



Educação, corpo e emancipação: considerações para a educação crítica na escola contemporânea¹

Education, body and emancipation: considerations for critical education in the contemporary school

Educación, cuerpo y emancipación: consideraciones para la educación crítica en la escuela contemporánea

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RESUMO

Trata-se de um ensaio teórico que visa apresentar aportes teórico-conceituais para pensarmos sobre a construção de uma educação crítica e emancipatória na escola contemporânea. Por via das contribuições sobre experiência e educação de Walter Benjamin e Theodor Adorno e das noções de educação libertadora e corpo consciente de Paulo Freire, vislumbra-se argumentar sobre a necessidade de a educação crítica do presente perpassar por uma valorização do corpo. Sendo assim, aponta-se que o projeto de legitimar a escola moderna objetivando uma educação para emancipação ganha fôlego a partir do momento no qual os objetos de conhecimento passam a ser tratados não como abstrações incompressíveis, mas como conceitos que podem ser aprendidos pelo corpo, como experiências que podem se transformar em conceitos, ou experiências que são, também, expressões de conceitos. No fundo, trata-se de reconhecer que na vida social, na verdadeira experiência e na educação, é impossível e, por vezes, problemática a separação entre o conceito do objeto e sua expressão prática.

Palavras-chave: Educação; Corpo; Corpo consciente.

ABSTRACT

This is a theoretical essay that aims to present theoretical-conceptual contributions for us to think about the construction of a critical and emancipatory education in contemporary school. Through the contributions on experience and education by Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno and the notions of liberating education and the conscious body by Paulo Freire, it is envisaged to argue about the need for critical education of the present to permeate the body. Therefore, it is pointed out that the project of legitimizing the modern school aiming at an education for emancipation gains momentum from the moment in which objects of knowledge start to be treated not as incompressible abstractions, but as concepts that can be learned by the body, as experiences that can become concepts, or experiences that are also expressions of concepts. Deep down, it is about recognizing that in social life, in true experience and education, it is impossible and sometimes problematic to separate the concept of the object from its practical expression.

Keywords: Education; Body; Conscious body.

RESUMEN

Este es un ensayo teórico que tiene como objetivo presentar aportes teórico-conceptuales para pensar la construcción de una educación crítica y emancipadora en la escuela contemporánea. A través de los aportes sobre experiencia y educación de Walter Benjamin y Theodor Adorno y las nociones de educación liberadora y cuerpo consciente de Paulo Freire, se prevé argumentar sobre la necesidad de una educación crítica del presente que permee a través de una valoración del cuerpo. Por lo tanto, se señala que el proyecto de legitimación de la escuela moderna encaminada a una educación para la emancipación cobra fuerza a partir del momento en que los objetos de conocimiento pasan a ser tratados no como abstracciones incompresibles, sino como conceptos que pueden ser aprendidos por el cuerpo, como experiencias que pueden convertirse en conceptos, o experiencias que también son expresiones de conceptos. En el fondo, se trata de reconocer que en la vida social, en la verdadera experiencia y educación, es imposible ya veces problemático separar el concepto de objeto de su expresión práctica.

Palabras clave: Educación; Cuerpo; Cuerpo consciente.

Introduction

The theme of education has penetrated numerous circles and spheres of debate in our time. In the modern world, education often becomes confused with schooling and the acquisition of diplomas (Bourdieu; Passeron, 2014). Aware that the task of debating the topic of education requires both a broader perception of the phenomenon and certain delimitations, that is, to speak of education from particular perspectives, in this study we aim to present theoretical-conceptual contributions for thinking about the construction of a critical and emancipatory education in the contemporary school.

Thus, we plan to discuss avenues for a proposition of education, especially school education, that can be configured as legitimate forms of understanding the function of the school, bearing in mind an emancipatory and effectively democratic educational project. In the wake of the debate on what renders the school legitimate, we will bring the relationship between theory and practice to the fore, which will lead us to address specific ideas regarding the themes of the body and education in Paulo Freire (1921–1997) and of body and experience in Walter Benjamin (1892–1940).

Thus, this is a study with the characteristics of a theoretical essay, since, based on the selection of certain material, we seek to reflect on the question posed and to present the positions of its authors on the matter (Severino, 2016). In terms of theoretical framework, we selected conceptual contributions at different levels and in different fields of study. Within philosophy and social theory, we will use the theoretical contributions of Adorno (1996, 2020) and Benjamin (1987, 1989) to think about the relationship among education, body, experience, and emancipation. From a propositional standpoint, notions such as liberating education and the conscious body in Freire (2003, 2008, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019) will contribute to a reflection closer to the concreteness of the educational practice we envision for the contemporary school. It should be noted that other works make up a more diversified scope of our reflection on body and education, among which we highlight the studies by Strazzacappa (2001), Nóbrega (2005), and Petry, Bassani, and Vaz (2014).

