

# Education and the Postmodern Subject in Neoliberal Society and the Possibilities of Emancipation by Paulo Freire's Pedagogy

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** In a society increasingly marked by the logic of contemporary capitalism, education becomes an instrument for the reproduction of alienated labour forces. **Objectives:** To provide an overview of the characteristics of subjectivity and attitudes of the postmodern subject based on the studies of Fredric Jameson and David Harvey; unveiling the development of techniques for producing more effective ways of subjecting the company culture to neoliberal rationality described by Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval and their influences on the formation of contemporary identities; reflect on the role of education, in particular of scientific education, in overcoming the state of alienation brought about by the capitalist system of neoliberal societies. **Design:** Articulation between exploratory and bibliographic research, articulated with the theoretical frameworks of Paulo Freire's critical theory and pedagogy. **Settings and Participants:** Given the typology of the research carried out, articles, books and documents about the capitalist system in neoliberal societies, the educational legislation and Paulo Freire's pedagogy. **Data Collection and analysis:** Critical reflection on the texts consulted and included in the research. **Results:** There is a relationship between the subjects constituted from the marketing logic and the role of the school as a reproducer of mechanisms of subjugation to the hegemonic capitalist system; there is also the business and industrial influence in the development of educational policies throughout the history of education. **Conclusions:** As a possibility of transforming this scenario of alienation from the educational system to hegemonic power, the Freirean conception of emancipatory critical humanist education is presented, in addition to the reproduction of capitalist logic, based on the awareness of subjects based on dialogical pedagogy and the appropriation of the scientific knowledge as a transformer of reality.

**Keywords:** Education. Postmodernity. Neoliberal society. Paulo Freire.

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## **A educação e o sujeito pós-moderno na sociedade neoliberal e as possibilidades de emancipação pela Pedagogia de Paulo Freire**

### **RESUMO**

**Contexto:** Em uma sociedade cada vez mais marcada pela lógica do capitalismo contemporâneo, a educação torna-se instrumento de reprodução de força de trabalho alienado. **Objetivos:** Traçar um panorama das características da subjetividade e das atitudes do sujeito pós-moderno com base nos estudos de Fredric Jameson e David Harvey; desvelar o desenvolvimento de técnicas de produção de formas mais eficazes de sujeição da cultura de empresa da racionalidade neoliberal descritas por Pierre Dardot e Christian Laval e suas influências na formação das identidades contemporâneas; refletir sobre o papel da educação, em particular da educação científica, na superação do estado de alienação impetrado pelo sistema capitalista das sociedades neoliberais. **Design:** Articulação entre pesquisa exploratória e bibliográfica, articulada com os referenciais teóricos da Teoria Crítica e da Pedagogia de Paulo Freire. **Ambiente e Participantes:** Dada a tipologia da pesquisa executada, artigos, livros e documentos acerca do sistema capitalista nas sociedades neoliberais, da legislação educacional e da Pedagogia de Paulo Freire. **Coleta de Dados:** Reflexão crítica sobre os textos consultados e incluídos na pesquisa. **Resultados:** Há uma relação entre os sujeitos constituídos a partir da lógica mercadológica e o papel da escola como reprodutora de mecanismos de subjugação ao sistema capitalista hegemônico; há também a influência empresarial e industrial na elaboração de políticas educacionais ao longo da história da educação. **Conclusões:** Como possibilidade de transformação deste cenário de alienação do sistema educacional ao poder hegemônico, apresenta-se a concepção freireana de educação humanista crítica emancipatória para além da reprodução da lógica capitalista, fundada na conscientização dos sujeitos a partir da pedagogia dialógica e na apropriação do conhecimento científico como transformador da realidade.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação. Pós-modernidade. Sociedade neoliberal. Paulo Freire.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since the beginning of its social formation, humanity has developed through the mediation of education as a typical activity of domination of nature (Saviani, 1997). This production of existence evolves from the establishment of experience as an actual learning process. With the development of contemporary societies, teaching has been held responsible for providing the basis for understanding the inhomogeneity of social relations (Morin, 2003). For Ferreira (2019):

Education is part of social reality and is an essential dimension for characterising the past, present, and future of societies, peoples, countries, cultures, and individuals. This is how schooling constitutes a humanising project that reflects the perspective of the progress of human beings and society. (Ferreira, 2019, Apresentação)

However, the development of late capitalism gives rise to a new form of subjectivity conditioned to cultural systems subordinated to the hegemonic power of accumulated capital (Jameson, 2000). This current, postmodern, fragmented, chaotic, and schizophrenic (Harvey, 2008) subject shapes a new reason for the world that Dardot and Laval (2016) call neoliberal society. Nevertheless, this condition of subjugating a subject to the workforce to maintain the capitalist system unequivocally impacts educational policies (Frigotto, 2010). In this sense, the school tends to incorporate the neoliberal thinking of educating subjects capable of industrial work.

To be a citizen, i.e., to actively participate in life in the city, just as to be a productive worker, one must enter the literate culture. And since this is a formalised, systematic process, it can only be achieved through an educational process that is also systematic. The school is the institution that systematically provides access to the literate culture demanded by members of modern society (Saviani, 1997, p. 3).

