

## **REINVENTING FREIRE'S PRAXIS IN THE FIGHT FOR LIFE WITH DIGNITY: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PATHS FOR CRITICAL EDUCATORS**

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**ABSTRACT** The article reflects Freire's work to unveil ethical principles and theoretical and methodological paths for a transformative praxis in formal educational contexts and beyond them, connecting universities, social movements, and public schools.

**RESUMO** O artigo reflete sobre a obra de Freire com o intuito de apontar princípios éticos e caminhos teóricos e metodológicos da práxis transformadora em contextos educacionais formais e para além deles, conectando universidades, movimentos sociais e escolas públicas.

**KEYWORDS** Praxis; Critical Education; Social Justice; Universities; Social Movements

The coronavirus pandemic has revealed the obscene degree of inequality and injustice to which a large part of the black, mestizo, and indigenous population is subjected at capitalism's peripheries. These are entire populations, which are denied the primary conditions for a life with dignity, which are left at the margins of

the parameters of civilization enjoyed by the countries of the global North, such as sanitation, drinking water, housing, and food.

Contrastingly, the new pandemic normality separates those who have access to coronavirus vaccines and health care from those who die at home, with no vaccine prospects and no vacancies for hospital care.

Among educators, the new pandemic normality separates, on the one hand, those who take their academic courses in an online format and see in the technologies a world of possibilities to be taken advantage of. On the other hand, there are educators in peripheral schools and universities, where the internet and computers are privileges for a few.

Considering the brutality and dehumanization of capitalist normality, the text affirms that life with dignity is only possible if it is a reality for everyone. In other words, the attack on the dignity of life anywhere in the world is an attack on life worldwide.

Affirming the right to life with dignity has direct implications for critical educators' work around the world. They refuse to be dehumanized and subordinate humanity to the degradations of capitalism. In this sense, this text reflects Paulo Freire's work, revealing theoretical and methodological paths for a transformative praxis from formal educational contexts. The reflections presented here are based on the experience of ten years of praxis in public universities in Brazil, in projects and actions connecting universities, social movements, and public schools. We agree with Marx and Engels when they state that:

All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human

practice and in the comprehension of this practice (Marx & Engels, 1993, p.128, our translation).

In this sense, the purpose of this text is not to highlight specific cases or projects as models to be followed but to bring to the debate some of the concrete challenges faced in practical action and that are, therefore, the target of collective critical reflection.

### **The educator needs to be educated**

One of Paulo Freire's best-known and perhaps one of the least understood statements is "Education does not transform the world. Education changes people. People change the world" (Freire, 1979, p.84, our translation).

The individualistic ideology woven into all dimensions of social life under the capitalist mode of production undermines the transformative power of this statement - and of Freire's entire work - by restricting the understanding of society as the sum of individuals who, each individually doing his or her part, would transform the world. The voice of Margaret Thatcher, who in the 1980s stated that "there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families," echoes in the minds of many educators.

About this, Freire states: "the taste that each person shows for individualism is the particular expression of a social consciousness of that person" (Freire & Macedo, 2011, p.37, our translation). In this sense, Freire reaffirms Marx by understanding that just as people form the environment, the environment also forms people. In other words, human consciousness is developed in the concrete context of social life.

And what does the individualist position stand for? It dichotomizes the individual and the social. Generally, this cannot be realized since it is not feasible to do so. Nevertheless, the individualist ideology ends up denying social interests or submitting social interests to individualist interests. (...) The individualist position acts against understanding the true role of human action. (Freire & Macedo, 2011, p.42, our translation)

The fragmentation of the social in isolated individuals, who do not recognize themselves as a class, is fundamental for maintaining the capitalist order. Freire reaffirms this in “Pedagogia do oprimido” (Pedagogy of the Oppressed - Freire, 2011). He points out that the strategy of dividing is manifested in all the actions of the dominant class to maintain oppression.

However, the analysis and critique of the ideology of individualism is a very complex process, precisely because this ideology puts in opposition, on one side, individuals, their subjectivity and their self-fulfillment needs, and, on the other side, class, history, and the need for social transformation. As long as these dimensions are considered self-excluding, understood as opposites, and not as being deeply interrelated, labor exploitation will continue to hinder both self-realization of individuals and the dignified life of the working class.