It is worth pointing out that the idea of bringing thinkers such as Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno closer to Paulo Freire, considering the critical and emancipatory

horizon of the formulations of these distinguished twentieth-century intellectuals, is already a legitimized undertaking in Brazilian scholarship. As a highlight, we mention the research by Agostini (2019), which exposes the proximities between Paulo Freire and Walter Benjamin regarding the issues of education and social emancipation. In short, the author recognizes in both intellectuals common concerns and theoretical choices, such as: the attempt to narrate and think history from the standpoint of the oppressed; the influence of religion and Marxism; and the perspective of education as demystifying the dominant ideology.

In an even more recent study, Furtado, Gomes, and Borges (2022) demonstrate the theoretical-political proximities between Paulo Freire and Theodor Adorno based on the elaborations on education and emancipation constructed by these thinkers. Thus, the authors of the study point out that in Paulo Freire and Theodor Adorno: education is understood as a counter-ideological practice capable of demystifying bourgeois pronouncements about humanity and history; education for emancipation is always an act of humanization in favor of the subject and against barbarism; an education for emancipation needs to be conceived as a project of political education and within the domain of political relations.

It should be emphasized that we do not aim to conduct a reflection on the entirety of the work and ideas of the thinkers listed. However, their formulations on education are not isolated from their theoretical systems, nor from the other problematics with which they engaged. In this sense, by means of the centrality of the educational discussion, we will endeavor to bring the discussion closer to the broader framework of ideas that encompass these authors' reflections on education.

In structural terms, this study will contain three additional topics besides this introduction. In the second, we will seek to situate the reader in the discussion on body and school from a pedagogical and sociological perspective, focusing on the relations between the social logics of the body and the educational processes that occur in the school environment. Next, we will present our theoretical-conceptual propositions with indications for educational practice by way of the theoretical framework presented. Lastly, we will offer our final considerations.

Introductory notes on body and school

In the following lines, we will outline an understanding of education and the legitimacy of school education that involves reorienting the discussion of the place of the body in educational practices. At first, the idea of rethinking the place of the body in the schooling process may seem pretentious, given that the entire premise of modern school education has been built on the idea of transmitting knowledge in the form of mental content.

According to Strazzacappa (2001), bodily movement has almost always been used as a kind of bargaining chip in school. Consequently, physical immobility, in many cases, functions as punishment, and the possibility of bodily movement, as a reward for students who display aptitude for bodily activities. As Bassani and Vaz (2003) note, in school there is a series of punishments and restrictions directly linked to pain and corporal punishment. In general, such penalties correspond to physical punishment and are expressed in everyday school life in actions “such as being allowed or not to get up from one’s desk or leave the cribs, permission to go to the bathroom, to drink water, or punishments that impose the deprivation of recess or Physical Education classes on children” (Bassani; Vaz, 2003, p. 30).

In a certain sense, it is possible to say that, in school, there exists an entire network of actions that educates against the body and movement, which reflects the very social logic that tends to value bodily rigidity understood as a standard of civility in modern life (Strazzacappa, 2001). That being so, if the school incorporates the social logic that historically devalues the body and movement in favor of the prestige accorded to attitudes and actions that prize cognition and rigidity, bodily movement tends to be repressed or to be present only at specific moments in school (recess, parties, Physical Education classes)². Thus, the idea of discipline in school involves something that is incompatible with movement and bodily expression. To be disciplined is not to move. Therefore, the act of learning ends up being considered something

serious and disembodied, since the body is understood as frivolous and not serious (Strazzacappa, 2001)³.

Strazzacappa's (2001) diagnosis regarding the structural and cultural organization of the school, which traditionally scorns the body and movement, can be complemented with some other important considerations in historical and sociological terms. To begin with, we should consider that the relationship between body and school is complex, because at the same time that the school tends not to consider the possibility of expression and learning through the body, this by no means implies that the school, as a social institution, presents no political and social concern with the body.

As Saviani (2011) states, the school, in its modern perspective, emerges to transform subjects into citizens, to overcome the barrier of ignorance of the feudal world. For this reason, from the outset the school must concern itself with the so-called scientific, universal, and systematized content, with a view to overcoming common sense and the barrier of ignorance. This perspective, which spans traditional ideas, renovative ones, and even the most critical strands of the Enlightenment and of Pedagogy, somehow reinforces the idea that the school works with mental content, with the appropriation of concepts and competencies that can adapt the subject to productive labor—as, incidentally, is proposed by the current National Common Curricular Base (*Base Nacional Comum Curricular* - BNCC)⁴ and a set of other educational reforms and curriculum policies—or to social transformation, as critical pedagogies suggest.⁵

According to Nóbrega (2005), since the Renaissance and with the proliferation of humanism, educating the body has been a pivotal task for ensuring civility in modern society. Politics, culture, philosophy, and education, in some way, reverberate modern instrumental rationality, which extols reason and the technical mastery of nature, transforming the body into a tool for that purpose. For this reason, Nóbrega (2005, p. 603) emphasizes that “we perceive that the sensible is present in modern philosophy and in the pedagogical ideology of the Enlightenment, but it assumes, in relation to knowledge, an inferior or accessory role.”

