the imperative to humanize educational practices, especially in response to the individualism that undermines individuals and institutions, leading to cultural stagnation (Francisco, 2017).

In 2019, with the launch of the Global Education Pact, Pope Francis emphasized the objective of “[...] having the courage to place the person at the center” (Francisco, 2019a, n. p.) of the educational process, advocating for a new humanism. This new humanism entails valuing “[...] every creature, in relation to people and the reality that surrounds it” and promoting “[...] a lifestyle that rejects the throwaway culture” (Francisco, 2019a, n. p.).

The centrality of the person in formative processes is thus a fundamental principle of Pope Francis' educational thought. In a 2022 address, he employed the mythological figure of Aeneas to illustrate this point. Amidst the destruction of Troy, Aeneas carries his aged father, Anchises, and leads his young son, Ascanius, symbolizing the importance of roots and the future. Pope Francis argues that Aeneas' actions exemplify the centrality of the person, prioritizing familial bonds over material possessions. From this, he concludes that “[...] in any educational process it is always necessary to put people at the center” (Francisco, 2022, n. p.).

Another key objective of the Global Education Pact, as highlighted by Pope Francis, is to foster an education that invests “[...] the best energies with creativity and responsibility” (Francisco, 2019a, n. p.). Reinforcing the principle of the person's centrality, he stresses the need for “[...] purposeful and confident action on education for a long-term projection, which does not run aground on the static tendency of conditions” (Francisco, 2019a, n. p.). This proactive stance is crucial for developing individuals who are open-minded, responsible, and capable of building meaningful relationships, thereby contributing to a new humanism (Francisco, 2019a, n. p.). To further elucidate this, Pope Francis revisits the example of Aeneas:

The elderly Anchises represents tradition, which must be respected and preserved. [...] ‘Tradition is the guarantee of the future’, not a museum piece. Ascanius represents the tomorrow that must be guaranteed; Aeneas is the one who acts as a ‘bridge’, ensuring the passage and the relationship between the generations. Indeed, education is always rooted in the past, but not to stop there: it aims at ‘a long-term project’, where the old and the new merge in the composition of a new humanism. [...] The true tradition is this one, which is carried on with the children (Francisco, 2022, n. p.).

Regarding long-term planning in education, Pope Francis emphasizes the principle that “[...] time is superior to space” (Francisco, 2013, p. 222-225; 2015a, p. 178). This principle, he argues, allows for sustained effort without the pressure of immediate results, focusing instead on the development of ongoing processes.

Another significant aspect of Pope Francis' educational thinking, evident in the analyzed speeches, is the concept of integral education. He frequently critiques an education that is overly technical and limited to the mere transmission of content, emphasizing the need for an education that encompasses the full spectrum of human development.

He argues that formal education, a legacy of positivism, focuses only on technicist and intellectualist knowledge, using solely the language of the mind and ignoring other experiences. Formal education is limited to inculcating concepts, becoming selective and exclusive (Francisco, 2015b; 2019b). To overcome this model of selective and exclusive education, Francis advocates an inclusive and informal education that harmoniously integrates the three languages in educational experiences: the mind, the heart, and the hands (Francisco, 2015b, 2023, 2024).

Education must move along these three paths: teaching to think, helping to listen well, and accompanying in doing. In other words, the three languages should be in harmony, so that the child, the young person, thinks what they feel and do, feels what they think and do, and does what they think and feel. And in this way, education becomes inclusive because everyone has a place; inclusive in human terms too (Francisco, 2015b, n. p.).

Francis' proposal for an education that harmoniously teaches the three languages – that of the mind, the heart, and the hands – aligns with the four pillars of education: learning to live together, learning to know, learning to do, and learning to be. These pillars, developed by Jacques Delors in 1996, were published in the Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century (Delors, 1998).

According to Pope Francis, education has always been guided by the principle of “[...] know thyself.” For education to be truly integral, it also needs to be open to the principle of knowing Transcendence, with the aim of educating for the great mystery of life (Francis, 2021). For Pope Francis, an education open to transcendence is one that introduces the totality of truth. In the totality of the human being, there is also the aspect of transcendence, and education cannot ignore this constitutive aspect. Educating for the totality of truth, in Francis' view, means “[...] educating young people and children in human values in all realities, and one of these realities is transcendence” (Francisco, 2015b, n. p.).