Once the capitalist mode of production establishes the phenomenon of private property as an absolute value, it reduces human life to mere commodity destined to propel wealth accumulation. One cannot forget that private property - of land, which is a crucial example - presupposes the existence of several individuals who are dispossessed of property, which therefore institutes a model of a society divided into classes.

The notion of individual, in this context, is shaped in parameters that ensure that the phenomenon of private property remains unquestioned. As Saviani (2003) explains, in slave and feudal societies, the relations of exploitation and subjugation were transparent, and slave owners justified their violent acts based on the law that ensured that enslaved human beings were not individuals but objects under their property.

In capitalist society, by contrast, the once enslaved subject's appearance of freedom becomes central. Indeed, the appearance is that of a society in which individuals are free to make choices and, from individual effort, accumulate wealth. Individualist ideology is tied to the myth of freedom, which in turn is only formal. The myth of freedom conceals the fact that the dynamics of capital reproduction imposes itself on human life. Capital assumes the appearance of an entity with a life of its own that does not stop at any ethical, legal, political, environmental, or cultural obstacle.

In this social context - and not outside or above it - we educators are formed and develop our understanding of the reality in which we are completely immersed. Many educators engaged in transforming society, who are inserted in an individualistic ideology, find it difficult to envision that their pedagogical action can go beyond the intention of "transforming people" who, in turn, would transform the world.

Paulo Freire tried to express when he stated that "Education does not transform the world" (Freire, 1979, p. 84) that the merely pedagogical path is not enough to change society, although it is extremely necessary. Transforming society requires a practical, active path beyond educational institutions.

Moreover, subjects cannot be divided between active and passive or between those who think and those who act. In other words, the dualism between educators and learners cannot be accepted because “educators need to be educated” (Marx & Engels, 1993).

In this sense, Freire follows up on the initial idea by stating that “education changes people. People change the world” because human beings - unlike animals - when acting on the environment, have the ability to reflect on the action and, therefore, to transform themselves in this interaction with the environment, in an ongoing process of self-transformation. As Freire states in another work,

In fact, the unfinishedness of being or its inconclusion is part of the vital experience. Where there is life, there is the unfinished. Nevertheless, only among women and men did this unfinished become conscious” (Freire, 1996, p. 12, our translation).

Changing circumstances and changing oneself must be a unitary process, carried out in revolutionary praxis (Marx & Engels, 1993). Therefore, there can never be educators who should not be educated.

The denial of both the dualism between educators and students and the conception of a subjects who think they are transforming without actually transforming themselves point to the need to engage in an incessant, continuous praxis (Sánchez-Vázquez, 2011). As Mayo (2020, p. 464) points out, “our life is constantly in need of reflective examination, with recourse to and the evaluation of theory and identification of its occlusions.”

In this sense, it is not possible to ignore the ethical aspect of praxis, which makes subjects engage in the permanent commitment to reflective practice, thus

maintaining a degree of coherence. Dussel (2012) emphasizes that there is an ethical duty in the critique of the capitalist system, which is expressed in an active stance before the world - a stance claimed by Marx when he states: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it” (Marx & Engels, 1993, p. 128, our translation).

In the era of globalized capitalism that relentlessly produces misery, hunger, and death, the critical educator must actively take a side, no matter in which country or context. Freire defends this perspective and states that it is not possible for a person living critically to exist without assuming the right and the duty to choose, to decide, to fight, to do politics.

And all this brings us back to the importance of the formative practice, and the ethical nature of this practice. And all of this brings us back to the radical nature of hope. I know that things can even get worse, but I also know that it is possible to intervene to make them better (Freire, 1996, p. 22, our translation).

Gramsci’s words also call for the urgency of taking a stand against capitalist barbarism:

I hate the indifferent. I believe that life means taking sides. One who is really alive, can be nothing if not citizen and partisan. Indifference is lethargy; it is parasitism; it is cowardice; it is not life. Therefore, I hate the indifferent. Indifference is the dead weight of history. Indifference plays an important role in history. It plays a passive role, but it does play a role. It is fatality; it is something that cannot be counted on; it is something that disrupts programmes, overturns the best made plans; it is that awful something that chokes intelligence (Gramsci, 2020, p. 33).

The affirmation of life is opposed to the “lethargy of the indifferent” (Gramsci, 2020). In the greater purpose of life affirmation, we argue that the praxis of the critical

educator should be guided by what Dussel (2012) calls the ethics of liberation, which calls for the ethical duty to transform the reality that causes victims.

