

ARTICLE

THE CATHARSIS IN THE GRAMSCIAN CONCEPT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION¹

RÉGIS HENRIQUE DOS REIS SILVA¹

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6392-0697>
<rhrs@unicamp.br>

NEWTON DUARTE²

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1837-8004>
<newton.duarte@unesp.br>

¹ Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp). Campinas, São Paulo (SP), Brazil.

² Universidade Estadual Paulista “Júlio de Mesquita Filho” (Unesp). Araraquara, São Paulo (SP), Brazil.

ABSTRACT: This paper aims to reflect on the Gramscian concept of catharsis and its implications for the field of Special Education. For this purpose, it initially presents general considerations about the writings of Antônio Gramsci (1891-1937) and then exposes the main concepts of this author interpreted and incorporated by the area of Special Education in Brazil. This study also examines the incorporation of the Gramscian conceptualization of catharsis by the didactic method of historical-critical pedagogy. Finally, some problematic aspects of some attempts to use the notion of catharsis in pedagogical proposals in the area of Special Education are analyzed. This is because, although this movement on the part of educators and researchers in Special Education in Brazil is necessary and commendable, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that, in the context of educational practice, working with the historical-critical pedagogy method requires readings and re-readings of the classics of this pedagogical theory and its theoretical-methodological foundation.

Keywords: Gramsci; Catharsis; Historical-Critical Pedagogy; Special Education.

A CATARSE NA ACEPÇÃO GRAMSCIANA E SUAS IMPLICAÇÕES PARA A EDUCAÇÃO ESPECIAL

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RESUMO: Este artigo tem como objetivo refletir sobre a conceituação gramsciana de catarse e suas implicações para a área de Educação Especial. Para tanto, inicialmente, apresenta considerações gerais sobre os escritos de Antônio Gramsci (1891-1937) e, em seguida, expõe os principais conceitos desse autor apreendidos pela área de Educação Especial no Brasil. Este estudo também examina a incorporação do conceito de catarse na acepção gramsciana ao método da pedagogia histórico-crítica e, por fim, com base nessa teoria pedagógica e sua conceituação gramsciana de catarse, problematiza algumas tentativas de apreensão dessa categoria a proposições teóricas e práticas na área de Educação Especial. Isso porque, muito embora essa movimentação por parte dos educadores e pesquisadores em Educação Especial no Brasil seja necessária e elogiável, é preciso não perder de vista que, no âmbito da prática educativa, o trabalho com o método da pedagogia histórico-crítica exige leituras e releituras dos clássicos dessa teoria pedagógica e sua fundamentação teórico-metodológica.

Palavras-chaves: Gramsci; Catarse; Pedagogia Histórico-Crítica; Educação Especial.

LA CATARSIS EN EL SENTIDO GRAMMSCIANO Y SUS IMPLICACIONES PARA LA EDUCACIÓN ESPECIAL

RESUMEN: Este artículo busca reflexionar sobre la conceptualización de la catarsis en Gramsci y sus implicaciones para la Educación Especial. Para ello, primero presenta consideraciones generales sobre la obra de Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) y luego presenta los principales conceptos de este autor, tal como se han incorporado al campo de la Educación Especial en Brasil. Este estudio también examina la incorporación del concepto de catarsis, en su sentido Gramsci, al método de la pedagogía histórico-crítica. Finalmente, con base en esta teoría pedagógica y su conceptualización Gramsciana de la catarsis, problematiza algunos intentos de integrar esta categoría en propuestas teóricas y prácticas en Educación Especial. Esto porque, si bien este movimiento por parte de educadores e investigadores en Educación Especial en Brasil es necesario y loable, es importante no perder de vista que, en el contexto de la práctica educativa, trabajar con el método de la pedagogía histórico-crítica exige lecturas y relecturas de los clásicos de esta teoría pedagógica y de su fundamentación teórico-metodológica.

Palabras clave: Gramsci; Catarsis; Pedagogía Histórico-Crítica; Educación Especial.

INTRODUCTION

Antonio Gramsci was born in Ales, in the province of Oristano, in the region of Sardinia, Italy, on January 22, 1891. He died due to complications related to his health in the city of Rome on April 27, 1937. He was a political activist and, in 1924, was elected deputy in Italy for the Communist Party of Italy (PCI), when, in the exercise of his mandate, more precisely in 1926, his arrest was decreed by the Italian fascist State.

A significant portion of Gramsci's writings, especially those from his imprisonment, are unfinished since Gramsci never published any material intended to expound

his system of thought. Consequently, reading his texts is not an easy task, and this has led to widely varying interpretations².

In Brazil, where, fortunately, the reading of Gramsci has been fostered and articulated since the late 1960s, we can find a variety of interpretations and ways of mobilizing his concepts in the literature on the Italian philosopher. Edmundo Dias, in the text “On the Reading of Gramscian Texts: The Uses and Abuses,” (*Sobre a leitura dos textos Gramscianos: os usos e abusos*) addresses this issue (Dias, 1994). In this same line of problematizing certain interpretations of Gramsci's writings—but with a specific focus on educational research—we also mention, as an example, the doctoral thesis by Jarbas Maurício Gomes (2017), entitled “The Appropriation of Gramsci in Educational Research in Brazil” (*A apropriação de Gramsci na pesquisa em educação no Brasil*) (1976-2012), defended in 2017 at the Federal University of São Carlos.