During the launch of the Global Education Pact, Pope Francis emphasized the importance of listening and dialogue in educational processes. He emphasized the need to take time to listen carefully to the needs, concerns, and experiences of learners, with the aim of promoting an inclusive and welcoming educational environment (Francisco, 2019a). Listening to the voices of children, adolescents, and

young people is essential in order to include their perspectives and opinions in the educational process. This means giving them the space to be respected and valued, contributing to building a more just and inclusive society. This commitment to participation, equality, and respect for the rights and dignity of each individual promotes a more empathetic, collaborative, and meaningful educational environment (Francisco, 2020b).

By placing listening as an essential component of education, Pope Francis underlines the importance of creating spaces for dialogue where the voices of all those involved in the educational process can be heard and valued. He sees an education that promotes dialogue as one that encourages open, respectful, and constructive communication between educators, students, and society in general. An education that promotes dialogue seeks unity, fraternity, and openness to new experiences and horizons, allowing individuals to become actively and participatively involved in the educational process. Thus, listening and dialogue are considered essential principles in building a more inclusive, collaborative, and enriching education for all (Francisco, 2015b).

An examination of Pope Francis' texts and speeches reveals an intrinsic relationship between education and hope. In the 2013 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* and in his 2018 speech to the members of the Gravissimum Educationis Foundation, Pope Francis states: "[...] let us not allow hope to be stolen from us" (Francisco, 2013, n. 86, 2018, n. p.). According to him, education must meet this expectation, urging educators to instill hope in the globalized world. Hence the invitation to *globalize hope and support the hopes of globalization* (Francisco, 2018, n. 86).

The education proposed by Pope Francis not only teaches hope but also keeps it alive in history (Francisco, 2020b, n. p.). He associates hope with risk, emphasizing that hope is not a superficial optimism but rather "[...] knowing how to risk in the right way, just like education" (Francisco, 2017, n. p.).

In Pope Francis' thinking, hope is intrinsically linked to the idea that change is not only possible but also achievable. He reminds us that life and reality are not static or predetermined.

[...] to educate is to bet on and infuse the present with the hope that breaks through the determinisms and fatalisms with which the selfishness of the strong, the conformism of the vulnerable, and the ideology of the utopian often want to impose themselves as the only possible path. Educating is always an act of hope that invites us to share in transforming the sterile and paralyzing logic of indifference into a different logic, capable of accepting our common belonging (Francisco, 2020b, n. p.).

In this context, Pope Francis highlights the crucial role of education as a transformative force. For him, "[...] only by changing education can the world be changed" (Francis, 2018, n. p.). Faced with the crises of today's world and a development model that generates exclusion and destruction of nature, Francis speaks of the need for a new educational model capable of initiating a new cultural paradigm that

respects human dignity and cares for our Common Home (Francisco, 2019a; 2020b).

Another significant aspect of Pope Francis' educational thinking is the relational and community nature of education. In his speech launching the Global Education Pact, quoting an African proverb, he said that "[...] to educate a child, you need a whole village" (Francisco, 2019a, n. p.). Education is not the sole responsibility of an individual or a single institution. On the contrary, it is a process built and carried out in a relational and communal way. This implies an alliance between all aspects of the person: between study and life; between generations; between teachers, students, families, and civil society, with its intellectual, scientific, artistic, sporting, political, business, religious, and solidarity expressions (Francisco, 2019a).

Educating for service is a central aspect of Pope Francis' educational thinking. In his speech launching the Global Education Pact, he emphasizes that education needs to have the "[...] courage to form people who are ready to put themselves at the service of the community" (Francisco, 2019a, n. p.). For Pope Francis, formation for service implies an educational approach that develops individuals with a strong sense of social responsibility and commitment to others, especially the most vulnerable. This involves the formation of ethical and moral values that encourage altruistic action and care for those in need. In addition, educating for service is essential for cultivating a critical and active conscience, enabling students to recognize and respond to social injustices, promoting responsible citizenship. This approach is vital to facing contemporary challenges and ensuring that future generations are prepared to act for a more humane and supportive world (Francisco, 2022).