If I do not assume responsibility, I do not cease to be responsible for the death of the other, who is my/our victim, and of whose victimization I am/we are an accomplice, at least for being a human being, destined to the communal responsibility of the shared vulnerability of all living people. I am/we are responsible for the other by the fact of being human, “sensitivity” open to the face of the other. Moreover, it is not responsibility for one’s own life; it is now responsibility for the denied life of the other (Dussel, 2012, p. 378, our translation).

Responsibility for human life in general achieves concreteness, not to remain a mere abstract conception, as we advance in critical analysis of the capitalist system and recognize its real, concrete victims, in whose faces we can recognize ourselves.

When we analyze history from the perspective of the oppressed - history of colonization, enslavement, pillage, rape, genocide, exploitation - what we see is “one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet” (Benjamin, 1940, p.6).

In the continuum of this history, the catastrophe deepens and continuously accumulates a greater number of victims. In the face of the single catastrophe, Benjamin states “that not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if he is victorious. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious” (Benjamin, 1940, p.4).

For justice to exist, it is necessary to transform the established order (which produces victims, denies the right to live) so that the *impossibility of living* for these victims is converted into the *possibility of living* and



*living better*. The material demand of the ethics of liberation is not only the reproduction of life (especially the life of those who have historically been denied their right to live) but also the development of human life in history, that is, the humanization of all humans.

Here, better living is understood as a quest that can only be realized if it is collectively, universally including all living beings. This clamor is present in the perspective of the *buen vivir* (good living) of the indigenous peoples of Latin America and the Zapatistas' struggle when they claim and reaffirm *dignity*, the struggle for life with dignity. Holloway (1997) reflects on the revolutionary role of dignity in the Zapatista movement:

Dignity is an assault on the separation of morality and politics, and of the private and the public. Dignity cuts across those boundaries, asserts the unity of what has been sundered. The assertion of dignity is neither a moral nor a political claim: it is rather an attack on the separation of politics and morality that allows formally democratic regimes all over the world to co-exist with growing levels of poverty and social marginalisation. It is the 'here we are!' not just of the marginalised, but of the horror felt by all of us in the face of mass impoverishment and starvation. It is the 'here we are!' not just of the growing numbers shut away in prisons, hospitals and homes, but also of the shame and disgust of all of us who, by living, participate in the bricking up of people in those prisons, hospitals and homes (Holloway, 1997, p. 9, our translation).

When Holloway says that "Dignity cuts across those boundaries, asserts the unity of what has been sundered," we can understand, for example, that the attack on the lives of peasant communities in Africa (threatened by the predatory actions of mining companies from many countries including Britain, the US, Canada, China, or Brazil), or the attack on indigenous communities in Brazil (by invaders who

illegally exploit mining for export or international timber trade) represents an attack on the dignity of all humans.

From this perspective, the necessary and urgent social transformation will only be possible with the active and persistent stance of people who refuse to be dehumanized and to accept that humanity is subordinated to capitalist degradation.

The praxis of liberation demands action. However, it is not a final act but the constant one that relates subjects to each other with the common goal of transforming reality. In this constant and persistent act, it is fundamental to seek unity between the transformation of circumstances and self-transformation, in an attitude radically opposed to a naive utopianism that, separating these two dimensions, restricts the pedagogical act to the search for the self-transformation of subjects.

Therefore, not falling into naive utopianism requires knowing the reality to be transformed: the capitalist society that dehumanizes human beings to even more extreme levels and denies the life and dignity of entire populations in Africa, Latin America, and the peripheries of the central countries of capitalism.

### **Educational institutions and the challenge of the praxis**

Since capitalism is a complex and contradictory totality, its understanding demands a theory that helps to unveil the connections between social phenomena, to go beyond the understanding made possible by the perception of appearances, and to achieve a more rigorous understanding of the facts observable in

everyday life (Freire & Macedo, 2011). As emphasized by Kosik:

If reality is a dialectical, structured whole, then concrete cognition of reality does not amount to systematically arraying facts with facts and findings with findings; rather, it is a process of concretization which proceeds from the whole to its parts and from the parts to the whole, from phenomena to the essence and from the essence to phenomena, from totality to contradictions and from contradictions to totality. It arrives at concreteness precisely in this spiral process of totalization in which all concepts move with respect to one another, and mutually illuminate one another (Kosik, 1976, p. 41, our translation).