Gramsci's concepts undoubtedly possess significant potential for contemporary scholars, activists, and politicians who aim to comprehend the current challenges posed by capitalism, which is characterized by a profound crisis within its system and the rise of reactionary popular forces, not only in Brazil but also in various countries worldwide.

In this context, Gramsci's writings have become a focal point for Brazilian researchers in the field of education. Consequently, his concepts have been integrated into numerous studies related to educational practice, including those that focus on Special Education.

Thus, we decided to carry out a bibliographic-documentary research on the Gramscian concepts and categories present in the academic production of the area of Special Education in Brazil, in the main databases: a) Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO); b) Google Scholar; c) Virtual Libraries of Unicamp, USP, Unesp and UFSCar; d) CAPES theses and dissertations bank; e) *Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações* (BDTD) of the *Instituto Brasileiro de Informação em Ciência e Tecnologia* (IBICT); and f) *Portal da Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Educação* (ANPED), mainly the works published within the scope of the Special Education Working Group (GT15).

The sources in the provided virtual databases were identified using Boolean operators for the following combined terms: “Gramsci,” “disability,” “people with disabilities,” “special education,” “inclusive education,” and “school inclusion.”

Based on the sources identified, collected, and systematized, which dialectically involved moments of description, analysis, and synthesis, we concluded that concepts and categories such as hegemony, passive revolution, organic intellectuals, integral state, catharsis, among others, have been recurrently mobilized by researchers in Special Education. This assertion is exemplified by the texts of Garcia (2004), Lehmkhul (2011), Rafante (2011), Kuhnen

² The information regarding the biography and writings of Antonio Gramsci presented in this text is based on the Introduction written by Carlos Nelson Coutinho for the Brazilian edition of *Cadernos do Cárcere* of 1999 (Gramsci, 1999) and on the Chronology of the life of Antonio Gramsci, which appears in the same work (p. 9-73).

(2016), Melo (2016a), Silva (2017), Vaz (2017), Melo; Rafante; Gomes (2019), Melo; Mafezoni (2019), and Santos (2022).

However, because catharsis in Gramsci assumes the status of a category³ and, in the case of historical-critical pedagogy, constitutes the culminating moment of its teaching method, we consider it necessary to reflect in this article on Gramsci's conceptualization of catharsis and its implications for the field of Special Education. To this end, we have organized this text into four parts, in addition to the introduction and final considerations. They are: 1) Gramsci's writings; 2) Main Gramscian concepts learned by the field of Special Education in Brazil; 3) The concept of catharsis, its formulation in Gramsci's writings, and its incorporation into the method of historical-critical pedagogy; and 4) Attempts to incorporate catharsis into theoretical and practical propositions in the field of Special Education.

Gramscian thought can be very fruitful for studies and practices in the area of Special Education, but it is important that this process occurs rigorously so that the concepts and contributions of this author to the area are not mobilized inappropriately, distorting their meanings and, consequently, their critical and revolutionary potential.

WRITINGS OF GRAMSCI

As previously mentioned, Gramsci never prepared a book for publication, so his writings were developed for specific purposes, published in newspapers and magazines of the parties he served in, written for personal purposes—such as letters sent to family and friends (Prison Letters)—or systematized in study notebooks (Prison Notebooks). Based on this aspect, Gramsci scholars classify his writings into two major periods:

- 1) Pre-prison writings (1910 to 1926); and
- 2) Prison writings (1926 to 1937).

In reference to these writings, we align with Fresu (2020) in asserting that there is no significant rupture in the philosophies and reflections of the Sardinian thinker. Instead, there exists a continuity of inquiries that refine and deepen the complexity of his analyses, shaped by his personal experiences of struggle and study. Notably, Gramsci's introduction to political and socialist writings came through his brother Gennaro, who, while serving in the military in Turin, sent him publications from the *Avanti* newspaper for his perusal.

After completing Middle School in Oristano, Gramsci began high school in Cagliari, where he lived with his brother Gennaro and began attending the “[...] socialist movement and

³ In an interview with professors Mario Mariano Ruiz Cardoso and Marcos Francisco Martins, Saviani (2013b, p. 151 apud Cardoso and Martins, 2014, p. 157) says that “[...] if every category is a concept, not every concept is a category, because the category is that concept that occupies a central place in the context of a given theory or area of knowledge”.

actively participated in youth groups that discussed the economic and social problems of Sardinia. [...]” (Gramsci, 1999, p. 50).

In 1910, he published his first article in the Cagliari newspaper *L'Unione Sarda*, and around the same time, he began reading Karl Marx for the first time. Subsequently, in 1911, he won a scholarship to enter the University of Turin, from which he left in 1918. However, it was during this period that Gramsci joined the Italian Socialist Party and began to write for the socialist press, so that, from 1915 onwards, he dedicated to this type of activity in several newspapers, such as *Il Grido del Popolo*, *Avanti*, *L'Ordine Nuovo* and *De Lá Città Futura*.

By this time, Gramsci had already become a revolutionary political activist, concerned with the cultural advancement of workers, who, he argued, needed to become aware of their class status and the legitimacy of their revolutionary struggle.

Furthermore, in 1919, Gramsci began to work on the creation of *L'Ordine Nuovo*, a weekly magazine whose objective was to elevate socialist culture and theorize about factory councils. Thus, not coincidentally, in 1921, *L'Ordine Nuovo* became the official publication of the PCI.