This “life in the city” refers to the industrial mode of development, while “literate culture” can be understood as basic subsidies for entry into the world of industrial work. Literate culture is beyond learning the writing technique; it focuses on the ability to learn to interpret the world. This argument is also found in Ostermann and Rezende (2020), when they affirm that educational legislation, especially the National Curricular Parameters (PCN), despite showing concern with the contextualisation of science, technology and society (STS), eventually regulate an urban lifestyle based on a central and technological space-time, disregarding the spaces of other subjects such as rural, indigenous, and quilombola communities.

The serial production of this neosubject, according to the logic of the individual-enterprise, competitiveness, self-management, and effectiveness, dictates the norms of neoliberal societies (Dardot & Laval, 2016). With a fragmented personality, with the chain of signifiers broken – characteristic of the postmodern subject – (Jameson, 2000), the subject’s identity becomes ultra-

flexible, controlling the behaviour and attitudes framed to the neoliberal norm (Dardot & Laval, 2016).

The hegemonic system, which owns the means of material production, also takes possession of the means of cultural production. In this sense, Horkheimer and Adorno (2009), from the group of theorists at the Frankfurt School, reflecting on the commodification of culture, elucidate the standardisation of lifestyles present in the industrialised culture. All aspects of the actors' daily lives induce the spectators to take them as references of just, ethical, happy, modern societies, etc. Real life is based on cinematic life. Musical styles, fashion, automobiles, household furniture, in contemporary times, everything reflects the cultural industry. The individual is constantly coerced to adapt to predetermined patterns by those who hold media power. The subordination is romanticised while worked with the ideology that presupposes that subjects are free and autonomous to choose -an ideology characteristic of the romantic period. Subjective choices are conditioned to industrialised cultural paradigms (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2009), and the subjects forged in this commercial logic constitute the fundamental corpus of contemporary school. The Frankfurt School strongly criticised traditional education and elaborated the critical theory, whose first exposition led to Horkheimer's work, *Kritische Theorie* [Traditional and Critical Theory], published in 1937, which defined the vision of social thought that typified the traditional theory, on the one hand, and the critical theory, on the other, in their greatest essences and distinctions (Alves, Sutil, Teixeira, Schimidt, & Gomes, 2019). Therefore, it was necessary to build a critical approach to traditional education, which was submissive to capital and whose labour-oriented training led subjects to alienation. Adorno proposes that in its original form, Marxism was based on the relations and premises of the industrial capitalism and labour relations of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which, from a 20<sup>th</sup> perspective, would have left cultural, social, and psychological aspects aside. In general, the critical theory brings with it:

The indicative perspective of the critical theory to the devices of irrationalities, especially Europeans, produces the dialectical negative. This concerns the opposition to capitalism represented by the imposing and hardening [imposing and hardening of what?] resulting from technological revolutions, which produce the domination of man by man – one of the forms of minority, characterising barbarism and the imprisonment of consciousness. The latter, in turn, intensifies

with the regulation of minds by the cultural industry process.  
(Alves, Sutil, Teixeira, Schimidt, & Gomes, 2019, p. 4)

This text portrays a perspective of the productive conjuncture of the subjects who participate in education in the Brazilian society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It seeks to establish a relationship between the subjects constituted from the marketing logic and the role of the school as a reproducer of mechanisms of subjugation to the hegemonic capitalist system. It deals with the business and industrial influence in the elaboration of educational policies and reflects on the question: What aspects of education and scientific education, in particular, make it possible to overcome the condition of submission to alienated work from the recognition of the self as a subject-product of neoliberal society?

## **METHODOLOGY**

For this research methodology, we articulated exploratory research as objective and bibliographic research, together with the theoretical frameworks of Paulo Freire's critical theory and pedagogy. Moreira and Caleffe (2008) define:

[...] exploratory research is the research whose primary purpose is to develop, clarify, and modify concepts and ideas to formulate more specific problems or researchable hypotheses for further studies. The most common examples are bibliographic and documentary surveys, non-standardised interviews, and case studies. (Moreira & Caleffe, 2008, p. 69)

Regarding bibliographic research, Moreira and Caleffe (2008) emphasise that it does not consist of a simple literature review since:

The bibliographic research is developed from an already prepared material that consists mainly of books and scientific articles. [...] However, the teacher should remember that bibliographic research is not a mere repetition of what has already been said and written on a given subject. Like all other types of study, bibliographic research requires the researcher to reflect critically on the texts consulted and included in it. (Moreira & Caleffe, 2008, p. 74)

From those methodological definitions, we will now discuss bibliography in line with the theoretical frameworks mentioned before to contemplate aspects arranged by the question and research theme.