In her analysis of the method in Marx, Miriam Limoeiro Cardoso (1990) points out that the “concrete” (which at first sight is recognized as concrete) only makes sense when the analysis discovers its determinations because social reality is a determined reality, the social facts are as they are for a reason. There are specific relations that engender them, a certain causality. “In this sense, they are determined and, thus, their explanation can only be achieved when one apprehends their determination” (Cardoso, 1990, p. 12, our translation).

[...] from the analysis of the relationship between parts and the whole, the concrete wealth of dialectical contradictions is increasingly developed within a unitary process, thus discovering the essence of the manifestations (Kofler, 2010, p. 61, our translation)

For Marx and other critical theorists, including Freire, the philosophy of praxis, enabling one to work through the contradictions of life, and hence think and act in a manner intended to stop reproducing them, constituted the means to interpret the world coherently with the ultimate goal of transforming it (Mayo, 2020). Thus, we can understand praxis as a permanent

dialectical process in which critical reflection guided by a radical theory (which goes to the root of contradictions) and action guided by the purpose of transforming society are closely interdependent. Therefore, it is not about reflection and action without a defined purpose. As Sanchez-Vasquez states

One does not know for the sake of knowing but rather in the service of an end. The activity of consciousness, which is inseparable from all true human activity, presents itself to us as the elaboration of ends and production of knowledge in intimate unity (Sanchez-Vasquez, 2011, p. 226, our translation).

Unlike other animals, humans are social beings who act consciously; therefore, they can plan, prospect, and transcend the present moment to envision new possibilities for the future, which Freire calls untested feasibility.

The untested feasibility is a word that entails the understanding of time and space [*untested feasibility entails an understanding of time and space*- journal editors]. Time and space in which we, in an impatiently patient manner, nurture the epistemological curiosity that ought to take us to philosophical and scientific knowledge, which in turn would materialize the ontological and historical hope through the transformative ingenuity [*potential* – journal editors] underlying human dreams (Freire A. M., 2002, p. 9).

Thus, transformative praxis needs the formulation (always collectively) of an ideal result or an end to achieve - as a starting point - and the watchful and permanent intention to adjust actions according to the stipulated end. “The end, in turn, is the expression of a certain attitude of the subject before reality. By the fact of tracing an end, I adopt a certain position before reality” (Sanchez-Vasquez, 2011, p. 224, our translation).

Just as the worker has in his head the design of what he will produce in his workshop, we, women and men, as such, workers or architects, physicians or engineers, physicists or teachers, also have in our heads, more or less, the design of the world in which we would like to live. This is the utopia or the dream that urges us to struggle. The dream of a better world is born from the bowels of its opposite (Freire, 2000, p. 85, our translation).

In line with Freire's thought, Sanchez-Vazquez points out important reflections on the process of praxis:

[...] The consciousness must be constantly active, peregrinating from the interior to the exterior, from the ideal to the material, with which throughout the practical process, the distance between the ideal model (the prefigured result) and the product (definitive and real result) deepens more and more. This introduces into the process, concerning the ideal model, a burden of uncertainty and indeterminacy. The inevitable loss of the original end in every truly creative (non-bureaucratized) practical process does not mean eliminating the determining role that the end has in such a process (Sanchez-Vasquez, 2011, p. 271, our translation).

As previously discussed, the concrete reality - both the focus and the context in which the praxis develops - is a complex and contradictory totality, which imposes a series of challenges to the praxis and confers a high degree of unpredictability and uncertainty about the outcome. For this reason, it requires high activity of consciousness (critical reflection on action) throughout the process.

Bringing the focus to educational institutions, the ethical duty of educators - discussed earlier - imposes the need to act concretely for the transformation of this society that places a large part of the global population (especially in the peripheries) facing "limit situations." It is a term used by Freire and is inspired by the work of Alvaro Vieira Pinto (Pinto, 1960). He states that

“limit-situations” are realities that put a concrete brake on “being more” to some subjects and, therefore, are obstacles to their liberation. Human beings find themselves in this reality under capitalism, which drives dehumanization to ever more extreme levels.