The PCI, under the leadership of Amadeo Bordiga, was created on January 21, 1921, from a dissident group of the Italian Socialist Party. Amadeo Bordiga led the Party between 1921 and 1924, when leadership of the PCI was transferred to Gramsci, who led the Party from August 1924 until his arrest on November 8, 1926.

During his time in prison, Gramsci initially confined his writing to letters addressed to family and friends. To combat the intellectual brutality of his confinement and to maintain both his physical and political vitality, he sought permission from the Italian government to study and take notes in notebooks. Upon receiving approval, he began composing the Prison Notebooks on February 8, 1929, while incarcerated in Turi prison, located in the Puglia region.

Gramsci wrote these notebooks from 1929 to 1935. They consist of a series of notes that were later recovered after his death by his sister-in-law, Tatiana “Tânia” Schucht, who had been his closest companion during his imprisonment. For safety reasons, his wife, Julia Schucht, along with their two children, had gone into exile in what was then the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

This material, difficult to understand due to its fragmentary nature and the conditions under which it was created, consists of 33 notebooks of handwritten notes, 29 of which are texts/notes on various topics and 4 translations.

After Gramsci's death, his prison writings were organized and numbered by Valentino Gerratana, a scholar who, observing the Sardinian philosopher's working style, compiled the notebooks as follows:

- Texts A or miscellaneous notebooks (1 to 9, 14, 15, and 17) - first-draft notes canceled and then rewritten in texts C or special notebooks (10 to 13, 16, and 18 to 29).

- Texts B - first-draft notes that were written only once; “[...] they appear mainly in the ‘miscellaneous notebooks,’ but also, in a smaller number of cases, in some ‘special notebooks’ [...]” (Gramsci, 1999, p. 12).
- Texts C or special notebooks (10 to 13, 16, and 18 to 29) - second-draft notes of texts A or miscellaneous notebooks (1 to 9, 14, 15, and 17).

This material has been the subject of philological studies by several researchers in Italy, Brazil, and other countries, including Gianni Francioni (*in memoriam*), Giuseppe Cospito, Giuseppe Vacca, Gianni Fresu, Alvaro Bianchi, Daniela Mussi, Giovanni Semeraro, and others. The dissemination of this material generally occurred in four main ways:

- The Italian editions via the PCI (1947-1951) are characterized by the suppression of some passages due to the surveillance of the Communist Party – Central Committee (Coutinho, 1999).
- The first Brazilian editions (1966-1968), in general terms, followed the Italian editions via the PCI, such as: *Concepção dialética da história* (Gramsci, 1995a); *Literatura e vida nacional* (Gramsci, 1986); *Maquiavel, a política e o estado moderno* (Gramsci, 1988); e *Os intelectuais e a organização da cultura* (Gramsci, 1995b). Criticism of these editions refers to the fact that they presented Gramsci to the Brazilian public as an intellectual of the superstructure (Coutinho, 1999).
- Critical edition by Valentino Gerratana (1975), whose publication contributed to the knowledge of Gramsci's writings, as the *Prison Notebooks* were published chronologically.
- Prison Notebooks (6 volumes) (1999-2002), which correspond to more recent publications; in these notebooks, part of Gramsci's work was translated, becoming the subject of the internationally known "Gerratana Edition," which is the critical edition coordinated by scholar Valentino Gerratana, at the request of the Gramsci Institute, and effectively completed in 1975.⁴

As we can see, the various editions of Gramsci's prison writings involved choices by their editors, leading to some difficulties and controversies regarding which scholars' interpretations were closest to Gramsci's original thought.

Based on this, efforts by various scholars of Gramsci's writings have currently focused on making the sources available and promoting ongoing debates on the Sardinian philosopher's work, to discuss his contributions to emancipatory struggles in the 21st century.

MAIN GRAMSCI'S CONCEPTS LEARNED BY THE AREA OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN BRAZIL

⁴ A third edition of this publication was published by Einaudi Publishing House in Turin in 2007: GRAMSCI, Antonio. Quaderni del Carcere: Edizione critica dell'Istituto Gramsci a cura di Valentino Gerratana. Torino: Einaudi, 2007. 4v.

The field of Special Education in Brazil has its “[...] historical foundations in psychology and a strong epistemological tradition of research based on empirical-analytical foundations” (SILVA, 2013, p. 257). Nevertheless, in the last two decades, some of Gramsci’s concepts, such as hegemony, passive revolution, organic intellectuals, integral state, catharsis, among others, have been repeatedly mobilized by researchers in Special Education.

As an example, we can cite four cases that draw our attention. The first is the Study Group on Educational Policy and Work at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (GEPETO/UFSC), particularly the research being produced within the scope of the Study Group on Special Education (GEEP), led by Professors Rosalba Garcia and Maria Helena Michels.

These studies⁵ draw our attention because they base their analyses of Special Education policies on Gramsci’s concepts—such as hegemony, private apparatuses of hegemony, civil society, political society, and the integral state—based on an understanding that politics and its language seek to build consensus around a bourgeois social and educational project.

More specifically, these works demonstrate how Special Education policies, from the perspective of inclusive education, fall within the scope of conservative educational policies⁶ and how the terms “school inclusion” and/or “inclusive education” are mobilized as progressive and transformative slogans, but are, strictly speaking, nothing more than pseudo-transformative slogans or, as Gramsci would say, a “tempered reformist conservatism” (Gramsci, 1999, p. 293).