In Libâneo's (1994) work, which lays out the foundations of a recognized Brazilian critical pedagogy, we identify the distinction between the disciplines that form the spirit and deal with scientific knowledge (Portuguese, Mathematics, History, Geography, and Sciences) and those that should concern themselves with the body, expression, and movement, namely Art Education and Physical Education. As can be seen, despite the recognition of the critical character of the author's work as a whole, and in addition to the dichotomization between intellectual knowledge and sensible knowledge, his perspective on Physical Education differs little from Durkheim's (2018) observations on the division among intellectual, moral, and physical education, since, for Libâneo (1994, p. 47), Physical Education is important in school "to form character, self-discipline, and a spirit of cooperation, loyalty, and solidarity. In addition, it organizes children's recreation and leisure."

With these remarks, it should be said that although the school is not very sensitive to the body and movement in its structural and cultural organization (Strazzacappa, 2001), and exhibits relations of corporal punishment in its routine (Bassani; Vaz, 2003), as well as depreciates the body and movement in the selection of types of knowledge and their purported "formative" functions (Libâneo, 1994), this reveals, in some way, a certain political and social concern with the body, or, in other words, there seems to be recognition that control over the body is important for maintaining a purported dominant social status.

According to Foucault (1998), modern institutions, among them the school, operate by means of a set of disciplinary techniques aimed at producing docile bodies. In this sense, beyond conceiving power as something exercised only through orders and laws, we should visualize the exercise and reproduction of power and ideology in the materiality of the body. Foucault himself stated that the control of individuals cannot be conceived as something that occurs simply through consciousness in the form of ideology, but rather as an undertaking that begins in the body, with the body.

Situating twentieth-century scholars who thematized the question of the body, among them Michel Foucault, Le Breton (2012) recalls that for the Parisian philosopher, power results from strategic positions and the body is a privileged

indicator of power relations in modern society. This occurs through multiple forms of restriction, such as disciplining, domination, efficiency, docility, and control, which are present, for example, in spaces such as prisons, hospitals, and schools.

For this reason, the school tends to repress in order to better control the body, that is, to impose dominant forms of being that cannot exist solely as ideological representations but must be embodied ideology. Therefore, it is possible to say that the body's non-place in education is, in fact, part of a project to dominate the subject and the subject's multiple potentials for development.

In this sense, the question that arises for thinking a critical education of the present can be formulated as follows: if the school has been an institution dominated by Enlightenment rationality that prizes the mastery of consciousness to the detriment of the body, would it be possible to conceive a new form of legitimacy that points to another meaning for critical school education without considering the demand to reorient the place of the body in the school and in the processes of schooling? We concur with Nóbrega (2005, p. 610), when the author states that "it is not a matter of including the body in education. The body is already included in education. To think the place of the body in education means highlighting the challenge of perceiving ourselves as bodily beings."

Therefore, for better or for worse, every form of education is a form of message to the body and about the body. It is now necessary to reorganize the school to valorize the human condition of being a body, which implies thinking beyond Arendt's (2020) idea of the body as tied to labor in an eminently mechanical dimension and one of biological subsistence. In Le Breton's (2012) terms, we need to understand that all our actions in the world are mediated by the body and embodiment, for if to exist means to live as a body, embodiment must be understood as the possibility of extending the human being's experience in the world.

Le Breton (2012) states that the body is a semantic vector of the actor's relationship with the world, manifesting itself through feelings, rites, appearance, seduction, bodily techniques, exercises, pain, and suffering. Human existence itself is

bodily. Thus, the body is both emitter and receiver; it is a producer of meaning. With this, Le Breton (2012) reminds us that,

The characterization of the body, far from being unanimous in human societies, proves to be surprisingly difficult and raises various epistemological questions. The body is a false evidence, it is not an unequivocal given, but the effect of a social and cultural elaboration (Le Breton, 2012, p. 26).¹

Thus, the school, whose function is to bring children, youth, adults, and the elderly closer to human experience produced historically and socially, cannot forget that these experiences are also lived through our senses, gestures, expressions, thoughts, and emotions. In Ingold (2010), there is a strong critique of cognitivist science, especially the idea that in the process of transmitting and appropriating culture, it could be passed on only in the form of mental content. In this way, knowledge is treated as information, and human beings become mechanisms trained to process it.