## **THE POSTMODERNITY AND THE SUBJECT IMMERSED IN IT**

Jean François Lyotard is generally regarded as the forerunner of debates on post-industrial society, which he called postmodernity. For him, truth is a kind of agonistic discourse, and, as such, it assumes a value in contemporary society. As the author says, “knowledge is and will be produced to be sold” (Lyotard, 2009, p. 5). Truth is the product of the discursive construction of a specific group that stipulates parameters to make it valid (Jesus & Vieira, 2019), used as a motor to transform the productive capacities of so-called developed countries and, at the same time, as a force of control over developing countries (Lyotard, 2009). In addition, society ceases to be a collectivity to become individuals atomised and immersed in communication circuits in which each has power over the messages that cross them. However, attributing postmodernity only to the development of mass communication vehicles and the internet also slips into a form of technological determinism (Dusek, 2009), as postmodernism is a diverse and broad-spectrum movement that has been studied in the human and social sciences, sociology of science and technology. The emphasis on the narrative structured by the discourse and language of the subjects to the detriment of a narrative and general, holistic, theories that propose to explain nature or society deny, therefore, the unifying essence of the sciences and human progress, so that both end up denying humanity’s progress, which was a precept of modernity in the 18<sup>th</sup> (Enlightenment), 19<sup>th</sup> (Positivism) and 20<sup>th</sup> (Marxism) centuries. Thus, we can find relationships between the characteristics of postmodernism and the internet because, unlike television, it is bidirectional, decentralised, fragmented, without a single plot, which opens up possibilities for subjects or smaller groups to elaborate their narrative, detached from the “real” one proposed by the social sciences and sciences of nature with their modern (Latour, 2013) and unified discourse. Therefore, we have the technological -alongside the cultural- dimension of the internet, fostering the spread of fragmented and dispersed discourse of postmodernity, which makes it necessary for educators to appropriate methodologies that can reverse this situation. On the other hand, combined with an appropriation of its possibilities by scientifically and technologically literate subjects, one of the primary challenges of contemporary education, the internet also serves to elaborate collaborative networks that can act in the educational system as opposed to postmodernist discourse, since:

We live in a moment in which society, when organised, is increasingly perceiving its political power. Today the struggle for citizenship and the right to access information are issues of international relevance. Digital information and communication technologies (DICT, or ICT only) have pointed out more possibilities of overcoming the odds of human development in their relationships and knowledge. The World Wide Web (internet) built a path in a telematic space to enable citizens to interact and share knowledge and cultures even from a distance. (Angotti, 2015, p. 18)

Harvey (2008) characterises postmodernity as a movement to break modernity's totalitarian, cohesive, and syntagmatic thinking. As a replacement, the notions of fragmentary, discontinuous, and chaotic predominate. This portrayal of postmodernism leads to one of its problematic facets: "psychological assumptions regarding personality, motivation, and behaviour" (Harvey, 2008, p. 56). This is because the fragmented condition of discourse and language leads to schizophrenisation as a linguistic disorder. For the author, assuming the Lacanian description of schizophrenia, there is a rupture in the chain of signifiers and meanings that result in a pile of unrelated signifiers. Thus, for the postmodern subject, the concern is framed in the signifier and the superficial appearances (Harvey, 2008). Fragmentation and ephemerality of postmodern thought bring disbelief in metanarratives and the disruption of universal truths, among others. In Harvey's words:

Eternal and universal truths, if they exist, cannot be specified. Condemning the metanarratives (broad interpretative schemes such as those produced by Marx or Freud) as "totalising," they insist on the plurality of formations of "power-discourse" (Foucault) or "language games" (Lyotard). Lyotard, in fact, defines the postmodern as "unbelief in the face of metanarratives." (Harvey, 2008, p. 49, 50)

For Jameson (2000), this process also breaks with the temporal unification of the past, present, and future, reducing the subject's experience "to a series of pure and unrelated gifts in time" (Jameson, 2000, p. 53). The break of temporality censors the praxis of activities, effectively intensifying the power of the material signifier, now isolated (Jameson, 2000). Jameson argues that this new conception leads to a crisis of historicity regarding the organisation of temporality and spatial logic. Therefore, one of the moulding factors of postmodern consciousness is immediacy (Carli & Silva, 2019).

It is precisely at this point of fragmentation that personal identity is forged in postmodernism. Stuart Hall (2014) argues that the identity of the postmodern subject is neither perennial nor settled and much less tangible. Such identity is defined historically rather than biologically. Thus, instead of the term identity as a product, the author proposes the term identification as a process, i.e., as a constant, fragmented, and remodelled construction throughout life by the cultural systems that surround us (Hall, 2014). Here is a crucial point for the analysis in question: the influence of cultural systems on the identity constitution of the subject. For that author, the subject's identity is closely related to the representation process, and globalisation – a cultural system resulting from the acceleration of global processes – resulted in the compression of space-time, which directly impacted those representation systems.