A noteworthy example is the work of Professor Heulalia Charalo Rafante from the Federal University of Ceará (UFC). In her doctoral thesis entitled “Helena Antipoff, the Pestalozzi Societies, and Special Education in Brazil,” defended in 2011 at the Federal University of São Carlos, she employed Gramsci’s writings—particularly those regarding the role of intellectuals in cultural life and the dissemination of specific types of culture—to analyze the contributions of Helena Antipoff and the Pestalozzi Societies to the development of Special Education in Brazil (Rafante, 2011).

Heulalia Rafante is the co-author of the book “Gramsci and Special Education” (Melo; Rafante; Gomes, 2019), published in 2019 by Brasil Multicultural. She collaborated with professors Douglas Christian Ferrari de Melo from the Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES) and Jarbas Maurício Gomes from the Federal Institute of Alagoas (IFAL). In this work, the authors apply Gramscian concepts to analyze Brazilian educational policies in the realm of Special Education, focusing on key concepts such as intellectual development, labor as an

⁵ For example: Garcia (2004), Lehmkhul (2011), Kuhnén (2016), Vaz (2017), and Santos (2022).

⁶ Conservative in the sense of maintaining class society and its mechanisms of exploitation and oppression, in which educational policies in particular are formulated in an ahistorical, fragmented manner and aiming to mitigate and compensate for the ills of the capitalist mode of production.

educational principle, the integral state, unitary school, praxis, emancipation, and omnilaterality. A third case refers to the writings of the professor Douglas Christian Ferrari de Melo da (UFES), who, in addition to being co-author of the book, together with Heulalia Rafante and Jarbas Gomes, has also used Gramsci's concepts (expanded state, hegemony, catharsis, among others) to analyze educational policies and practices in the area of Special Education, since 2016, the year in which he defended his doctoral thesis entitled *Between the struggle and the right: public policies for the school inclusion of people with visual impairments* (Melo, 2016a).

A fourth and final case is the work of Professor João Henrique Silva of the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ). In his doctoral thesis, titled *National Federation of APAES, Hegemony and Educational Proposals (1990-2015)* (Silva, 2017), defended in 2017 at the Federal University of São Carlos, he explored the concepts of hegemony and organic intellectuals.

According to Silva (2017), the National Federation of Associations of Parents and Friends of the Exceptional (Fenapaes), through its leaders—organic intellectuals linked to the bourgeoisie—has acted as a private apparatus in the struggle for hegemony in the education of people with disabilities in Brazil since its inception.

Finally, for an area that has historically been constituted on positivist epistemological bases, with a strong influence from behavioral psychology and focused on know-how, the incorporation of Gramscian concepts to analyze policies, teacher training and pedagogical practices undoubtedly constitutes an advance for the area and this fact should be seen as auspicious by those who have sought to understand historically and critically the educational practice with people with disabilities.

However, caution is essential, as there are inherent challenges in studying and interpreting Gramscian concepts, as we highlighted in the previous section. In this regard, we have noted that the interpretation of the concept of catharsis in some publications within the field has drawn our attention.

Therefore, we will discuss our interpretation of this Gramscian category in the context of historical-critical pedagogy, particularly its relation to Special Education. Additionally, drawing from an example in the field, we will offer relevant considerations for those who seek to facilitate cathartic moments—understood in Gramsci's sense—within school education, particularly through pedagogical practices in the Special Education modality.

THE CONCEPT OF CATHARSIS, ITS FORMULATION IN GRAMSCI'S WRITINGS, AND ITS INCORPORATION INTO THE METHOD OF HISTORICAL-CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

The concept of catharsis – origin and meanings

Catharsis is understood differently across various fields, such as Aesthetics and Psychology, as well as among different schools of thought. While the term originates from Greek and Aristotle's "Poetics" is frequently referenced historically in discussions about this

concept, Duarte (2019) identifies several authors who present markedly divergent interpretations of its significance within Aristotelian aesthetics. Some of these scholars deem the longstanding debate surrounding this concept to be unproductive, while others challenge the very presence of the term in the original text of "Poetics." Duarte (2019, p. 5) offers a specific perspective on this interpretative discourse:

Having not conducted in-depth studies of Aristotle's work, I do not feel authorized to interfere in this debate among specialists. However, it does not seem to me that so many debates about catharsis have been fueled exclusively by an interest in self-justifying polemics, and that the various interpretations have been constructed without any basis in reality.

I will adopt another hypothesis: that catharsis exists as a phenomenon of individual life and human social history, and that the various interpretations are attempts to grasp the meaning of this phenomenon. I am not adopting an eclectic and subjectivist position, which would attribute to all interpretations the same degree of reliability regarding the phenomenon in question. I am simply saying that, beyond the exegeses of Aristotle's work, there is something in social practice that can be explained with the concept of catharsis, without disregarding the difficulties arising from the existence of very disparate and conflicting conceptualizations.

Based on Gramsci and Lukács, Duarte (2019, p. 3) considers that catharsis is not an exclusive category of the aesthetic sphere and does not reduce it to a moment of emotional overflow:

The cathartic process is a qualitative leap in the expansion and enrichment of the relationship between individual subjectivity and sociocultural objectivity. It is a transformation that is simultaneously intellectual, emotional, educational, political, and ethical, modifying the individual's worldview and their relationships with their own life, society, and humanity.