In the educational field, Nóbrega (2005) questions the idea that it would be possible to learn cognitive content detached from bodily experience. That is, there can only be cognitive activity, or consciousness of something, when there is sensible experience and perception, since “cognition emerges from embodiment, expressing itself in the understanding of perception as movement and not as information processing. We are bodily beings, bodies in movement” (Nóbrega, 2005, p. 606).

It is in opposition to all this modern rationality, which, in education, presents itself in pedagogical discourses of the most diverse theoretical orientations, that we believe it is prudent to move toward a critical education of our time that overcomes historically produced dichotomies which disdain bodily expression and the human condition of being a body in their discourses and practices. Therefore, we venture to deepen the idea of education as experience, which, in order to genuinely enable the full development of all human potentialities, must consider the body not only as something that supports the soul or our thoughts (Nóbrega, 2005), but as our pathway

¹ Original: “A caracterização do corpo, longe de ser unanimidade nas sociedades Humanas, revela-se surpreendentemente difícil e suscita várias questões epistemológicas. O corpo é uma falsa evidência, não é um dado inequívoco, mas o efeito de uma elaboração social e cultural” (Le Breton, 2012, p. 26).

to the construction of educational experiences that are effectively formative, critical, and reflective. This is the construction we will undertake in the following topic.

School education: body, experience, and legitimacy

When Adorno (2020) discusses experience and education, the philosopher indicates that any and all critical education must confront the problem of the progressive loss of experience in the modern world, marked by the advance of capitalism, totalitarian political forms, instrumental reason, and the culture industry. At the same time, the German thinker points out that it is the task of education to cultivate in the new generations an aptitude for traditional and collective experience, as corroborated by the thought set forth by Benjamin (1987).

In this sense, we can think of education both as the practice of experience in itself, which would surely always be more desirable, and as a process of building an aptitude to have experience. It is as if education could operate to promote humanity's reencounter with itself, returning to a form of contact with objects that transcends the logic of objective manipulation for ends other than the development of the human being as such.

From a similar perspective, Benjamin (1987) concerns himself with the loss of experience in the cultural and artistic field, especially in literary manifestations, cinema, theater, among others. We therefore believe it possible to affirm that Benjamin recognizes in his work various forms of experience, namely, religious, cultural, historical, and aesthetic. In these and other dimensions, we would then have the possibility of forming individuals' subjectivity in the full sense.

However, the Berlin thinker identifies that it is precisely in the historical period marked by uninterrupted technical progress and the proliferation of the demands of the bourgeois economy, which act to deteriorate our formative contact with the objectifications of the world, that authentic experience undergoes its greatest crisis. In this context, Benjamin is emphatic in stating that the loss of the human capacity to have experience is one of the most nefarious expressions of the barbarism of the

twentieth century. According to Petry, Bassani, and Vaz (2014), the set of changes in contemporary times undertaken by processes of modernization and the acceleration of life act in the continuous loss of experience and, consequently, in the decline of subjectivity and formation.

If, like formation, experience enters a period of regression in modernity, we need to understand the structure and characteristics of real experience in the terms of the Frankfurt School authors, as well as its possibilities in our time of crisis. Broadly speaking, experience is always something that involves formative accumulation in the present, together with tradition and history in the form of events that are significant for subjects. In Benjamin's terms (1989, p. 105),

In truth, experience is the stuff of tradition, both in private and in collective life. It is formed less with isolated data rigorously fixed in memory than with accumulated data, often unconscious, that flow into memory (Benjamin, 1989, p. 105).²

It is important to note that in Benjamin (1987) experience stands in opposition to inauthentic lived experience. Thus, if the lived experience of subjects in the modern world tends to be guided by the logic of information, quick sensations, the ephemeral, and the so-called shock factor, authentic experience is related to history in a non-linear sense, provoking qualitative changes in the individual and collective memory of subjects, and it can always be communicable among people by means of storytelling. Hence, it is this sense of the collectivity of experience that, according to Petry, Bassani, and Vaz (2014), makes it notable for linking knowledge and understandings that are meaningful and integrated with the subjects' own lives in their non-instrumental, non-rationalized dimension.

Another important aspect to mention is that experience is something that happens in the relation between subjects and, at times, between subjects and some object, not necessarily in the sense of objects of knowledge, as positivist science prefers, much less information and inauthentic expressions of the culture industry, but

² Original: "Na verdade, a experiência é matéria da tradição, tanto na vida privada quanto na coletiva. Forma-se menos com dados isolados e rigorosamente fixados na memória, do que com dados acumulados, e com frequência inconscientes, que afluem à memória" (Benjamin, 1989, p. 105).

objects and human manifestations that can be transmitted through storytelling. We can think, for example, of the relation between the subject and play, or between the subject and labor.