In the Brazilian context, the limit situations that threaten life and dignity have reached extremely critical levels. Some examples are the high number of deaths by COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021. In relation to this, the ultraconservative neoliberal right wing in power is investigated by a parliamentary commission for not taking the necessary measures to prevent the death of more than 600,000 Brazilians from COVID-19<sup>1</sup>. In addition, the food insecurity situation that more than half of the population faces is dramatic. The ‘National Survey of Food Insecurity in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Brazil’, conducted in December 2020, indicates that 116.8 million Brazilians (Brazil’s population is circa 212 million) do not have complete and permanent access to food (PENSSAN network, 2021). Another sad example is the fact that between 2015 and 2019, at least one human rights activist was murdered every eight days<sup>2</sup>.

Alvaro Vieira Pinto argues that the limit-situations are not “the insurmountable contour where possibilities end, but the real margin where all possibilities begin” (Pinto, 1960, p. 284, our translation). In the author’s perspective, the concept of “limit situation” provides the opening for historical transcendence and unveils an infinity of acts to be done. Those educators who are self-described as being

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<sup>1</sup> Official data on COVID-19 in Brazil is available at <https://covid.saude.gov.br/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://noticias.uol.com.br/colunas/jamil-chade/2021/01/28/um-ativista-foi-morto-no-brasil-a-cada-oito-dias-revela-relatoria-da-onu.htm>

critical cannot stay passive while most of the population is having their dignity stolen.

When it comes to university institutions, there are countless challenges to be faced so that a transformative praxis can be established - which, by principle, should have as its first objective to break down the walls that separate university, school, and social movements.

In the Brazilian case, the scarcity of public resources for public universities and for social policies demands from educators a permanent state of struggle against privatization in defense of the public good and for better working conditions. On this point, the unions have enormous importance.

Another problem is the racist and elitist culture ingrained in universities. In the last decade, affirmative policies have made it possible for black students from low-income families to enter public universities. However, there is not enough budget to ensure that these students can finish their undergraduate courses. Thus, the share of the population of 24 to 34 years old that has a higher education degree remains low (21.3%), compared to neighboring countries such as Colombia (30%), Chile (33.7%), and Argentina (40%) (INEP, 2020). In addition, the illiteracy rate in Brazil remains at high levels so that, in 2019, Brazil has a population of 11 million illiterate people, which would be equivalent to the sum of the populations of Finland and Norway (IBGE, 2020).

Thus, it is not possible to disregard the fact that attending higher education is a privilege. Furthermore, the struggle for a more humane and egalitarian society must necessarily involve the struggle for the end of privileges. That is, the recognition that accessing higher education is a human right, just like housing,

food, healthcare, the right to cultural identity and territory, to a balanced environment, and so forth.

These are struggles undertaken by countless social movements in Brazil, such as the Landless Workers Movement (MST), the Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB), the Homeless Workers' Movement (MTST), the indigenous movements, the quilombolas (maroon communities) movements, the movements of popular pre-college courses, the black movements, and many others. Historically, these movements develop organizational strategies, methodologies of struggle and resistance, political training and fulfill the important social task of keeping alive the memory of the struggles of oppressed peoples.

Several educators and groups of researchers have been facing the challenge of the praxis in Brazilian public universities in order to break the walls that separate the academic world and the social movements, having as a starting point the affirmation of the importance of social movements for the transformation of society.

This text intends not to highlight specific cases or projects as models to be followed because, besides being countless and diverse in their theoretical perspectives and methodological strategies, there is no model to be followed for the transformation of society. Instead, there is a long trajectory to be traveled collectively. Here, the intention is to debate some of the concrete challenges faced in practical action, which are, therefore, subject to critical reflection.



## **Methodological paths**

As discussed earlier, praxis is not action without definite purposes. On the contrary, it requires collective formulation of an ideal result or an end to be reached - as a starting point - and an attitude of openness to the inevitable changes in planning. Therefore, it is not possible to establish in advance a methodology to be implemented. However, from work experience over ten years in Brazilian universities, it was possible to observe some common challenges faced in the process of praxis. Identifying the challenges makes it possible to unveil methodological paths - not a ready-to-use methodology - collectively traveled in a dialogical way.

Here, dialogue is understood in its radicality, as advocated by Paulo Freire (2011): to be dialogical is to experience dialogue, which can be understood as the loving encounter of men and women who, in interrelation with the concrete environment, act to transform the world and, in this process, humanize themselves and move towards the higher goal that is the humanization of all. Therefore, to be dialogical is not to invade, not to manipulate, not to sloganize.