Faced with the conflicts and violence that permeate the contemporary world, Pope Francis highlights another requirement of education: "[...] to educate to welcome others" (Francisco, 2021, n. p.), promoting fraternity. According to him, this is the primary purpose of education. In the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis argues that, in order to build a more fraternal world, it is essential to educate the new generations to "[...] recognize, value, and love all people regardless of their physical proximity" (Francisco, 2020a, n. 1). In this context, he suggests that education, which has always been guided by the principle of know thyself, should also be guided by the principle of know your brother, with the aim of educating to welcome the other (Francisco, 2021).

In the context of education for fraternity, Pope Francis believes that religions play a crucial role in the formation of new generations. He calls for religious traditions, with their wisdom and humanity, to be "[...] stimuli for renewed educational action that can make universal brotherhood grow in the world" (Francisco, 2021, n. p.; Francisco; Al-Tayyeb, 2019).

Faced with the environmental emergency, Pope Francis emphasizes that the education of new generations must also be guided by the

principle of knowing creation, with the aim of promoting care for our *Common Home* (Francisco, 2021). In his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, he highlights the need for a new approach to environmental education in order to tackle the current cultural and ecological crisis. The Pope argues that awareness of the seriousness of this crisis must be translated into new habits that go beyond material progress and market-driven consumerism (Francisco, 2015a; 2020b).

According to the Pope, environmental education must expand its objectives to include a critique of the *myths* of modernity, such as individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, and an unregulated market. It must also promote ecological balance on several levels: the inner level with oneself, solidarity with others, the natural level with all living beings, and the spiritual level with God. However, Pope Francis observes that environmental education is often limited to informing and fails to promote the maturation of habits. He argues that the existence of laws and norms is not enough to limit harmful behavior in the long term. Instead, most members of society must accept the legal norm on the basis of appropriate motivations and react with a personal transformation (Francisco, 2015a; 2020b).

Education, according to Pope Francis' vision, is fundamentally a question of love and responsibility. He believes that "[...] education is above all a matter of love and responsibility that is passed on over time from generation to generation" (Francisco, 2020b, n. p.). Therefore, it is an act of love and responsibility towards the new generations. By passing on knowledge, values, and experiences, educators show care, affection, and commitment to the integral development of individuals (Francisco, 2020b).

By placing the person at the center of every educational process, recognizing their dignity, uniqueness, and value, educators demonstrate a love that translates into respect, empathy, and dedication to the well-being and growth of each individual. Therefore, according to Pope Francis, education as an act of love implies cultivating relationships of care, understanding, and mutual support in the educational environment, thus promoting human flourishing and building a more just and fraternal society (Francisco, 2020b).

Paulo Freire's Educational Thought

If nothing remains of these pages, something, at least, we hope will remain: our trust in the people. Our faith in people and in the creation of a world in which it is less difficult to love (Freire, 2023b, p. 253).

A key concept in Paulo Freire's work is the idea of the human being as an *unfinished being*, mirroring the view that humanity is always in a continuous process of development and transformation. This perspective suggests that human beings are, by nature, incomplete, and that this inconclusion is an intrinsic characteristic of the human condition. Inconclusion is therefore not seen as a limitation but rather as an opportunity for growth, creativity, and solidarity.

I like being a man, being people, because I know that my passage through the world is not predetermined, pre-established. That my 'destiny' is not a given, but something that needs to be done and from whose responsibility I cannot exempt myself. I like being people because the history in which I make myself with others and in the making of which I take part is a time of possibilities and not of determinism. This is why I insist so much on problematizing the future and reject its inexorability (Freire, 2023a, p. 52).

Freire (2023a) argues that awareness of our own inconclusiveness is what makes us educable human beings. By recognizing themselves as unfinished, individuals open themselves up to the search for knowledge, critical reflection, and the construction of their identity. This search is a continuous movement, through which education becomes a permanent process of learning and self-knowledge (Freire, 2023a).

Furthermore, the idea of being unfinished is closely linked to the notion that the human being is a historical, social, and relational being. Freire rejects the notion of an abstract man, isolated and disconnected from the world, proposing that a true understanding of the human being must consider his interactions and relationships with the environment and with others. Being in the world means interacting with others and with culture, which enriches the process of formation and learning (Freire, 2023b).

The relationship between education and the human being is one of the important aspects of Paulo Freire's educational thinking. In his work *Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Freire (1967) emphasizes the intrinsic connection between education and the human being, stating that "[...] there is no education outside human societies and there is no man in a vacuum" (Freire, 1967, p. 35). He argues that human beings shape themselves through the relationships they establish with each other, transforming themselves and, consequently, altering their own reality.