According to Benjamin (1987), to speak of experience means to think of processes in which subjects can communicate, develop their subjectivities, and socialize information without external coercions. This communication gains meaning to the extent that there is real exchange and transmission of human culture, “for what is the value of all our cultural heritage if experience no longer binds it to us?” (Benjamin, 1987, p. 115).

Although Benjamin (1987, 1989) is emphatic in asserting that experience takes shape as a process of storytelling and communicating something, this does not mean that the German thinker understands this undertaking as something that manifests itself only in the act of speaking and must then be internalized by the mental faculties. Thus, in true experience we are faced with the human being in his complexity, insofar as:

The soul, the eye, and the hand are thus inscribed in the same field. Interacting, they define a practice. This practice has ceased to be familiar to us. The role of the hand in productive labor has become more modest, and the place it occupied during storytelling is now empty (for storytelling, in its sensuous aspect, is by no means an exclusive product of the voice. In true storytelling, the hand intervenes decisively, with its gestures learned in the experience of work, which support in a hundred ways the flow of what is said) (Benjamin, 1987, pp. 220–221).³

That experience is a fundamental attribute for emancipation can be confirmed by the excessive concern of capital and the culture industry with deteriorating its forms. In the essay on the crisis of cultural formation promoted by the culture industry and semi-culture, Adorno (1996, p. 11) states that in the world of capital, experience, as the continuity of reflection in the minds of subjects (the formation of memory) aimed at

³ Original: “A alma, o olho, e a mão estão assim inscritos no mesmo campo. Interagindo, eles definem uma prática. Essa prática deixou de nos ser familiar. O papel da mão no trabalho produtivo tornou-se mais modesto, e o lugar que ela ocupava durante a narração está agora vazio (Pois a narração, em seu aspecto sensível, não é de modo algum um produto exclusivo da voz. Na verdadeira narração, a mão intervém decisivamente, com seus gestos aprendidos na experiência do trabalho, que sustentam de cem maneiras o fluxo do que é dito)” (Benjamin, 1987, p. 220-221).

constituting a certain tradition and effective accumulation regarding something, “is replaced by a punctual informational state, disconnected, interchangeable, and ephemeral, which is known to be blurred in the next instant by other information.” In Benjamin’s terms, experience is replaced by lived experience.

Thus, to consider the concept and the demand for experience in the sense of Benjamin and Adorno in order to think about the critical education of the present places us once again before the challenge of finding or reworking the meaning of critical pedagogies toward an educational practice that considers the human being in all its complexity. Although traditionally critical pedagogies operate with a denunciatory discourse and a transformative orientation for educational practice, this is almost always carried out at the level of concepts alone.

As we observe in Libâneo’s (1994) perspective, which expresses the tenor of much of the Brazilian pedagogical debate, the subject of education tends to be a subject without a body, without expression, without gesture, nevertheless, he or she must be made conscious through the assimilation of scientific knowledge so as to have formed his or her condition as a wage worker and citizen, or even class consciousness. Thus, we consider it fundamental for the critical pedagogies of our time to incorporate the notion of formative experience in connection with an advanced conception of the body.

In the Brazilian critical educational debate, we observe in Freire (1985, 2003, 2008, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019) a possibility for thinking a new conception of the human, of the subject of education, and of the teaching-learning process which, in pedagogical language, moves in a similar direction of privileging experience in Benjamin’s and Adorno’s senses. From our point of view, the key to thinking education in Freire beyond his cognitivist definitions can be found in his concept of the conscious body.

Although it is not among the best known and most explored concepts within Freire’s work (Gonçalves, 2019), the notion of the conscious body discloses both his conception of the human being and how it unfolds in Freire’s concepts of education and teaching. This issue seems fundamental, namely, articulating a concept of

education to a non-fragmented conception of the human being and, consequently, of the knowing subject of education.

According to Gonçalves (2019), the notion of the conscious body, which appears for the first time in Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, an iconic work published in 1968, first outside Brazil, presents different meanings over the course of the author's theoretical construction. During the 1970s and 1980s, the concept refers to the human being in general, who would not be merely a consciousness incarnated in a body, but a conscious body that experiences the world in a singular way; "in this case, the experience of the conscious body is nontransferable" (Gonçalves, 2019, p. 133).

Another focus, deepened by Freire from the 1990s onward, refers to the notion of the conscious body as a mode of social belonging and an epistemic possibility, interweaving with profound relations of learning. The point to be emphasized is that an expanded conception of the body, based on subjects' broad existential possibilities, certainly aligns with Freire's relentless pursuit of elaborating a liberating conception of education (Gonçalves, 2019). Accordingly, we will briefly address, in an interwoven manner, the two senses of the concept of the conscious body in Freire.

In the same way that Benjamin (1987, 1989) and Adorno (1996, 2020) conceived of experience as a possibility against the loss of the formative meaning of human actions in the modern world, Freire (2017) develops his conception of liberating and problem-posing education based on a critique of what he called banking education. In banking education, we have the prevalence of narrating⁶, depositing, and transmitting knowledge.