All means of representation – writing, painting, drawing, photography, symbolisation through art or telecommunication systems – must translate their object into spatial and temporal dimensions. Thus, the narrative translates the events into a beginning-mid-end temporal sequence; visual representation systems translate three-dimensional objects into two dimensions. Different cultural epochs have different ways of combining those space-time coordinates. (Hall, 2014, p. 40)

Thus, in addition to its fixed dimension, space has another dimension, compressed by the “intersections” provided by technological development (aircraft, satellites, computers, internet, digital telecommunications systems). For Jesus and Vieira, “the affirmation of unity, cohesion, rationality, was replaced by new lines of intelligibility that have direct consequences on human action, which put the subject in crisis, as it is not possible to find fixed points of anchorage” (Jesus & Vieira, 2019, p. 19). In this sense, for Jameson (2006), postmodernism is not, therefore, simply an aesthetic issue; above all, it is a historical issue. Considering this movement as late capitalism, the author argues that capitalist hegemonic forces restructured themselves by absorbing the means of cultural production as a new form of domination, based on the creation of a new society, the society of consumption (Jameson, 2006), the result of late capitalism, characterised by the unregulated expansion of large multinational corporations and the globalisation of markets, which would lead to the precariousness of labour relations, mass consumption, and the intensification of international flows of capital. In the face of the global financial crisis of 2008 due to this practically unregulated flow of capital, the indefinite consumption and production growth led to the exhaustion of natural



resources, placing late capitalism not as an evolutionary stage of the capitalist mode of production but as a period of crisis, with developments in the fragmentation of culture and society, impregnated with postmodernist discourse. The exhaustion of natural resources has led to environmental imbalances (Latour, 2019), which, from the 1990s, corroborate the debate with science, prolific in postmodernity.

## **THE SUBJECT UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE NEOLIBERAL SYSTEM**

Just as the authors above, Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval (2016) discuss the influence of capitalism on the constitution of the world order. The analysis of their work makes us see neoliberalism as a historical process of strategic construction of the commodification of social relations. Thus, “neoliberalism can be defined as the set of discourses, practices, and devices that determine a new way of governing men according to the universal principle of competition” (Dardot & Laval, 2016, p. 17). Therefore, neoliberalism produces new sets of rules that define the new contemporary societies.

By reflecting on contemporary man, Dardot and Laval (2016) start from the assertion that, in the sociological field, there was a substantial transformation of the subject. For the authors, this new condition of the subject must be analysed from the perspective of discursive and institutional practices that, in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, transformed them into “man-enterprise” or “entrepreneurial subject” (Dardot & Laval, 2016, p. 322). Thus, this new human being, the neoliberal being, is shaped by market logic, which makes them exceptionally competitive.

The transformations in human relations over time, induced by new economic relations and driven by two important moments in history, namely, political democracy and capitalism, have converged to a “general logic of human relations under the rule of maximum profit” (Dardot & Laval, 2016, p. 323). Such commodification of social relations was the driving force behind the individuals’ emancipation from their subjective and family traditions and conditions. This new condition is governed by the way of contracting human relations (Dardot & Laval, 2016).

According to these authors, the political economy of industrial society, in partnership with the homogeneous psychic economy, enabled the definition of a new economy of the being, governed by pleasures and pain, making them believe that their interest, detached from society, is what drives them. However,

all these actions are safeguarded by the invisible power of the market that frees the individuals so that they produce their own happiness. Thus, this free being becomes docile to work and predisposed to consumption, moving the capital wheel (Dardot & Laval, 2016).

With the entrepreneurial culture, neoliberal rationality develops techniques of producing more effective forms of subjection, reinforcing the characteristic mark of capitalism in transforming the human being into a simple commodity. The new economic management, which is basically the same as traditional capitalism, is updated by leading individuals to a more peaceful acceptance of the new conditions imposed on them. Thus, the subject is assigned the function of becoming “his/her own expert, own employer, own inventor, own entrepreneur” (Dardot & Laval, 2016, p. 330), which leads to the competitive system of the market. “The great innovation of neoliberal technology is to directly link the way a man ‘is governed’ to the way he/she ‘governs him/herself’” (Dardot & Laval, 2016, p. 332).

In this regard, what the authors call “the enterprise of oneself” [jouissance of oneself] emerges. The entire economy movement forces the transmutation of human life in an enterprise. Success and failure, happiness and depression, achievement and obstacles are consequences of the direct action of the individual in their self-management. This responsibility to no longer see oneself as a worker but as a company with market share, flows to a pseudo-mastery over one’s life, to commit to the control of one’s desires and sensations, developing strategies to satisfy them (Dardot & Laval, 2016).

To this end, neoliberal management uses practices and disciplines typified by austerity and self-control of the body and spirit that accompany and strengthen theoretical speculation in search of effectiveness and strengthening of the self. Whether coaching, neurolinguistic programming, or transactional analysis, all aim to adapt individuals better to reality, “making them more operational in difficult situations.” (Dardot & Laval, 2016, p. 339). All those strategies aim to “throw the weight of complexity and competition exclusively on the individual” (Dardot & Laval, 2016, p. 342). The individuals must also be able to manage the risks of this new modality of being. Individualisation as a form of entrepreneurial subject carries with it all the management of success or failure, i.e., risk. However, this management of the self should not be seen as an encapsulation of the human beings in themselves. On the contrary, with the management of the self, the communication network – which is in the interest of the market – increases in effectiveness and operability. However, this self-management, this freedom – or imprisonment – of choices and strategies

cannot be made by taking themselves as reference. Every action of those entrepreneurial subjects goes through market assessments that clearly shows what the criteria for an optimal being are. Individual choices end up flowing to market determinations (Dardot & Laval, 2016). Based on this diagnosis, the authors maintain that all subjectivity is built in line with the perspectives of the successful subject, the manager of the self, who best adapts to the mercantile conditions of their relationships. According to Giroto (2018), this project of management of the subjectivity of the neoliberal system bases the central values of the subjects' relationship with each other and with the world. Thus, "values such as individualism, competitiveness, meritocracy, entrepreneurship, and protagonism become the most relevant references of this new social subject, and the neoliberal project is raised to the condition of an irreversible collective destination of humanity" (Giroto, 2018, p. 25).