In *Pedagogy of Autonomy*, Freire (2023a) reiterates this idea, stating that "[...] teaching is a human specificity" (Freire, 2023a, p. 89). This means that education is a human need because human beings are not born programmed or predetermined. They are capable of learning and teaching. These elements point to a fundamental principle of his educational philosophy: education is a commitment to humanization. This commitment, inherent in human nature, involves the act of teaching people how to be people. Therefore, education is specific to the human being.

This commitment also implies the educator's responsibility to ensure that individuals do not miss out on the opportunity to develop their humanity. This idea echoes what Paulo Freire expresses in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where he emphasizes the commitment and love that educators must have for people in the struggle for liberation. Freire presents education as a commitment that the educator has to humanity. It's not just about liberation but a commitment to humanity. After

all, the educational process is essential for human beings to become people (Freire, 2023a; 2023b).

For this reason, Freire emphasizes the need for professional competence. According to him, “[...] teaching requires security, professional competence, and generosity” (Freire, 2023a, p. 89), since love alone is not enough. It is essential that love is lived out in a high-quality educational experience, providing the best conditions for students to build their experience of humanity in the most joyful, respectful, fair, and free way possible (Freire, 2023a). Furthermore, for Paulo Freire, responsibility requires a witnessing practice (Freire, 2023a, p. 36). The elements that make up witnessing are: coherence between the words and deeds of the witness; the boldness of the witness; radicalization in the choice made; the courage to love; and belief in the masses (Freire, 2023b).

Therefore, education, according to Paulo Freire, must be deeply committed to what he calls a witnessing practice (Freire, 2023a, p. 36). This commitment goes beyond the search for internal coherence, extending to the formation of resistance. This resistance is a direct response to a type of education that aims to preserve people's inequalities, injustices, and suffering. In Paulo Freire's view, education should be a tool for transformation, not an instrument that perpetuates situations of oppression (Freire, 2023b).

According to Paulo Freire, an education that is committed to humanization is one that enables students to be *more*. The concept of *being more* is intrinsically linked to the incessant quest to overcome conditions of oppression and alienation, with a view to the full realization of humanity and the achievement of freedom and autonomy. Educating to *be more* implies transcending the limitations imposed by society, power structures, and dominant ideologies. This involves the search for self-realization and the transformation of reality toward a more just and egalitarian society. Furthermore, educating to *be more* is associated with the idea of hope, which motivates educators and students to believe in the possibility of a better world. This leads them to commit themselves to personal and social transformation (Freire, 2021; 2023b).

It is important to note that conscientization is a fundamental principle in Paulo Freire's educational project. He sees conscientization as an “[...] effort to gain critical knowledge of obstacles, that is, of their reasons for being” (Freire, 2023a, p. 54). For Freire, conscientization is inherent to the human being, who recognizes himself as an unfinished being.

Freire sees conscientization as the ability of individuals to become critical and reflective about their reality, recognizing the social, political, and economic conditions that surround them. This process is intrinsically linked to the idea that education should be an act of freedom, not domination. Freire argues that conscientization allows individuals to see themselves as subjects of their own history, rather than mere passive objects (Freire, 2023b).

Furthermore, one of the importance of education as a conscientizing practice lies in the possibility of promoting the purging of the oppressor consciousness that dwells within the oppressed, which Paulo Freire calls *colonized consciousness* (Freire, 2023b, p. 68). It is the other's way of being that desires silence and a posture of permanent agreement. Therefore, education committed to liberation also needs to be an opportunity to help learners build a process capable of removing from themselves the other that dominates and silences them, thus allowing them to flourish in the company of others for new experiences (Freire, 2023b).

In *Pedagogy of Autonomy*, Paulo Freire states that “[...] education acts as an instrument of intervention in the world” (Freire, 2023a, p. 96). He interprets this intervention as an effort aimed at social transformation, which is achieved by raising students' awareness of their historical, social, and cultural context. From this perspective, intervention is seen as a means of promoting change both in reality and in the individual themselves (Freire, 2021; 2023a).

Freire sees education as a practice that promotes emancipation and social and personal transformation. By stimulating awareness, critical thinking, and transformative action, education becomes a powerful instrument for promoting justice, freedom, and equality. This enables individuals to become agents of change, contributing to the construction of a more humane and supportive world (Freire, 2023b).