Freire (2017) asserts that banking education contributes to maintaining the status quo and encourages the deepening of social contradictions. Thus, education "becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher the depositor" (Freire, 2017, p. 80)⁴. Hence, the banking conception of

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Freire in English are taken from Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, 50th Anniversary Edition (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018). Page numbers given in the text refer to the Portuguese editions cited in the references.

education as an instrument of oppression, as a culture of silence, divides educator and student. The former being the one who educates, who knows, who thinks, who speaks the word, who disciplines, who chooses, acts, selects the content, holds authority, and is the subject of the process. While the latter, the one who knows nothing, who must listen docilely, be disciplined, follow prescriptions, and passively internalize the objects narrated by the educator (Freire, 2017).

The liberating conception⁷, in turn, conceives education as an act of knowing, that is, as a dialogical and creative situation. According to Freire (2017, p. 94), “as a ‘gnosiological’ situation, the cognizable object, instead of being the end of the act of knowing of a single subject, becomes the mediator of the cognitive subjects - teacher, on the one hand, students, on the other,” the dialogical and problem-posing perspective of education seeks to overcome the contradiction between educator and student so as to project both as subjects of the teaching and learning process.

Thus, as a ‘gnosiological’ situation of communication among subjects, knowledge, and world, liberating education cannot think of the human being as a consciousness that serves only to store information, for “men, however, because they are aware of themselves and thus of the world, because they are a ‘conscious body,’ live in a dialectical relationship between the determining limits and their freedom” (Freire, 2017, p. 125).

In the final analysis, it is a matter of considering that we live in the world producing consciousness of it, which, as praxis, must be regarded as the action of a conscious body. However, for this process of becoming conscious to be increasingly liberating and to enable the protagonism of the human being⁸ in history, it must recognize that we apprehend and transform the world also through the body. This is because, if we reflect on the historical and cultural being we have become, we will conclude that such a condition could not result solely from our creative consciousness, but rather from the action of our conscious body in the world (Freire, 2003).

It is through praxis⁹, through the creation and transformation of the existing world, that human beings, in their relation with reality, produce material goods, variable objects, as well as social institutions, ideas, and worldviews. In this way, at the same

time that they create history, they become historical-social beings (Freire, 2017). It is this dialectic of creative connotation between human being and world that ensures the connection between the history of humanity and of human societies.

From this expanded conception of the human being presented by Freire (2003, 2017) and deepened in Freire (2018), there unfolds an understanding of liberating education that privileges consideration of the human being in its entirety. In Freire's words (2017, p. 95):

those truly committed to liberation must reject the 'banking' concept of education in its entirety, adopting instead a concept of men as conscious beings and of consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world. They must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of problems of men in their relations with the world (Freire, 2017, p. 95).

According to Freire (2017), the goal is to call the attention of true humanists so that, in their desire for liberation, any use of banking education may be curtailed. Thus, care is needed so that the banking form of education does not become a legacy of the oppressor society to the revolutionary society. All the more because if, and only if, a revolutionary society still maintains banking education, it must have erred in its maintenance or allowed itself to be influenced by distrust and disbelief in human beings.

What is clear is that, for the liberation of human beings, it is not possible to alienate them, keep them alienated, and accept a mechanistic conception of consciousness. It is therefore important that liberatory action not employ the same instruments of domination (slogans and deposits) as the banking concept of education. According to Freire (2021, p. 93), "authentic liberation, the process of humanization, is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it."

According to Freire (2008), our process of domination exercised as alienating domestication does not occur solely in ideological or verbalist representations identified with oppression, but around our conscious body. Thus, neither education in general nor teaching processes in particular can disregard the body as a text that must be read in a non-fragmented way, one that can express desires, fear, love, and anger.

For this reason, it is the task of critical education to conduct the "reading of the body with learners, interdisciplinarily, breaking dichotomies, unviable and deforming ruptures" (Freire, 2016, p. 169).

In Freire (1985), the conscious body does not disregard the physical, biological, physiological, and technical facets, however, it is necessary to consider it beyond these aspects, that is, in its other and different dimensions that encompass the reflexivity and wholeness that involves the relationship between subject and world. As can be seen in,

The human body, old or young, fat or thin, no matter what color, is the conscious body, that looks at the stars, it is the body that writes, it is the body that speaks, it is the body that fights, it is the body that loves, that hates, it is the body that suffers, it is the body that dies, it is the body that lives! (Freire, 1985, p. 28)⁵