I therefore depart from the most common meaning of catharsis, incorporated into common sense, which would be a process of emotional release that provides relief and tranquility. This is not to ignore the fact that catharsis involves affects, that is, feelings and emotions, but to emphasize that the emotional aspect of catharsis is not dissociated from the others.

I will argue that, for both Lukács and Gramsci, catharsis is not limited to an artistic phenomenon, but rather something broader, encompassing psychological, ethical, aesthetic, political, and educational aspects.

In this article, we do not explore Lukács's contributions to the incorporation of the category of catharsis into the didactics of historical-critical pedagogy, as our objective is limited to analyzing how Gramsci's conceptualization of catharsis has been incorporated into Special Education in Brazil.

At times, we perceive the term catharsis being used in a sense closer to the meaning of emotional outpouring than to Gramsci's conceptualization of this category. Consider, for example, the following passage:

It was then that I began to consider and accept myself as a person with a disability. I recognized the limits and possibilities of my vision. I began to truly understand myself as a person with low vision. This process of self-discovery was like a catharsis and awakened joy, comfort, and security within me. I stopped lowering my head in

the face of life, and even my body posture changed. Now I had answers to the questions I had previously asked myself. (Melo, 2016b, p. 21, emphasis added).

Without a doubt, the process this person went through regarding how they found to deal with their disability should be respected. We also do not intend to assert that they should employ the Gramscian concept of catharsis; our intention in presenting this statement is solely to exemplify a common meaning of catharsis that differs from that adopted by Gramsci.

Catharsis in Gramsci – origin and meaning

In Gramsci's writings, according to scholars of his thought, catharsis is a central concept and therefore gains the status of a category, although the term specifically appears only in two passages in the *Prison Letters* and seven times in the *Prison Notebooks* (Cardoso, 2014). Regarding this concept, Gramsci states:

The expression “catharsis” can be used to indicate the transition from the merely economic (or egoistic-passionate) moment to the ethical-political moment, that is, the higher elaboration of the structure into a superstructure in human consciousness. This also signifies the transition from the “objective to the subjective” and from “necessity to freedom.” The structure, from an external force that crushes man, assimilating him and rendering him passive, is transformed into a means of freedom, an instrument for creating a new ethical-political form, a source of new initiatives. The establishment of the “cathartic” moment thus becomes, it seems to me, the starting point of the entire philosophy of praxis; the cathartic process coincides with the chain of syntheses that result from dialectical development. (Gramsci, 1999, p. 314-315, quotation marks in the original).

The transition from a purely economic perspective to one that encompasses ethical and political dimensions can be seen as a shift from class consciousness in itself to class consciousness for itself. This evolution in class consciousness is intertwined with the dialectic of determination and freedom, wherein the social structures that individuals navigate evolve from being mere determinants to becoming instruments for the creation of a new reality. Consequently, this transformation does not emerge from nothing; it arises from the active engagement of existing forces directed toward forging a new human reality. In this context, catharsis manifests as a process that alters the relationship between consciousness and objective reality, thereby elevating social practice to a qualitatively higher level.

Duarte (2019, p. 13) interprets Gramsci's notion of the “superior elaboration of the structure into superstructure in the consciousness of men” in two distinct ways:

The first is that overcoming capitalism would place economic forces at the service of an organized collective will, reversing the current situation in which capital, as an economic force, dominates the entire political-institutional framework. Another would be that human beings, to develop toward freedom, need to incorporate into their individuality the objectively existing social forces resulting from the accumulation of historical experience. These two meanings of the process of

developing infrastructure into superstructure are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they are inseparable aspects of the same dynamic, simultaneously collective and individual.

The process through which human actions harness objectively existing forces cannot be successfully achieved without a mastery of historically produced objective knowledge. This underscores the significance of education for achieving catharsis. In the absence of systematic instruction in the most sophisticated forms of scientific, philosophical, and artistic knowledge, individuals remain susceptible to common sense, where fetishistic and mystical perspectives on nature and society dominate. Without the “socialization of systematized knowledge” (Saviani, 2011, p. 14), the emergence of catharsis as a comprehensive process of change in class consciousness becomes improbable. Conversely, without a clear understanding of catharsis as a transformation in worldview, the teaching of school content risks being driven by pragmatic and short-sighted objectives.

Catharsis in Gramsci’s sense incorporated into the PHC method – origin and meaning

It is well established that Saviani, in the early 1980s, utilized the Gramscian concept of catharsis to define the pivotal moment of the didactic process while formulating an initial approach to the method of historical-critical pedagogy. Saviani (2008, p. 57) interprets this Gramscian idea as “the effective incorporation of cultural elements, now transformed into active components of social transformation.” However, in developing his initial approach to this pedagogical method, the author did not delve deeply into the broader implications of integrating the category of catharsis into the didactic framework.

Duarte (2016, p. 96) highlights the necessity of understanding the significance of the concept of catharsis within the historical-critical pedagogy method by analyzing the relationships between the classics and worldviews.

Discovering the most appropriate ways to lead individuals to appropriate the cultural elements necessary for their humanization is a task that, to be successful, requires clarity about what justifies, in terms of worldview, the defense of the teaching of classics through historical-critical pedagogy. Without this understanding of the relationship between the teaching of classical content and the process of transforming worldviews, Saviani’s definition of catharsis as one of the decisive moments of the teaching method becomes a puzzle.