In this sense, Freire highlights the active and political nature of education. He emphasizes that education is not a neutral or apolitical process; on the contrary, it is a form of intervention that can either reproduce the dominant ideology or unmask it. This duality implies that education has the power to influence social and cultural reality, shaping consciences and behaviors. Therefore, there is no such thing as a neutral education. Education cannot be neutral because every educational practice is embedded in a social, political, and cultural context that involves relations of power and domination. According to Freire (2023b), neutrality in education is an illusion, because every educational practice reflects and reproduces certain worldviews, values, and interests (Freire, 2023b).

It is in the directiveness of education, this vocation that it has, as a specifically human action, to ‘address’ itself to dreams, ideals, utopias, and objectives, that we find what I have been calling the *politicality* of education – the quality of being political, inherent in its nature. In fact, the neutrality of education is impossible (Freire, 2023a, p. 107-108, 109).

For Freire, education must be aware of its political and ethical position, seeking to promote critical reflection, awareness, and social transformation. Education as a liberating practice cannot ignore injustice and inequality. On the contrary, it must actively engage in transforming situations of oppression and injustice, with a view to building a more just and egalitarian society (Freire, 2023b).

According to Paulo Freire, education is a relational and collective experience. He states that “[...] no one educates anyone, just as no one educates themselves: men educate themselves in communion, mediated by the world” (Freire, 2023b, p. 96). This perspective emphasizes that education is not a unilateral transfer of knowledge but a dynamic and collaborative process that takes place in an environment of communion. Other statements by Freire in *Pedagogy of Autonomy*, such as “[...] there is no teaching without learning” (Freire, 2023a, p. 23) and “Teaching requires respect for the knowledge of the students” (Freire, 2023a, p. 31) reiterate the idea that education is a joint and relational undertaking.

Freire argues that the acts of teaching and learning are deeply interconnected and, therefore, cannot be separated. The educator, in the act of teaching, also learns from students, while students, in the act of learning, also teach the educator through their experiences, contexts, and prior knowledge. This reciprocal relationship of exchange and dialogue is considered fundamental to an education that aims to be critical, reflective, and transformative (Freire, 2023b).

Freire also emphasizes the necessity of recognizing the naivety of learners within the educational context. However, this naivety should not be disdained, nor should the knowledge arising from it be disregarded. Instead, the knowledge brought by learners must be considered a starting point for the construction of the educational experience (Freire, 2023a). This implies that an educational environment must be created in which dialogue is favored, and students are enabled to share their experiences and reflections, thereby actively contributing to the construction of knowledge.

According to Freire, “[...] teaching requires knowing how to listen.” “Only those who listen patiently and critically to others can speak *to them*” (Freire, 2023b, p. 111). This indicates that education should not be conducted as a monologue directed at the student, but rather as a dialogue *with* the student. Active listening is required – one that transcends mere hearing and involves a continuous openness to the speech and differences of the other. True listening is not characterized by the silencing of one’s own voice, but by the enrichment of dialogue, in which disagreement and affirmation can coexist respectfully. According to Freire, legitimate listening should be practiced democratically, as it enables a better understanding of students’ perspectives and allows pedagogical discourse and approaches to be adapted. Moreover, active listening demands that students be motivated to express themselves, within an environment in which all individuals feel valued and heard (Freire, 2023a).

In addition to listening, dialogue is identified as a fundamental principle in Freire’s pedagogical theory. Dialogue is what establishes a respectful and collaborative relationship between educator and student, enabling both parties to engage in a mutual learning process. This dialogical interaction not only affirms the students’ experiences and

knowledge but also creates an environment in which curiosity and critical thinking are encouraged. Freire argues that, through dialogue, knowledge is not imposed by the educator but is constructed jointly, in a space where students are encouraged to question, explore, and build their own understanding of reality. Furthermore, through dialogue, naive knowledge is transcended, allowing for the development of a more critical and informed worldview (Freire, 2023a).