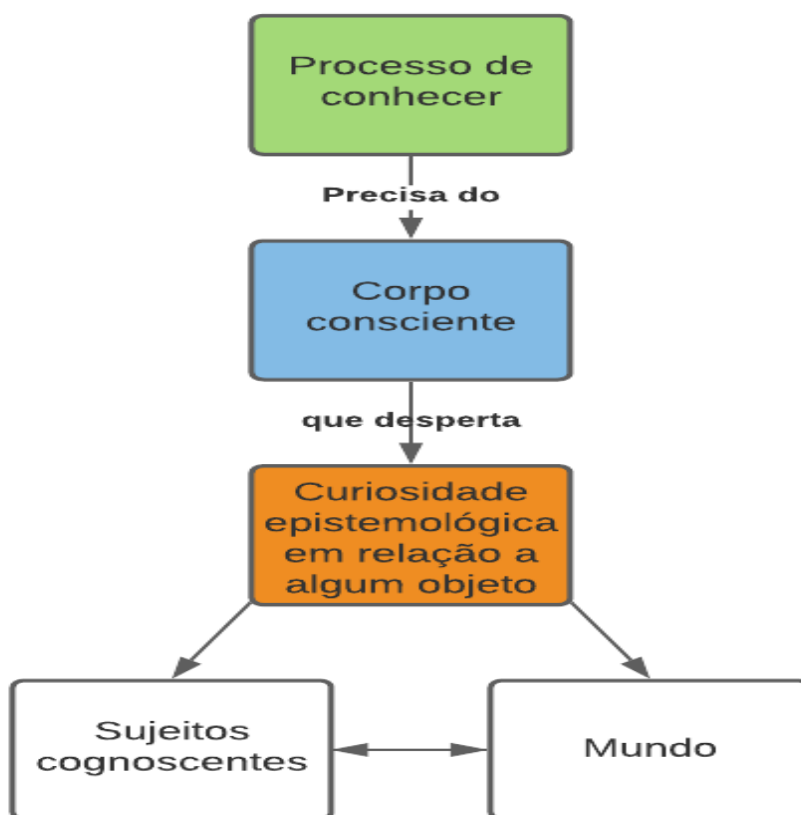
Thus, in Freire's perspective (2016), education is conceived as an experience in which the human being acts with their whole body in the search for their wholeness, mediated by a cognizable situation that, being cognizable in a broad sense, considers sensitivity and emotions as fundamental to the process of critical apprehension of phenomena. Therefore, Freire (2016, p. 174) opposes any attempt to establish an opposition between sensitivity and cognitive activity, because according to him, "[...] I know with my whole body: feelings, emotions, critical mind." Indeed, Freire (2019) is emphatic in defending the impossibility of understanding and acting critically in the world without considering the complexity that we are, after all, we are wholeness and not a dichotomy.

In our view, the Freirean conception of education and his concept of conscious body seek to overcome the tendency of most theories and pedagogies in Brazilian education, which always conceive education as an activity of a consciousness without body. As a synthesis of Freire (2016), we can say that the process of knowing, which

⁵ Original: "O corpo humano, velho ou moço, gordo ou magro, não importa de que cor, é o corpo consciente, que olha as estrelas, é o corpo que escreve, é o corpo que fala, é o corpo que luta, é o corpo que ama, que odeia, é o corpo que sofre, é o corpo que morre, é o corpo que vive!" (Freire, 1985, p. 28)

involves the conscious body, stems from some form of restlessness in the form of epistemological curiosity regarding some object. However, this process cannot be carried out in isolation between subject and object, since it requires other subjects and reflective interaction with the world. In Flowchart 1, we present a synthesis of Freire (2016).

Flowchart 1 – Path of cognitive activity in Paulo Freire.



Source: Prepared by the authors (2023).

In view of the reorientation of critical education discourse to the present, our proposal to think of education as experience and as a practice of building the aptitude to have experiences finds in Freire a conception of subject and education that inverts the entire lineage of Brazilian pedagogical debate. From what we have observed, this lineage almost always tends to begin from the end, that is, from the concept and scientific generalization in the ready-made and finished form of school knowledge,

which must be socialized to students for the formation of the wage worker, the citizen, or critical consciousness.

In this sense, it is worth saying that before the final conceptual representation, things can be experienced (in the sense of experience and not experiment), treated as human practice that encompasses the conscious body. With this, we believe that the project of legitimizing the modern school aiming at education for emancipation gains momentum from the moment in which objects of knowledge begin to be treated not as incomprehensible abstractions, but as concepts that can be learned by the body, as experiences that can be transformed into concepts, or experiences that are also expressions of concepts. Ultimately, it is about recognizing that in social life, in true experience and in education, the separation between the concept of the object and its practical expression is impossible and, at times, problematic.

With these reflections, we conclude this study that sought to present theoretical-conceptual contributions and concrete considerations for critical education of the present, based on the consideration of the need for the formative process that positions itself as emancipatory to permeate through the body. Ultimately, it is necessary to orient education toward the bodily condition of subjects, ensuring that the idea of forming the critical subject is, in fact, expressed in critical and liberatory educational practices with and through the conscious body.

