

## SPECIAL SECTION: PAULO FREIRE CENTENARY

# Is there a place for Paulo Freire's theory in contemporary university pedagogy?<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

This article is the result of theoretical research, of qualitative nature, with the aim of answering the question: is there a place for Freire's theory in contemporary university pedagogy? In 2021, the birth centenary of the patron of Brazilian education is celebrated. Based on his works and others that deal with university pedagogy, we argue intending to build bridges between them. Some concepts that are diluted in Freire's theory will be discussed, as well as arguments will be built to demonstrate that there is still a lot to learn and understand about it. The choice for the concepts presented was not random: it was based on the academic experience of the authors and on the knowledge that they have about the thinker's work, believing that that represents important aspects of a teacher profile expected for acting in university teaching.

**Keywords:** University pedagogy. Freire's theory. Teaching-learning.

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## Há lugar para a teoria de Paulo Freire na pedagogia universitária contemporânea?

### RESUMO

Este artigo resulta de pesquisa teórica, de natureza qualitativa, com o objetivo de responder ao questionamento: há lugar para a teoria de Freire na pedagogia universitária contemporânea? No ano de 2021 comemora-se o centenário de nascimento do patrono da educação brasileira. Com base nas suas obras e em outras que tratam da pedagogia universitária, argumenta-se na direção de construir pontes entre elas. Traz-se à discussão alguns conceitos que se encontram diluídos na teoria de Freire, além de construir argumentos para demonstrar que ainda há muito por aprender e por compreender a seu respeito. A opção pelos conceitos apresentados não foi aleatória: fez-se com base na experiência acadêmica dos autores e no conhecimento que possuem da obra do pensador, acreditando que eles representam aspectos importantes de um perfil docente esperado para atuar na docência universitária.

**Palavras-chave:** Pedagogia universitária. Teoria de Freire. Ensino-aprendizagem.

## ¿Hay lugar para la teoría de Paulo Freire en la pedagogía universitaria contemporánea?

### RESUMEN

Este artículo es el resultado de una investigación teórica, de carácter cualitativo, con el objetivo de dar respuesta a la pregunta: ¿hay lugar para la teoría de Freire en la pedagogía universitaria contemporánea? El 2021, se celebra el centenario del nacimiento del patrón de la educación brasileña. A partir de sus obras y otras que tratan de la pedagogía universitaria, se argumenta en la dirección de tender puentes entre ellas. Se traerá a la discusión algunos conceptos que se diluyen en la teoría de Freire y se construirá argumentos para demostrar que aún queda mucho por aprender y comprender al respecto. La elección de los conceptos presentados no fue aleatoria, se basó en la experiencia académica de los autores y el conocimiento que se tiene sobre el trabajo del pensador, creyendo que representan aspectos importantes de un perfil docente esperado para actuar en la docencia universitaria.

**Palabras clave:** Pedagogía universitaria. Teoría de Freire. Enseñanza-aprendizaje.

## INTRODUCTION

The question whether there is room for Paulo Freire's theory in contemporary university pedagogy can be answered with an affirmative or negative. The answer can be simple and straightforward. In our view, it is affirmative: yes, there is room for Freire. However, there are no simple answers to complex questions. The fact that the question that gives vent to this text is simple does not mean that it is not profound. The direction that our article takes aims to identify aspects of Freire's theory that serve as a reference for contemporary university pedagogy. We believe in giving our contribution by building a bridge between the two themes, demonstrating their convergences and their importance.

The path to expose the arguments that allow contextualizing and giving density to the response begins with a provocation from a look launched on social networks and interviews with intellectuals and exponents of the political scenario disseminated in the media, which they claim Freire's thinking is inconsistent and ideological. The conviction in his ideas is so strong that they propose to remove the title of "patron of Brazilian education"<sup>4</sup>. Given this, would it make any sense to commemorate the centenary of the man that designed Brazilian pedagogical thinking to other continents? Does his theory have anything to say to university pedagogy and teachers working in higher education?

The university world has its particularities, even so, we can think of some aspects about which Freire speaks. In the organization of the text we will contextualize the contemporary university locus, then we will approach Freire's theory in connection with university pedagogy and, within this, deal with some of Freire's concepts that we consider relevant to the discussion.

## THE CONTEMPORARY UNIVERSITY LOCUS

The revolution in Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICTs) and the vertical expansion of higher education in Brazil draw a scenario that, while democratizes education and includes students, enabling access to higher levels of education, alerts to problems that will have a great impact on their training and their personal and professional future. Access to the diploma does not guarantee that they will be included in other spaces, such as in the labor market.