As Freire states:

[...] knowing how to listen to them does not mean, as I have already made clear, *agreeing* with their reading of the world or accommodating to it, assuming it as your own. Respecting the student's reading of the world is not a tactical game with which the educator tries to make himself or herself sympathetic to the student. It is the right way for the educator, *with* the student and not *over* them, to try to overcome a more naive way of understanding the world with a more critical one. Respecting the reading of the world means taking it as a starting point for understanding the role of *curiosity* in general, and human *curiosity* in particular, as one of the founding impulses in the production of knowledge. By respecting the student's reading of the world in order to go beyond it, the educator must make it clear that the curiosity that is fundamental to the intelligibility of the world is historical and takes place in history, that it improves, changes qualitatively and becomes methodically rigorous (Freire, 2023a, p. 119-120).

The *banking* model of education, as criticized by Freire, is one in which students are treated as passive recipients of knowledge, to be filled with content by educators. In this model, the teacher is regarded as the sole possessor of knowledge, while students are assigned the role of listeners, with no opportunity for questioning or critical engagement. Freire contends that such an approach perpetuates inequality and alienation, as the students' prior knowledge and lived experiences are ignored (Freire, 2023a).

Within this framework, education is reduced to a process of depositing: students are treated as depositories, and the educator as the depositor. Communication is replaced by the act of depositing, in which students are expected to receive, memorize, and repeat information. This conception of education limits the students' role to passive acceptance, offering no space for critical thought or active participation (Freire, 2023b, p. 80-81).

This approach is criticized by Freire for its lack of dialogue and for promoting a dehumanized form of education that suppresses critical consciousness. In contrast, a problem-posing education is proposed – one that values interaction, dialogue, and the co-construction of knowledge. This model enables students to become active participants in their learning and in the transformation of their social realities (Freire, 2023a).

Criticality is also identified by Freire as a core element of the educational process. In *Pedagogy of Autonomy*, he affirms: "Teaching requires criticality" (Freire, 2023a, p. 32). Criticality is defined as the capacity to question, reflect upon, and analyze reality in a profound and

conscious manner. It is argued that education should not be reduced to a mechanical transmission of content, but should be conceived as a space for the development of critical and reflective individuals (Freire, 2023a).

This critical stance involves the recognition and questioning of social, political, and economic structures that shape individuals' lives and experiences. Thus, the teaching process should foster an environment where students are encouraged to think independently, voice their opinions, and challenge perceived injustices. Freire also stresses that criticality is not only an intellectual exercise but an ethical and political commitment. Teaching with criticality entails the formation of individuals who are aware of their roles in society and capable of acting to promote social change (Freire, 2023a).

Furthermore, Freire asserts that "Teaching requires wanting the students to do well" and "Teaching requires joy and hope" (Freire, 2023a, pp. 70, 138). These statements underline the central role of affectivity and care in the pedagogical relationship. Education, in Freire's view, is an act of love and hope.

As he articulates:

[...] I need to be open to the taste of doing good, sometimes to the courage to do good to the students and to the very educational practice in which I participate. This openness to wanting to do well doesn't actually mean that, as a teacher, I'm obliged to want to do well by all students in the same way. It means, in fact, that affectivity doesn't scare me, that I'm not afraid to express it. This openness to caring is the way I authentically seal my commitment to my students, in a specific practice of being human. In fact, I have to dismiss as false the radical separation between *teaching seriousness and affectivity*. [...] Affectivity is not excluded from cognition. What I obviously cannot allow is for my affectivity to interfere with the ethical fulfillment of my duty as a teacher, in the exercise of my authority (Freire, 2023a, p. 138).

In this sense, loving kindness in education manifests itself in recognizing the humanity of others, in valuing their experiences, knowledge and feelings. By establishing relationships of affection and respect with students, educators can create a welcoming, safe and stimulating environment for learning, where each individual feels recognized, valued and cared for in their entirety. Education, as a loving and joyful educational practice, represents a pedagogical approach that values the emotional, ethical and aesthetic dimensions of the educational experience, promoting not only cognitive development, but also human growth, solidarity and the building of bonds of trust and mutual respect (Freire, 2021; 2023a).

Joy, according to Freire, is linked to the meaningful engagement of educators and students in the teaching-learning process. The pleasure derived from learning, discovering, and sharing knowledge is said to foster motivation, commitment, and well-being, thereby transforming education into a process of personal and collective fulfillment (Freire, 2021).