The praxis involves paths that start from the urgency of social struggles and the concrete need to be mobilized to ensure the rights and integrity of individuals and social groups at risk of life. Freire, in his work 'Educação como prática da liberdade' (Education as the practice of freedom', 1979), states:

One of the great, if not the greatest, tragedies of modern man is that he is today dominated by the force of myths and commanded by organized publicity, ideological or otherwise. For this reason, he has been renouncing, without knowing it, his ability to decide. (...) Despite his disguise of initiative and optimism, modern man is crushed by a deep sense of

impotence that makes him stare, as if paralyzed, at the coming catastrophes (Freire, 1979, p. 50, our translation).

Renouncing the human capacity to make decisions and act guided by them is to disregard that only humans are transforming and creative beings who, in their permanent relations with reality, produce not only material goods, sensible things, objects but also social institutions, their ideas, their conceptions. That is, human beings make history.

It is man, as a real historical subject, who in the social process of production and reproduction creates the base and superstructure, forms social reality as a totality of social relations, institutions, and ideas; and in this creation of objective social reality creates at the same time himself, as a historical and social being, endowed with human senses and potentialities, and realizes the infinite process of the “humanization of man.” (KOSIK, 1976, p. 51, our translation)

As real historical subjects, professors and students produce and reproduce the university. In Brazil, the long tradition of struggle and strikes by professors, with student organizations’ support, ensures that public universities remain free, despite all attempts at privatization. In addition, the professors’ unions and student organizations have been of enormous importance in defense of democracy.

Referring to Marx, Freire (Freire & Macedo, 2011) points out that human beings make history based on the concrete conditions that a generation inherits from previous generations. From this concrete situation, a generation can continue history or have the possibility of making a revolutionary rupture. In this way, even if the concrete conditions are not favorable for revolutionary rupture in favor of the working class, the current generation must work to create the conditions for transformation to become possible in the future.

The importance of the understanding - discussed above - that “the educator needs to be educated” lies here. It is necessary to be permanently self-critical about the coherence of our actions concerning the end (purpose) established collectively. In this sense, it is necessary to keep in mind that the praxis carried out by educational institutions - which seek to break the barriers that put the university and the social movements at different poles - necessarily deal with the dimension of historical time, which forces us to recognize the limits of our action and, upon recognizing the limits, act collectively to overcome them. In this movement, it is understood that every effort to transform society is a collective effort, which has an extended temporality. We received this legacy from those who preceded us, and it will continue beyond with those who come after us. Therefore, in a patiently impatient way, we are urged to develop the capacity to understand that our temporality exceeds the limits of the temporality of our own lives and that we may not be present at the celebration of the victories we so long for.

The experience of praxis at the university has pointed out that, besides the challenges already mentioned, there is a permanent challenge related to the tension between the notion of temporality in which university curricula are structured and the other temporalities that condition concrete social life and, especially, the processes of the struggle for rights.

The notion of temporality in which university (and school) curricula are structured refers to chronological temporality, established in successive semesters (or school years) and anchored in plans and schedules. This temporality is of great importance. It helps

organize the action and establish spaces for the encounter between educators, students, and social movement leaders (for example, the space in a curricular discipline and a classroom).

Nevertheless, from the moment that praxis breaks the university's walls, subjects are faced with the tensions caused by this temporality: planning and schedules are essential, but a truly dialogical praxis needs to be fully open to transform itself into the concrete encounter between concrete subjects in concrete territories.

The notion of temporality required in concrete life (outside the university) is not linear and carries a high degree of unpredictability. It is a temporality that can be more or less extended because it is conditioned by the multiple dimensions of social life: culture, customs, climate, economy, political dynamics, intersubjective relations.

For example, if the process of praxis is developed in a region where the primary means of transportation is river navigation - as in some locations in the Amazon region - the dynamics of the waters imposes a particular temporality to actions. This temporality differs from the one in a city like Rio de Janeiro - where precarious transportation and long traffic jams make the time of locomotion unpredictable. Likewise, the praxis in certain conflict regions in Rio de Janeiro - where firefights between police and drug dealers are a daily reality - faces numerous unpredictable factors.

How to deal with the tensions between the university structure (low budget for research and extension activities, poor infrastructure, highly competitive and elitist culture), the temporality of this

structure (which can impose changes in the team members of a project and discontinuities, for example) and the temporality demanded by the concreteness of praxis that, in many cases, demands urgency?