The pandemic that began in 2020 aggravates some aspects of this situation, generating second-nature exclusion, those excluded because they do not have the technological conditions to enter or follow the studies. This exclusion, added to the economic exclusion, increases the distance between social segments and leaves even more critical the situations of a large segment of the Brazilian population. Dubet (2020, p. 9) uses numbers to explain this

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<sup>4</sup> Law No. 12,612 of April 13, 2012 declares the educator Paulo Freire Patron of Brazilian Education.

exclusion, which leads him to the conclusion that in "[...] everywhere, the richest percentage of the population has enriched and reaped most of the growth."

There is a lot of talk about education 3.0, 4.0 and 5.0, with their respective characteristics<sup>5</sup>. Such nomenclatures even seem to be related to the power of automobile engines, but in fact, they are ways of describing, from web concepts 3.0, 4.0 and 5.0 (JUNG; VAZ; BENATTI, 2019), the internal transformations that education undergoes due to the interference of economic, technological, international organizations and the labor market, which increasingly projects higher demands.

However, it is worth mentioning that there is a contradiction in this process, for as the requirements for training increase, it seems that the criteria for the quality of education decrease. This causes Beck (2011) to state that it begins "[...] thus establishing the formula according to which qualification certificates **are less and less sufficient**, but at the same time increasingly necessary to achieve the desired and disputed professional positions" (BECK, 2011, p. 224, author's note). Dubet (2020, p. 48) goes in the same direction when he says that there is a paradox between school and professional mobility: "[...] upward mobility within the school system is not accompanied by professional mobility; young people have risen in school order and have not moved on the employment order." Even though the number of hires from one generation to another has increased, there has also been a massification of diplomas.

Writings on university pedagogy deal, on different perspectives and with a repeated focus, regarding the demand for innovation, active methodologies, and the insertion of TDICs. Thus, in the wake of the proposed education, professor 3.0, 4.0 or 5.0 appears, which causes some professional anxiety in the students, since he is always improving so as not to miss the "wave" and, consequently, his work. Goergen (2020, p. 143) explains that, in many contexts, school and university education "[...] it is put at the service of quantitative, utilitarian and productivists objectives not related to human, subjective, citizen formation, but to the instruction of useful individuals and adequate to market expectations." Looking at this and into Freire's theory, we ask if there is anything that can be said for the widespread pedagogy of the 21st century.

Almeida (2012) points out that, from the 19th century, we had two<sup>6</sup> models that serve as inspiration for the university organization. The Napoleonic, characterized by the preservation

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<sup>5</sup> According to Rodrigues and Aranha (2020), Professor 3.0, linked to the values of the industrial era, had a technical inclination, based on the achievement of objectives and centered on the evaluation of the results. In turn, Professor 4.0 focuses his work on technological and digital resources. Finally, Professor 5.0, in an emergency phase, guides his work in the construction of a new society centered on the human, which "will allow a more efficient, inclusive, sustainable world, with more convenience and quality of life for human beings to live long and peacefully" (RODRIGUES; ARANHA, 2020, p. 798).

<sup>6</sup> We will not enter or characterize the models referred to in greater depth. We alluded to them so that we can understand the traits that characterize university teaching in the 21st century.

of the idea of "[...] universality and dissemination of constituted knowledge, created professional regulations, limited the autonomy of the university and instituted the protection of the State" (ALMEIDA, 2012, p. 41). The Humboldtian consecrated the separation of the university from state control, "[...] ensuring freedom in the face of power and religion, and made autonomy and research the distinctive marks of the modern idea of university" (ALMEIDA, 2012, p. 41). In Brazil, these models were mischaracterized due to the commodification and privatization of higher education, in addition to the need for internal reconfigurations to meet regulatory processes.

The university built under these two rationalities reaches the contemporary period instead of being highlighted in the knowledge society, as a producer of science. Even so, it finds itself suffocated and has startles in the face of the metamorphosis (BECK, 2011) that the world and national scenarios suffer and the emerging questions, for which she needs to seek the answers in order not to lose the space conquered over decades.

If the challenges arising from these changes were not enough, by opening the doors to different social segments and performing mass care, the university sees some of its historical problems, such as the incipient pedagogical training of its teachers, being enhanced. Almeida (2012) argues that there is an epistemological change in progress that results in the disappearance of significant vocabulary in the world of formation, emerging another of an essentially instrumental character. Morin (2016) reinforces that scientific knowledge, science and technology constitute a very important part of culture and human beings, but only a part.