Final considerations

We remind readers that our intention in this essay, now coming to a close, was to articulate authors recognized within the critical tradition of social theory and education around a debate. This was an educational debate through which we ventured to propose an inflection in favor of the body, since, from traditional to critical pedagogies, the body has almost never been treated as a protagonist in teaching and learning processes, and much less in pedagogical intentions and formulations that project the emancipation of subjects in the time and space of school education.

For this proposition, in addition to the discussions on education and experience

in Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, we presented Paulo Freire as an author who, within the educational field, considered the bodily condition of subjects in teaching and learning processes, to the point of defending the idea that liberatory education needs to consider subjects as conscious body. Thus, in terms of results and assertions that we can sustain through the discussion conducted in this study, we note that:

- 1) Critical education of the present oriented toward emancipation and democracy needs to consider educational practice as experience and formation of the aptitude to have experiences. In this direction, it is about reorienting the relationship between theory and practice, in the sense of making an inflection in pedagogical discourses of cognitivist primacy, so that they reconnect with the body through non-dichotomous ways. Therefore, we emphasize that the contributions of Benjamin and Adorno on experience and cultural formation, if well mediated, can point to fruitful paths for the educational field.
- 2) In the confrontation between banking education and liberatory education proposed by Freire, the latter elevates contradictory and overcoming thought of the exclusionary contemporary reality, of a still unequal society, to think critically about dialogical and conscientizing action. It is an expanded formation that connects with the plane of action, generating struggle against dehumanization, projecting the organization of the oppressed, autonomy, and the radical transformation of oppressive reality.
- 3) The project of critical education of the present to which we are referring, which conceives the body as the place of formative experience imbricated with theoretical reflection, needs to recognize the human being as conscious body, in the Freirean sense. In this condition, learning is considered as a whole-body action. This aspect is fundamental for reorienting school education, since the need for education of the body in a critical sense is a task to be carried out by all curricular components and formative moments of the school.

Finally, we emphasize that despite the points made and the propositional discussion in favor of the body in the teaching and learning process, thinking about critical education in the contemporary school, we note that this demand needs to be

materialized in concrete practices within basic education. This is our challenge: to think about education of the body in everyday life, in the micro processes of education and schooling that permeate the school experience.

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Notes

¹ This work is a result of the Doctoral thesis of its first author. In this paper, we present a reviewed and improved version of one of the topics of the forementioned thesis, which counted with the collaboration of the other authors of this paper.

² When Strazzacappa (2001) refers to Physical Education classes, the author still conceives the subject as a time and space for the instrumental and reductionist use of the body. It should be noted that this is not the position of the authors of this study. In our understanding, Physical Education classes need to contribute to the fulfillment of the school's formative function, thus fostering processes of education of the body beyond the instrumental and reductionist logic of movement.

³ To illustrate this relationship among school, body, and punishment, Strazzacappa states that (2001, p. 70) "bodily movement has always functioned as a bargaining chip. If we briefly observe the disciplinary attitudes that continue to be used in schools today, we realize that we are not very different from the infamous palm paddles of our grandparents' time. Teachers and principals resort to physical immobility as punishment and to the freedom to move as a reward. Undisciplined students (bearing in mind that, many times, what defines an undisciplined child is precisely an excess of movement) are constantly prevented from carrying out activities in the schoolyard, either through a ban on enjoying recess time or by being barred from participating in Physical Education class, whereas those who behave may go to the schoolyard earlier to play. These attitudes show that movement is synonymous with pleasure and immobility with discomfort." This recalls Huizinga's (1980) discussion of the disdain for play and playfulness (phenomena expressed through gesture and bodily expression) in the modern world, marked by the presence of activities rationalized by science and its technical means, as is the case of sport, according to Adorno (2020).

⁴ This is the curriculum guidance document proposed and approved for Brazil's Basic Education system, based on the approval of the following resolutions: CNE/CP Resolution No. 2, of December 22, 2017, which establishes and guides the implementation of the BNCC for Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education; and CNE/CP Resolution No. 4, of December 17, 2018, which establishes the BNCC for High School.

⁵ It is worth noting that, owing to the revolutionary theoretical contribution, there are indications that the pedagogy formulated by Dermeval Saviani points to paths that valorize the corporeal condition of the historical subject.

⁶ Narrating as a practice of banking education is different from storytelling as traditional experience as set forth by Benjamin (1987).

⁷ In Freire (2017), liberating action consists in a conscious moment that stands in opposition to oppressive reality.

⁸ Also in Freire (2017, p. 124), “men not only live but exist, and their existence is historical.”

⁹ According to Freire (2021, p. 52) “but praxis is reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it. Without it, it is impossible to resolve the oppressor–oppressed contradiction”.