The worldview that historical-critical pedagogy aims to disseminate is historical-dialectical materialism, and therefore, the teaching of school content is understood by this pedagogy as a process by which the foundations are built for the subsequent elaboration of a dialectical, historicizing, and immanentist (materialist) worldview by the individual. In the words of Gramsci (2001, p. 43):

The concept of the balance between social order and natural order based on work, on the theoretical-practical activity of man, creates the first elements of an intuition

of the world free from all magic or witchcraft, and provides the starting point for the subsequent development of a historical, dialectical conception of the world, for the understanding of movement and becoming, for the evaluation of the sum of efforts and sacrifices that the present has cost the past and that the future costs the present, for the conception of the present as a synthesis of the past, of all past generations, which projects itself into the future [...].

Catharsis, therefore, is part of the process of overcoming common sense, which typically harbors many ideas about the world that lack an objective basis. The method of historical-critical pedagogy cannot be understood merely as a way of organizing didactic-pedagogical work in the classroom. It is much more than that; it is a conception of the transformation of consciousness in the process of appropriating knowledge.

Saviani (2008) summarized the method of historical-critical pedagogy into five “steps” that, strictly speaking, are best understood as five dialectically articulated processes: social practice (as a starting point), problematization, instrumentalization, catharsis, and social practice (as a destination). Marsiglia, Martins, and Lavoura (2019) developed a figure to convey some aspects of this method:

Figure 1 - Fundamentals of historical-critical didactics.



Source: Marsiglia, Martins, and Lavoura (2019, p. 13).

It is also important to note that this definition of the didactic method is a more general reference and, therefore, does not determine a single way of teaching, as explained by Duarte (2016, p. 109):

There is no “one” way to teach in historical-critical pedagogy, since the decision to employ a strategy, technique, or didactic procedure will always depend on an assessment that relates at least four elements: who is teaching, who is learning, what is being taught, and under what circumstances the educational activity takes place. Of course, this assessment always assumes, when it comes to this pedagogy, that there is something to be taught, and it is the teacher's task to carry out the act of teaching. In

turn, this assumption connects to another: that there are scientific, artistic, and philosophical contents that constitute values acquired through the historical development of humanity and are representative [...]. Therefore, in stating that there is no single way to teach from the perspective of historical-critical pedagogy, I am not making any concessions to the pedagogies of “learning to learn,” but simply highlighting an almost obvious fact: the possible and necessary variability of teaching methods.

On the method of historical-critical pedagogy and more precisely on the moment of catharsis, Saviani (2008, p. 57) also states the following:

Once the basic instruments have been acquired, even if only partially, the time has come for the elaborate expression of the new form of understanding of social practice to which one has ascended. Let us call this fourth step catharsis, understood in the Gramscian sense as “the higher elaboration of the structure into a superstructure in the consciousness of men” (Gramsci, 1978, p. 53). It involves the effective incorporation of cultural instruments, now transformed into active elements of social transformation.

In other words, catharsis in historical-critical pedagogy is considered the culminating moment, as it is in this moment that, at the same time, “[...] through the mediation of the analysis carried out in the teaching process, the passage from syncretism to synthesis” occurs (Saviani, 2008, p. 58). In the same sense, Duarte (2019, p. 3) also defines catharsis, understanding it as “[...] a qualitative leap in the expansion and enrichment of the relations between individual subjectivity and sociocultural objectivity”.

Saviani's assertion that cultural instruments serve as active components of social transformation illustrates that catharsis is not self-contained. Instead, it has the capacity to modify the circumstances of social agents within the broader context of global social practices. It shifts the way students engage with and appropriate reality, so that this transformation, while not necessarily immediate or direct in its effects on social reality, still exerts an indirect and mediated influence on those involved in the practices of that very reality (Saviani, 2008).

Within the Marxist tradition, and especially Gramsci's tradition, the cathartic moment represents the subjective appropriation of historically produced cultural elements, which qualitatively alter the way the individual conceives reality, positions themselves in relation to it, and establishes guidelines for their actions.

As Saviani (2011, p. 19) points out, this qualitative change is so significant that it assumes an irreversible character, that is, it reveals itself as “[...] a permanent disposition, or, in other words, when the object of learning becomes a kind of second nature.” After all, as the author attests:

Through catharsis, the educational process reaches its apex, enabling students to attain a higher conception, free from all magic and witchcraft. Through catharsis, the transition from the purely economic level to the ethical-political moment occurs. Likewise, through catharsis, the superior elaboration of the structure into a superstructure occurs in human consciousness, that is, the subjective assimilation of objective conditions occurs, allowing the transition from the condition of class-in-itself to the condition of class-for-itself. It is, ultimately, through catharsis that everything that was the object of learning becomes incorporated into the very way of being of human beings, operating a kind of second nature that qualitatively

transforms their lives integrally, that is, on the plane of conceptions and on the plane of action. (Saviani, 2013, p. 74, emphasis added).

As Martins (2011, p. 544) states, this category represents the “raising of consciousness of individuals from the lower classes [...] acquiring increasing awareness of themselves and the world around them - read: class consciousness”, which is even necessary in the current context to overcome the political passivity of the “class-that-lives-from-work” in the face of the urgency of overcoming capitalist, exploitative and alienating sociability.