From this point of view, failure is the sole fruit of the individuals who failed to manage their self-enterprise under the market norms. This failure leads to a series of negative consequences such as depression and mass suicide. The blame of the unsuccessful subject for the failure of their relationships is induced by a psychic economy that points to the non-effectiveness of performance due to the mismanagement of the neosubject. The authors attribute the competitiveness of neoliberal logic to a search for unlimited enjoyment of oneself, even if there is a desymbolisation of the neosubject's very identity for this purpose (Dardot & Laval, 2016).

## **EDUCATION AS A WORKSHOP FOR THE COMMODIFIED SUBJECT**

Since the outset of the current Law of Guidelines and Bases of Brazilian Education (LDB 9394/96), the conception of education as a process of qualifying the workforce required by the mercantile system has been predominant. As described in Article 22, one of the purposes of basic education is training that provides means for progress in the world of work (Brasil, 1996). Saviani (1997) argues that in modern society, education then becomes a matter of public interest. Therefore, we ask: who is this "public" if not the owners of the means of production? In the analysis by Carmo and Miranda (2019), several interest groups linked to the industrial sector influence the Brazilian legislative field, including in the text of the 1988 Federal Constitution, ensuring their economic demands. Whether by the election of representatives of the industrial sector or the straightforward lobby of political decision-makers, Brazilian

educational legislation has undergone the interference of neoliberal thinking and industrial entrepreneurship (Carmo & Miranda, 2019).

The effects of the economic system on educational policies are widely problematised and discussed by authors such as Frigotto (2003, 2010). For example, on the subordination of educational processes to capital, Frigotto (2003) argues that:

In its most general formulation, the analysis of the relations between the production process and educational practices, from the classical liberal or neoliberal perspective, is explained by the conception that society is constituted by factors where, in a given period, one is the fundamental and determinant factor, such as the economy [...]. From this perspective, work, technology, and education are considered factors. Human education and shaping will have as their defining subject the needs, the demands of the process of capital accumulation under the different historical forms of sociability that they assume (Frigotto, 2003, p. 30).

Thus, those factors are clearly regulated and subordinated by capital and its reproduction. All school structural features – schedules, hierarchies, awards, and sanctions – are ways of reproducing the capitalist division of labour that contribute to shaping the subjects' personality to form a socially required workforce (Frigotto, 2010). Reinforcing this argument, Giroto (2018) argues that:

Educational policies from the neoliberalism perspective have reinforced the notion of school as a simple institution, capable of being controlled and managed from a logic of management by and for results. In this conception, teachers and students are defined as all alike, subject to actions that they understand little because they little participated in their construction. (Giroto, 2018, p. 17)

In this new logic of market-education, the subjects are constantly formed under the shadow of managerial individualism at the service of the current hegemonic system. For this, the action of market power on educational policies develops curricula capable of mass production of neoliberal mentalities, necessary to sustain this new mercantile reality (Santos & Cervi, 2017). In Oliveira's (2020) words, the appreciation of "school education in the perspective of shaping productive subjects, economic subjects, regarding the

linkage of the educational agenda to the principles of competitiveness are clear expressions of the subsumption of educational policy to the dictates of neoliberal hegemony” (Oliveira, 2020, p. 7).

Jeremias, Mueller, and Steinmetz (2019) maintain that educational proposals in contemporary society converge for the degradation of education. According to them,

It seems to us that the current project for education is precisely its dismantling, considering the current conditions of production of an extremely *basic* education based on instrumental knowledge necessary for insertion in the labour market [...] All the current conditions of the arts and education are not restricted to this field, but they are also due to the mercantile-competitive logic from which individuals cannot escape. (Jeremias, Mueller, & Steinmetz, 2019, p. 16, emphasis added)

Under the veil of technological innovation in education, neoliberalism shifts the focus from education to shape a social subject to the modernisation of the individual, which means absorbing technological innovations and prepare the students to execute tasks that favour the maintenance of the marketing logic of late capitalism (Motta, 2013). From this perspective, education has been guided by neoliberalism, which seeks to strengthen the capitalist system and maintain the privileges of a historically hegemonic class in control of the country’s decisions. Moreover, the very physical structure of contemporary schools seems to obey the marketing criteria of the current system:

The school educational environment in neoliberalism has been built as a company, at the service of the economy, serving more students at once in a smaller physical space, having mostly basic and precarious infrastructure, with a basic common curriculum for minimum and lightened learning, suited to satisfy standardised national and international assessment tests, quick continuing education of teachers who suffer from social downgrading. The market, in turn, expects educated human resources to be proactive, multipurpose, and creative; it expects academically intellectualised subjects that can interrelate in culture and digital media. (Kosvoski & Silva, 2020, p. 181)