He explains:

The teaching activity from which the student is not separated is a joyful experience by nature. It is also false to take teaching seriousness and joy as irreconcilable, as if joy were the enemy of rigor. On the contrary, the more methodically rigorous I become in my search and teaching, the more joyful and hopeful I feel. Joy doesn't just come when I find something, it's part of the search process. And teaching and learning cannot take place apart from the search, apart from beauty and joy (Freire, 2023a, p. 139).

Finally, hope is described by Freire as an ontological necessity and an essential component of educational activity. Hope is seen not as mere optimism, but as an active and motivating force that drives individuals to engage in the process of transformation.

As he states:

Thinking that hope alone transforms the world and acting on such naivety is an excellent way to fall into hopelessness, pessimism and fatalism. But to do without hope in the struggle to improve the world, as if the struggle could be reduced to calculated acts alone, to pure scientificity, is a frivolous illusion. To do without hope, which is also based on truth as well as on the ethical quality of the struggle, is to deny it one of its fundamental supports. What is essential [...] is that hope, as an ontological necessity, needs to be anchored in practice. As an ontological necessity, hope needs practice in order to become historically concrete. That is why there is no hope in pure hope, nor is what is hoped for achieved in pure hope, which thus becomes vain hope (Freire, 2021, p. 15).

Freire maintains that hope is vital for sustaining joy, curiosity, and the desire to learn, both for educators and students. It is through hope that individuals are empowered to confront obstacles and commit to educational practices grounded in the belief in transformation. Furthermore, Freire contends that hopelessness is not inherent to human nature but is the result of conditions that must be critically unveiled. Thus, one of the responsibilities of the progressive educator is to reveal the possibilities for hope and to diminish the material causes of despair (Freire, 2021; 2023a).

Final Considerations: interlocutions between the thinking of Pope Francis and Paulo Freire

A comparative analysis of the educational thought of Pope Francis and Paulo Freire reveals a rich intersection of ideas, as both figures offer significant contributions to contemporary educational discourse. This relationship is marked by both convergences and divergences in approach.

Education, conceived as a path toward humanization and centered on the human person, is recognized as a fundamental element in the thought of both Pope Francis and Paulo Freire. The vision of the human being proposed by Pope Francis is rooted in Christian anthropology, wherein the individual is viewed as a relational and social creature of God. An education that promotes the fullness of humanity is emphasized – one intrinsically linked to all dimensions of the human

being. Consequently, education is proposed not merely as technical training but as a process involving value formation and openness to transcendence.

In contrast, Paulo Freire views the human being as an *unfinished*, historical, relational, and social subject – constantly evolving, developing, and transforming. As an *unfinished being*, the human person is considered educable, rendering education a specifically human trait. Education is thus understood as a means of fostering humanization, enabling individuals to become more fully themselves through freedom and autonomy.

The concept of integral education holds particular centrality in Pope Francis' pedagogical vision. Nevertheless, both thinkers advocate for an education that transcends the mere transmission of knowledge and reject technicist models of education. A shared emphasis is placed on the formation of individuals capable of engaging critically and responsibly with the world.

For Pope Francis, integral education entails the cultivation of human, social, and spiritual values, with the goal of promoting respect for human dignity and the interconnectedness of all life. Solidarity, empathy, and care for the Common Home are essential pillars. Paulo Freire, in turn, proposes an education oriented toward critical awareness, in which individuals are empowered to reflect on and transform their lived realities – thus promoting emancipation through dialogue and critical thinking.

The notion of transcendence in Pope Francis' educational philosophy and Freire's idea of "being more" reflect shared humanist and integral perspectives, albeit with different nuances. Pope Francis asserts that education must be open to transcendence, seeking the totality of truth and fostering values that extend beyond technical knowledge. Ethical and spiritual formation is presented as necessary for engaged citizenship and solidarity. Freire, by contrast, advances an education for liberation and autonomy, in which learners are perceived as beings in continual transformation. The idea of "being more" underscores the individual's capacity to alter surrounding realities.

Both thinkers recognize the need for education to foster the integral development of the human person, going beyond content delivery to incorporate ethical and social values that support human dignity and societal change. While Pope Francis integrates a transcendent dimension into this framework, Freire places greater emphasis on conscientization and resistance to oppression. Nonetheless, these components are not absent from Pope Francis' vision.