ATTEMPTS TO INCORPORATE CATHARSIS INTO THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL PROPOSITIONS IN THE AREA OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

The construction and dissemination of historical-critical pedagogy represent a struggle between pedagogical theories that are rooted in conflicting worldviews, making it a process of ideological contention. Moreover, grasping the essential concepts of this pedagogy, along with its scientific and philosophical underpinnings, necessitates elevating pedagogical practice from the realm of common sense to one of philosophical consciousness (Saviani, 2002). Given that Gramsci's ideas play a crucial role in the scientific and philosophical foundations of this pedagogy, the extent to which these ideals are understood significantly impacts the successful integration of this educational theory into pedagogical practice.

The field of Special Education in Brazil has some unique characteristics that, at first, may hinder the incorporation of this pedagogy, such as the influence of the positivist model of science and the prevalence of pragmatic attitudes. Furthermore, this field has also adopted concepts aligned with epistemological and cultural relativism, which conflict with the historical-dialectical materialism that underlies historical-critical pedagogy. This situation generates a mix of optimism and caution regarding the appropriation of this pedagogy by the field of Special Education.

Optimism comes from the possibility of issues related to disability and the education of people with disabilities being understood within the scope of global social practice and, with this, overcoming a-critical and a-historical theorizations about what disability is, who people with disabilities are, and the respective ways of educating them.

This involves constructing a perspective on Special Education in which human diversity and educational models are understood within the context of the historical need to develop a world that is socially equal, yet humanly diverse and free, as Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) advocated.

Concerns emerge from the tendency to simplify and misinterpret Gramsci's concept of catharsis and the methodology of historical-critical pedagogy. This is evident in an article within the field of Special Education that illustrates a didactic scenario involving the “riparian forest,” utilizing principles of historical-critical pedagogy.

With these moments as a premise, we will use an episode that represents a possibility of working from the chosen theoretical framework and promoting the right to learn. This involves teaching the topic "Riparian Forest" in Geography instruction to a 15-year-old student with multiple disabilities, regularly enrolled in a municipal elementary school.

In the case of the experience at the elementary school, one of the authors of this text worked as a special education teacher and was able to observe the work of another teacher in the same role with the afore-mentioned student. The topic taught by the geography teacher in the regular classroom was, as mentioned, "Riparian Forest." In the first phase (social practice as a starting point), the teacher assessed the students' prior knowledge of the topic, including the student with multiple disabilities, with the assistance of the special education teacher. The problematization (second phase) was supported by the construction of a short text, begun in class, to be handed out in a subsequent class, during which some texts were reread and rewritten.

On the same day as the classroom activity, the student returned to school, during the opposite shift, to receive supplementary AEE support in a resource room, guided by the same special education teacher who had been with her in the morning. To provide the instruction (third stage), the special education teacher used the strategy of telling a story about riparian forests, featuring a teenager who lived there as the main character. In this way, the geography teacher could use the students' daily life as the basis for her teaching, enabling the students to incorporate the theoretical and practical knowledge needed to understand the topic studied.

After the Geography teacher's intervention, she verified that the student understood what riparian forests were and their purpose; she was also able to address issues related to springs and streams, emphasizing the need for their preservation. Written activities were also conducted, enabling the rewriting of the text to be submitted in the subsequent Geography class. Thus, the special education teacher assisted the student in the writing process through a text entirely written by her, since the student was unable to write with a pencil.

In the following class, the teacher revisited the topic, as had been previously discussed by the special education teacher, and, as agreed, several texts were collectively reread and rewritten, including that of the student with a disability (catharsis, the fourth stage). In this activity, the students were able to advance toward the synthesis process, confirming and revising some hypotheses they had before the explanation and implementation of the activity. In light of the explanation, the texts were reconstructed, and dialogues emerged, information was corrected, and new interventions were made, including with the participation of the aforementioned student. The return to social practice (the fifth stage) was qualitatively superior, as the students were now able to recognize and critically analyze reality, understanding the importance of preserving riparian forests for river conservation. (Melo; Mafezoni, 2019, p. 108-109, our emphasis).

While this article does not aim to analyze the interpretations of the didactic method within historical-critical pedagogy, we would like to point out that our interpretation differs from the account presented in several key aspects. These include our understandings of the concepts of social practice at both the beginning and end points, as well as our interpretations of problematization and catharsis. The portrayal of the didactic method in the aforementioned **passage** leads to a limited understanding of catharsis, which in this instance is restricted to the notion of comprehending "the importance of preserving riparian forests for river conservation" (Melo; Mafezoni, 2019, p. 109).

We do not wish to undermine the pedagogical efforts undertaken with this group of students, particularly with regard to the student with a disability. Instead, our critical perspective

is both theoretical and methodological; we believe it is essential to engage in further discussion of the concepts utilized by Saviani to define the method of historical-critical pedagogy. In this context, we underscore the insights provided by Marsiglia, Martins, and Lavoura (2019, p. 20-21), who note that changes in students' cognitive and behavioral responses to existing problems in social practice do not occur instantaneously.

An immediate change in attitude does not necessarily mean understanding or transforming social practice. Just as the human psyche has a long journey to achieve rigorously abstract forms of thought, school education has a long way to go to ensure that “practices” are not immediate, superficial, impoverished, or even mere expressions of verbal representations of objects and phenomena by which they can be described but not necessarily understood. (Marsiglia; Martins; Lavoura, 2019, p. 20-21, emphasis added).