More recently, when the National Common Curricular Base – BNCC – came into force in Brazilian basic education, the discourse of an education focused on the “market”, on the world of work, detached from aspects related to human and historical formation, reappeared. Having emerged at a time of crisis in Brazilian society, that discourse leads to the obliteration of some achievements in the educational environment, a characteristic of perennial crises (Santos, 2020). Regarding the BNCC, according to Silva (2018), we can observe that:

In the devices that guide curriculum propositions based on competencies prevails a conception of human formation marked by the intention to adapt to the logic of the market and to adapt to society through an abstract notion of citizenship. This discourse does not recognise the dimension of culture as an element that produces the identity and the difference at the same time. The notion of competencies, sometimes as a result of a biologist and/or innatist approach to education, sometimes due to its instrumental and efficient character, consolidates a perspective of schooling that, contradictorily, promises and restricts education to autonomy. Thus, it reinforces adaptation and limits the possibility of emancipation, that is, the recognition of the individual not as a “mimesis” but “as a substance of oneself.” (Silva, 2018, p. 11)

In the field of science education, according to Ostermann and Rezende (2020), the historical analysis reveals that since its origin as a product of educational legislation, the educational practice has always been shaped by the teaching and learning of concepts that are predetermined and admitted as neutral in Western Science, to build fixed identities, disregarding cultural plurality and, thus, lessening students’ tacit knowledge, which must be replaced by scientific knowledge, as it is presented as a universal authority in relation to cultural knowledge. Also, according to those authors, the official documents that guide the science curricula are continuously based on shaping the subject for the 21<sup>st</sup> century in line with the neoliberal vision of society (Ostermann & Rezende, 2020).

In addition to the social pressure of the neoliberal way of thinking, the school needs to deal with the subjects who are products of the postmodern period, as Harvey (2008) argues, fragmented, schizophrenic, and chaotic subjects.

## LIBERATING PEDAGOGY AS A POSSIBILITY OF TRANSFORMATION

Paulo Reglus Freire (1921-1997), Brazilian educator and philosopher, is the main influence of the Critical Pedagogy movement. Freire is the author of several works addressing overcoming the subjects' state of alienation through dialogic education. One of his main struggles was against neoliberal thought and practices, the fruits of capitalist globalisation. As a form of subversion to the capitalist hegemonic system, Freire proposed an education that aroused in the student a taste for research, verification, and criticality in the face of new knowledge. Thus, education would imply the development of the subject's critical consciousness (Freire, 2019), in line with the provisions of Frankfurt's theorists and in opposition to the discourse of postmodernity. Freire's pedagogy in its practical dimension involves the perception as to the very idea of freedom that only acquires meaning when it is directly related to humankind's struggle to set free from the systems of oppression. Despite being known worldwide, Paulo Freire's liberating pedagogy is sometimes not essentially understood, being reduced to his literacy method. This reduction transforms Freire's pedagogy into a strict technical set aimed at the human being and the world as a product of a given time and a given place, making its critical performance unfeasible in other times and spaces (Moreira & Carola, 2020). Also according to Moreira and Carola, the heart of Freire's thoughts lies in recognising the situation of oppression caused by neo-colonialist imperialism of the self-styled First World countries (developed capitalist countries) over the Latin American countries. In that context,

Paulo Freire proposes a liberating pedagogy that develops the subjects' "awareness," achieved in the dialectic of "dialogue," two concepts both superficially generalised and trivialised. Awareness and dialogue have distinct meanings in liberating pedagogical theory. They are not synonymous with convincing and listening to better argue, as they are so often used. They have the revolutionary strength of educational *praxis*, of acting-thinking-acting, and of "saying his/her word" in communion with others, in the eternal reading of the world, in the realisation of the ontological vocation of "being more." (Moreira & Carola, 2020, p. 36)

For Freire, education must be based on transformative, dialogical, coherent, and simple educational practices. Indeed, dialogue, the dialectical relationship, is one of the central aspects of Freire's pedagogy (Beckett, 2013).

He was also an optimistic, hence his aversion to the neoliberal system. In Gadotti's words,

Besides **hope** [Paulo Freire] cultivated **autonomy**. Autonomy is the ability to decide, to take one's destiny into one's hands. Faced with a market economy that invades all spheres of our lives, we need to fight – also through education – to create in civil society the ability to govern and control development (an alternative to authoritarian socialism). Paulo Freire had a real **taste for democracy**. He always treated it with affection. (Gadotti, 1997, p. 4, author's emphasis)

It is important to emphasise that the dialogicity between the subjects involved in the educational process (teachers, students, school community) is also opposed to the fragmentation and atomisation of society, which stops being a collective and becomes a collection of subjects without a comprehensive view of nature, society, and the phenomena related to both.