Dialogue and active listening are identified by both thinkers as foundational to an inclusive and transformative pedagogy. Freire contends that "teaching requires knowing how to listen" (Freire, 2023a, p. 110), underscoring that authentic listening deepens dialogue and enables a better understanding of learners' perspectives, thereby nurturing collaborative educational environments. Similarly, Pope Francis

stresses the necessity of empathy and dialogue, proposing that education be grounded in respect for the diverse lived experiences of individuals. However, while Freire emphasizes the progression from naïve knowledge to critical consciousness, Pope Francis calls for institutional collaboration to address complex challenges, advocating interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity. Thus, although both promote a humanistic education, Freire concentrates on social critique and consciousness-raising, whereas Pope Francis prioritizes the construction of educational communities and the appreciation of cultural and religious diversity.

The non-neutrality of education is affirmed by both thinkers. Education is presented as an instrument of awareness and transformative action aimed at achieving justice, equality, and human dignity. Pope Francis advocates for a new educational model capable of responding to contemporary crises, grounded in a cultural paradigm that emphasizes dignity and solidarity. Freire, on the other hand, promotes an education that awakens critical consciousness in learners, enabling them to act as agents of change. Their divergent emphases are noteworthy: Freire focuses on individual emancipation through critical awareness and resistance, while Pope Francis frames hope and solidarity as the foundations of educational transformation, suggesting a more collective and communal orientation. While both regard education as a transformative force, their approaches reflect distinct philosophical commitments.

Hope is also central in the educational philosophies of both thinkers. It is regarded as an active and motivating force that sustains engagement in teaching and learning. Freire considers hope essential to the overcoming of inequality and oppression, while Pope Francis links it to risk-taking and attentive listening to young people, in pursuit of inclusive and participatory education. Freire further asserts that pedagogical practice actualizes hope, rooted in affectivity and ethical commitment within educator-student relationships. Pope Francis, however, extends the discussion to the communal and global realms, proposing a “globalization of hope” that transcends individual and local frameworks.

In the domain of environmental education, Pope Francis underscores the urgency of fostering ecological awareness and solidarity, especially in light of global ecological crises. A new educational paradigm is called for, one capable of addressing such challenges. Although environmental education was not explicitly addressed by Freire, given the context of his time, the principles of critical consciousness and social transformation he espoused are applicable to environmental issues. Hence, while Freire provides a theoretical foundation for ecological discourse, Pope Francis explicitly integrates it as a central theme.

Both thinkers place love at the heart of educational practice, conceiving education as an act of care and commitment to human development. For Pope Francis, education is described as an act of love

transmitted across generations, marked by empathy and relational engagement. Freire argues that teaching necessitates a desire for students' well-being, linking loving-kindness with hope and the pursuit of social transformation. A key divergence, however, lies in their treatment of hope: Freire interprets it as inherent to human nature and vital to educational practice, foregrounding action and struggle for societal change. Pope Francis, by contrast, emphasizes responsibility and love as the foundations of education, with less explicit focus on social struggle.

This dialogical exploration of the ideas of Pope Francis and Paulo Freire concludes with the poetic voice of Adélia Prado in prose 10 of *Solte os Cachorros*:

I don't know what I'm doing here in the teachers' lounge, sleeping myself to sleep in this vacant time slot that they ugly call a hole. I don't know why I teach. I hardly know. I feel obliged to do something for the kingdom of God. Deep down, if I had a guarantee that I wouldn't sin, I'd do what I like, which is nothing. But a productive nothing. Lying face down on the ground, despite my age, I was going to go to the ants (Prado, 2006, prose 10).

Adélia Prado's poetic reflections – "I hardly know. I feel obliged to do something for the kingdom of God" – seem to capture the commitment to which both Pope Francis and Paulo Freire call educators: a commitment to humanizing education. Such education must be directed toward the service of learners, particularly children, by supporting the formation of their humanity, cultivating care for others and for the Common Home, and nurturing belief in the possibility of personal and societal transformation. It must be a form of education that is committed to humanization and oriented toward the flourishing of human beings. It must also contribute to the human development of children and youth. At a time in which artificial intelligence in education is being widely debated, it becomes essential to design and implement educational experiences that are both humanized and humanizing. These experiences must aim to understand new technologies as tools that augment and support the teaching-learning process, rather than replace the educator, for education is, at its core, a fundamentally human endeavor grounded in interpersonal relationships.

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Availability of research data: the data set supporting the results of this study is published in the article itself.

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