Our understanding is that the processual nature of education does not exclude the mastery of verbal representations of objects and phenomena. These verbal representations can be the beginning of the process of understanding that will develop through successive approximations of the student's thinking in relation to the objects of knowledge. However, we agree with Marsiglia, Martins, and Lavoura (2019) that the moments of the historical-critical pedagogy method need to be understood as aspects of a potentially long process. In this sense, there is a need to avoid a certain urgency in identifying these aspects of the method in specific moments. Metaphorically speaking, perhaps it would be more appropriate to try to capture the educational process as a film rather than attempting to take photographs of social practice, problematization, instrumentalization, and catharsis. In this sense, Marsiglia, Martins, and Lavoura (2019, p. 20-21) make another important observation:

Representations are subject to the subject's sensible and experiential reality, based primarily on their individual memory, and therefore do not transcend the sphere of particularity. Concepts, on the other hand, fulfill exactly the opposite function, that is, to supplant the sensible in its particularity to capture the essential traits of objects and phenomena in their universality through historical memory. Thus, it is necessary to analyze, in the supposed previous statement of a child, whether their sentence in fact represents a judgment—that is, an internal logical articulation between different concepts—or a mere verbal reproduction arising from their ability to memorize what was said to them. It is also necessary to analyze whether this judgment allows them to analyze the issue of nature preservation in its entirety. With totality as the goal of teaching, it will not be at the end of a class, a two-month period, a semester, or sometimes not even a year that we will achieve this result. (Marsiglia; Martins; Lavoura, 2019, p. 20-21).

And they continue:

According to Martins (2013, p. 292), catharsis, “[...] corresponding to the results that make it possible to affirm that learning has occurred, produces, as Vygotsky would say, ‘rearrangements’ of the psychic processes based on which complex, culturally formed behaviors are instituted.”

It is, therefore, the formation, in each subject, of the capacities that have already been built historically and collectively by humanity as a whole, notably the capacity to act with maximum awareness of the object and objectives of the action. Only in this way will we be effectively working towards the formation of individuals within a

perspective that seeks to overcome class society through the struggle waged by historical subjects, formed and transformed through the participation of the school. (Marsiglia; Martins; Lavoura, 2019, p. 20-21, emphasis added).

In short, the production of catharsis and cathartic moments in Gramsci's sense, mediated by historical-critical pedagogy, must be understood in its conceptual and appropriative character (Duarte, 2013), as a moment capable of altering the individual's worldview, positioning, and action in their relationship with the human race. It is worth noting that, as Marsiglia, Martins, and Lavoura (2019, p. 21) explain, this is possible when didactic work grounded in historical-critical pedagogy is carried out systematically, intentionally, and articulated for each "grade/year/stage and in each area of knowledge" over a period of years.

We contend that the concept of catharsis, as a component of the didactic method, must be approached through the lens of hegemonic struggle, highlighting what Gramsci (1999, p. 314) described as the transition from the "passionate egoistic level" to the "ethical-political level." As Saviani noted, the construction and dissemination of a new worldview that has the potential to become hegemonic necessitates a mastery of "[...] logical-methodological instruments whose strength and coherence exceed those that uphold the dominant worldview" (Saviani, 2002, p. 4). Acquiring these instruments—essentially, the theoretical frameworks that allow for a deeper understanding of reality beyond the pragmatic and immediate context of daily life—is a challenging and time-intensive endeavor.

Thus, the catharses that occur throughout this process may involve conflicts, ruptures and even suffering; as Gramsci (2001, p. 52) wrote: "In a new situation, these issues may become very harsh and it will be necessary to resist the tendency to facilitate what cannot be facilitated under penalty of being denatured".

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article aims to reflect on Gramsci's conceptualization of catharsis and its implications for the field of Special Education. We begin by providing an overview of Gramsci's biography and writings, followed by an examination of how certain Gramscian concepts have been applied in Special Education in Brazil. We place particular emphasis on the notion of catharsis, tracing its development from Gramsci's original formulation, through its integration into the method of historical-critical pedagogy, to its application in both theoretical and practical approaches within Special Education.

This is because, although this movement by educators and researchers in Special Education in Brazil is necessary and commendable, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that, in the context of educational practice, working with the historical-critical pedagogy method requires reading and rereading the classics of this pedagogical theory and its theoretical and methodological foundations.

As noted at the outset of this article, we have chosen to concentrate specifically on the concept of catharsis as defined by Gramsci. However, it is essential to highlight that we do not intend to restrict the examination of this category solely to this author. Other influential

figures in historical-critical pedagogy, such as Vygotsky and Lukács, have also been explored in various contexts, including the multiple dimensions of catharsis.

Our decision to focus on Gramsci's conceptualization of catharsis in this article stems from our belief that his work offers substantial insights into understanding and addressing the systemic crisis of capitalism, particularly within the realm of Special Education.

Our main objective was to demonstrate the need for this process to occur rigorously, so that Gramsci's concepts and contributions to the field are not mobilized inappropriately, distorting their critical and revolutionary potential, especially at a historical moment when capital is experiencing a profound crisis in its sociometabolic system and reactionary forces are emerging in Brazil and around the world, willing to deliberately lie, confuse, and deceive the subaltern classes, including people with disabilities.

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