Another striking aspect of Freire's thinking is the valuation of the knowledge of the peripheral classes. For Freire, knowledge has historicity and, as such, must be considered in all its dimensions and movements. No one ignores everything or knows everything (Silva, 2014). The situation of peripherals is considered dependent on central countries. Such dependence generates a silent society that imputes the subject the phenomenological lack of understanding of awareness as intentionality (Moreira & Carola, 2020). And thus, Freire subverts the conception of knowledge as possession of the dominant class, and that subjugates the knowledge and practices of men and women in situations of illiteracy (Silva, 2014). Such subversion is intrinsically linked to social inequalities and the way hegemonic power considers the working class. On this meaning of the Freirean work, Silva (2014) describes notably:

His whole work is full of indignation regarding social and economic injustices. It is laden with radicalism, as it defends challenging transformations not only in the field of education but also in relation to the humanisation of men/women, believing in another possible society. It is loaded with rebellion in the sense of not accepting the exclusionary status quo. However, it is equally watered with love and hope. (Silva, 2014, p. 163)



Therefore, Paulo Freire's pedagogy serves to address those dimensions of the postmodern subjects because, for him, the humans are unfinished beings with desires; they are social beings made in the relations with others but singular at once; that interpret the world giving meaning to their experiences, and act to transform it. This historical materialist bias of Freire's pedagogy places the subject and the world in constant co-production. "The world brings objective conditions to human existence, but it transcends these conditions and recreates the world or accepts it. Both man/woman and world are unfinished. The praxis derives from this unfinished work" (Moreira & Carola, 2020, p. 42). And from their reading of the world, the subjects can reach their autonomy and capacity for authorship. In this regard, we can infer that scientific education can strongly influence subjects to overcome the knowledge from experience to achieve and appropriate more rigorous and systematic knowledge of the world. In Freire's words,

From the relations of men/women with reality, resulting from being with it and being in it, through the acts of creation, recreation, and decision, he/she dynamises his/her world. He/she dominates reality. He/she humanises it, temporises the geographic spaces. He/she does culture. [...] And, as he/she creates, recreates, and decides, the historical epochs are conformed. It is also creating, recreating, and deciding that men/women must participate in these times. (Freire, 2019, p. 60)

Still, hope is part of the human condition. It is through hope that the subjects build their history and have their curiosity instigated. However, it is precisely this hope that the neoliberal discourse represses (Santos Neto, 2009). The educational practice in Paulo Freire must be based on the observation, understanding, and unveiling of the mechanisms of oppression of the dominant system. It is also important a critical praxis of educators that is consistent with the democratic and respectful dream and never manipulative of students (Moreira & Carola, 2020). More recently, there has been some questioning about the role of academia, schools, and the teachers' very praxis, whether in basic or higher education, which, besides the aspects already mentioned that are inherent to teachers, finds echo in Paulo Freire's pedagogy and research groups derived from it, providing subsidies for a dialogic education, which rescues hope and the collaborative construction of knowledge, such as:

In our understanding, a consensus among most teachers and researchers from all areas that do not share the exotic idea of a

“society without schools,” the teacher was, is, and will always be the essential epistemic subject of the mediation of teaching-learning of physics and/or basic and applied natural sciences, and/or technology knowledge. For us, this understanding does not agree with the references and practices of traditional school education. Rather, it requires commitment and struggle to overcome strong obstacles still present in this institution that is fundamental for children, adolescents, young people and adults. (Angotti, 2015)

Besides the theoretical-methodological aspects, initiatives and teaching systems based on Paulo Freire’s pedagogy are varied (Muenchen & Delizoicov, 2012; Watanabe, 2019) and can serve as examples and starting points for a dialogic-critical education that offers responses to society to deconstruct postmodern fragmentation, which leads to the weakening of relations between subjects, leaving them at the mercy of obliterations of spaces and rights neoliberalism imposes. Above all, education that excels in dialogicity and criticality, having as a baseline the problematisation of the reality in which the community is immersed, dispenses with the dichotomy between educators and students. Instead, there is a communion of subjects, educating themselves through elaborating an emancipatory reading of the world.

For the dialogic, problem-posing duo educator-student, the programme content of education is neither a gift nor an imposition – a set of information to be deposited in the students- but rather the organised, systematised feedback to people of those elements that they delivered to the educators in an unstructured way. (Freire, 1987). Thus, it is radically opposed to the notion of banking education, characteristic of the oppressive contexts that sustain social inequalities, which condemn the subject to an education based on the reification of the human being, consubstantiating the neoliberal system of subjugation of subjectivity to the individual-entrepreneurial project.

In a literature analysis on the education of science teachers in Brazil, Jesus and Razera (2020) demonstrate that the Freirean reference prevails quantitatively and qualitatively in publications in this area. This fact shows that Paulo Freire’s work is notably recognised for and aligned with the methodological and argumentative structures of researchers (Jesus & Razera, 2020). However, we understand that this alignment does not reach the end of the system, i.e., the basic education classroom that still deals with scientific concepts and methods in an airtight and fragmented way, reinforcing the

concept of reception banking education without appropriation of scientific and technological language.

According to Fernandes, Chaves Filho, Julio, and Campos (2020), any attempt to change our reality first involves the ability to know it. And the scientific knowledge produced by humanity throughout history is a way that enables us to concisely and critically capture the real and its systematisation.

The possible way of liberation and humanisation of men/women is, therefore, configured by a problematising, horizontal, dialogical education, in which the knowing object is the incidence of reflection of both the educator and the students. The more the subjects identify themselves as beings in the world and with the world, the more challenged they will feel. Also, the more they face those challenges, the stronger their criticism becomes, making them less and less alienated (Freire, 1987). Therefore, it is an educational practice – this practice *with them* and not *for them* – that displaces the human beings from the position of a market object and takes them to a humanised, politicised, critical, creative, and hopeful stance.