In the poem *Like a River*, the Brazilian poet Thiago de Mello (Mello, 2006) captures the complexity of the difficult collective task of social transformation and the need for persistence.

**LIKE A RIVER**

To be able, like a river  
To carry along  
The tired boat  
Unable to convey any hope;  
Washing away and cleansing  
The stains of suffering.

Covered by the silence of distance  
To grow and deliver  
The full Power of a song,  
Exactly as the river deciphers  
The secrets of the earth.

When it is time to decrease  
The river saves its strength  
To stay flowing.  
Sometimes it disappears and for a while  
Its waters will run deep in the earth.  
But it learns always to return  
In order to fulfill its trade: Love.

To accept, like a river,  
Those sudden waves  
Of foul Waters  
That bring to surface  
The hidden truth of the deep

Like a river, sum of streams,  
To learn how to follow  
And widen with others,  
To finally meet  
The ocean.

To change, always on the move,  
Sustaining the same being,  
Different yet in each moment:  
Like a river.

(Mello, 2006)

Praxis requires permanent attention to the present time and space (in the physical, social, cultural, and economic dimensions), as well as permanent critical analysis of time and space in the historical dimension.

As Freire (2011) states, in the existence of human beings, the “here” is not only a physical space but also a historical space constructed by them and, therefore, possible to be transformed. The statement that men and women are subjects of history implies the idea of a subject that only exists in history. That is, individuals are a social product from a history that only exists as the history of their activity (Sanchez-Vasquez, 2011).

Therefore, it is imperative to keep alive the memory of the social struggles of the oppressed, their stories, their ideas, their projects, their insurgencies, and their resistance strategies. The history of the “defeated” - as opposed to the history of the winners, which becomes the “official” history - states that the battle was not over. Each new generation inherits the strength, wisdom, and tenacity to continue the struggle. Benjamin (1940) points out that:

[...] there is a secret protocol [Verabredung:also appointment] between the generations of the past and that of our own. For we have been expected upon this earth. For it has been given us to know, just like every generation before us, a weak messianic power, on which the past has a claim. This claim is not to be settled lightly (Benjamin, 1940, p. 3).

These struggles cross universities: the struggle of those who have been denied their right to education that occurs in the movements of popular pre-college courses, the struggle for housing and food that occurs in urban centers, in rural areas, and also inside universities, when students fight for housing near the campus and “bandeijão” (subsidized meals for students), the struggle of the various student movements that question the elitist, racist, and authoritarian university structure and that organize strikes, protests, and occupy the university demanding rights.

Is it possible to develop ways of teaching and learning that have as their starting point the strengthening of these struggles? From our point of view, such ways of teaching and learning involve the endless search for possibilities to break through the academic structure (even being inserted in it), experience the tensions and contradictions that emerge, and reflect critically about them, considering the new horizons that open up, expanding the collective vision of what is possible and tracing other paths.

For example, it is possible to elaborate a curricular discipline connected to practices with a social movement, engaging educators and students in the elaboration of, for example, leaflets to give visibility to the movement’s demands and technical documents as subsidies for the judicial disputes they may face. Furthermore, as part of the collective reflection, there are other actions such as systematizing the strategies adopted and the paths taken, the setbacks and conflicts; studying strategies and paths taken by other social movements and dialogue with them; mapping

the social actors involved in the judicial disputes and the underlying interests; trying to foresee probable scenarios if a certain attitude is taken by the collective or not; and so on.

As mentioned earlier, one does not know for the sake of knowing but rather in the service of an end (Sanchez-Vazquez, 2011). The countless limit situations faced by social movements unveil an endless number of acts to be done (Pinto, 1960). On this path, the elaboration of ends and the production of knowledge are intimately united.

## **Conclusions**

The text aims to present a reflection on Paulo Freire's work in dialogue with other authors to unveil theoretical and methodological paths for the praxis developed from universities, bringing to the debate some of the concrete challenges often faced.

We argue that affirming the right to life with dignity is an ethical duty of educators that brings direct implications to their pedagogical work, requiring the breaking out of the "lethargy of the indifferent" (Gramsci, 2020) to follow a practical, active path beyond the educational institutions. On this path, changing circumstances and changing oneself is a unitary and continuous process carried out in praxis.

In this sense, "the educator needs to be educated" (Marx & Engels, 1993) in praxis, in the ceaseless struggles for rights, and, therefore, in the long collective path of human life in history, that is, the humanization of all humans.



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