## CONCLUSIONS

The new world order, the product of the neoliberal system, seems to be moving towards solidifying an increasingly insurmountable structure of domination. That trajectory of sustaining hegemony purposely intersects with the educational system.

As if the pressure of hegemonic power in the normalisation of current societies was not enough and, consequently, of educational processes, in contemporaneity the school faces increasingly superficial subjects, displaced from their historicity. With the unprecedented changes in postmodern society's cultural, political, and economic practices, new ways of domination that cross time and space emerge and transform the subjects immersed in it (Harvey, 2008). Those transformations in the ways of thinking and understanding the world have a significant impact on formal education. Today, classrooms are filled with subjects constituted by a fragmentary, chaotic, and schizophrenic logic, in which the understanding of the historicity of human knowledge is lost by the superficiality of the students' way of being. Thus, every conceptual approach based on their historical conception tends to become uninteresting for a mentality highly disconnected from the chains of signifiers. Sometimes the provisional truths of scientific knowledge are relative, and some authors

attribute the wave of post-truths that reaches contemporary culture to the superficiality of the postmodern subject.

Education delivered to neoliberal rationality works as an ideological industry of production of the labour force available to the hegemonic market, what Dardot and Laval (2016) called “a particular kind of subjective normalisation” (Dardot & Laval, 2016, p. 324), i.e., subjects capable of functioning in the great movement of production and consumption. Projects that encourage meritocracy in schools collaborate in the construction of identities based on efficiency, competitiveness, and individualism, hallmarks of the neoliberal project.

The fragmented identities and without temporal and spatial cohesion, products of the postmodern condition portrayed by Harvey (2008) and Jameson (2000), become docile to work in the neoliberal system (Dardot & Laval, 2016). About this, standardised scientific education reinforces the fragmentation from the perpetuated practice of knowledge segmented into isolated and sometimes decontextualised concepts of the local reality.

The institutionalisation of the inauthentic need of the soul, satisfied only with the products of capitalism, sinks the subjects to a level that definitely makes it impossible for them to level with the hegemonic class. The mental manipulation of canned culture conditions the individual's total happiness to the maintenance of current power. Choices are not choices; they are, first of all, the execution of a previewed script. The novelistic productions impose a rhythm of life. They lead the spectator to the patterns of consumption that feed the owners of power; they manipulate opinions to the point of demonising thought contrary to the current system. All this form of submission to capital comes to the school space loaded with values that the given entrepreneurial culture determines.

Hence, the liberation from the bonds of capitalism and the refusal to accept mercantile domination would be the first steps towards a truly humanising and critical education *with* students and not *for* them. In Freire's pedagogy, we can find humanist principles necessary to seek in the experienced concrete circumstances the dimensions of the educator's and the students' role involved in the attribution of meaning. Thus, the students would be stimulated, challenged to assume the stance of a subject that they know by addressing their object of knowledge, and the educator could also resignify his/her role, i.e., a responsible position of the educator with the act of knowing, emphatically defending the role of the subject of knowledge that belongs to the student.

This question is related to a transformative option, consistent with the Freirean option to achieve a reasonable level of coherence between the meaning of the subject's discourse and the option for the practice of questioning the educator's work, in which the subject is affirmed and challenged to assume the role in the process of knowing. This option is to assume freedom and criticism as the way of being of men/women.

Therefore, as a possibility of transmutation of this scenario, sometimes seen as determined, we use Paulo Freire's fundamentals, who defends the pedagogical practice as emancipating, liberating, and humanising to the extent that it allows overcoming the conditions of the oppressed and the oppressive subject. For Freire, thinking of education is thinking of the production of the subject as being free from the ties of any hegemonic system of capital accumulation. In this sense, the questioning about the real role of education in contemporary society is highlighted. And any effort of change requires the understanding of the main actors of the educational process: students and teachers subject-products of the postmodern condition.

We understand that science education based on the dialogicity between common sense knowledge and knowledge systematised by the scientific community, observing the cultural aspects of those who dialogue, plays a fundamental role in overcoming the conception of the world, and determined knowledge. Self-awareness in relation to natural and technological aspects and their appropriation by hegemonic groups is the way for the humanisation of the subjects and the bridge to protagonism in their community reality.

Thus, from the Freirean perspective, by recognising their little self-knowledge and by reflecting and acting in the world aiming to transform it, the subjects can overcome the condition of submission to the alienated work. The path Freire proposed elucidates that by conceiving the world in its socio-political-educational dimensions, we can understand how the neoliberal system works. In this way, we can seek liberating strategies that withdraw men/women from reification, placing them in a humanising situation.

## **AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT**

N.C.S.F. and M.S.L.D. were responsible for guidance on theoretical assumptions and methodological referrals. R.P.P.Z. carried out the literature review, collected and analysed the data according to the proposed scope. N.C.S.F. and R.P.P.Z. discussed and analysed the results and contributed to the writing of the article.

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