According to Morosini *et al.* (2006), university pedagogy emerges in the french cultural tradition, centered on the study of knowledge as the raw material of teaching/learning. In the Brazilian case, it assumes the responsibility of overcoming criticism to propose solutions in view of the diversity of institutions and the differences between them. In the opinion of Morosini *et al.* (2006, p. 57-58) "there is a lot of criticism and little proposition of alternatives that seek to improve performance and teacher training."

Observing the pedagogical models and current practices in the university environment, we verified the reproduction of trends that have been installed for decades and have changed little or almost nothing presenting itself as a conservative, vertical, magistrocentric pedagogy centered on the transmission of contents. On the other hand, there are initiatives that aim to give prominence to students: using DICTs, situating the teacher in the role of a mediator, changing the architecture of the classroom and implementing active methodologies. Such initiatives face resistance due to the lack of preparation of teachers, the relative lack of clarity in how to conduct their work and the instability of pedagogical models. These initiatives propose little density and theoretical depth and are marked by oscillations of a certain technological fad, which transmutes at all times. Finally, in some contexts, the use of a discourse of a more voluntary character than based on clear conceptions, which require a

process of formation, still persists. Perhaps these initiatives are missing what we will suggest from Freire's theory: the contribution of classics of this thought, in which is the embryo of many pedagogies, referred to as novelty. Calvino (1993) may be able to help reflect on this. For him, it remains the fact that reading the classics "[...] it seems to be in contradiction with our rhythm of life, which does not know the long times, concerning the humanist *otium*; and, also in contradiction with the eclecticism of our culture, that we would never know how to write a catalogue of the classicism that interests us" (CALVINO, 1993, p. 15, author's note).

In these two models, we can situate pedagogical practice in higher education, since these models coexist at the same time and often within the same institution. We do not want to praise the virtues of one over the other, since they were considered as references, which we will bring to the discussion correlating Freire's theory.

### FREIRE'S THEORY IN CONNECTION WITH UNIVERSITY PEDAGOGY

The reading of Freire's works provides contact with his theory of knowledge, built throughout his life history. In many circumstances, we see educators referring to Freire's works without having made a deeper incursion, as they demand, to speak with property that they "know" or "use Freire" as an anchor of pedagogical practice.

If we take as a parameter the role and characteristic of university professors in Brazil, we identify that one of the greatest weaknesses is related to didactic preparation to be teachers. These make qualifications in their original knowledge areas, standing out as researchers, without a consistent preparation in what we can call "didactic-epistemological foundations for teaching". It is not a question of holding teachers responsible for the fragility of their education, but of questioning the Brazilian legislation itself, which does not place as an obligation the offer of didactic-pedagogical disciplines in masters and doctorates, nor does it place the teaching internship as a prerequisite for non-scholarship students. At first, we find masters and doctors (educators by profession) who do not even have any notion of educational theories and references that support the teaching exercise in a perspective as Freire proposed. A significant portion of them may have heard about Freire, but they don't know his theory of knowledge. We can even find those who reject it without even having read any of his works.

We can affirm that, in Brazil, the university professor lacks an identity. It exists as a category, has a professional status, but there is a lot of disparity and typological variables that support a certain uncertainty about it. According to Maciel (2009), coping with the problem of university teaching demands a collective effort with the intention of evolving in search of the construction of a multidimensional university pedagogy.

This framework reinforces the arguments for defending that there is room for Freire in university pedagogy. However, the fact that teachers do not have knowledge about university pedagogy does not authorize us to say that Freire's theory, by itself, is justified in this "didactic epistemological" void. This can be occupied by other authors or theories. We need to justify why Freire may be an option. But there is undeniable the need to fill that void. Morosini *et al.* (2006, p. 58) reinforce this thought when they state that:

[...] prepare professionals for the future and contribute to the formation of citizenship, university professors need to reflect on their established practices, on the knowledge of their area, the forms of their appropriation and the social and ethical values that permeate the curricula and need to be worked inside and outside the classroom. This overlaps with a ready-made prescription on ways and methods of teaching or transmitting knowledge.

Freire is important and contemporary. It is a classic of pedagogical thinking recognized internationally. A classic does not lose its relevance, as Calvino (1993) points out, because it is a book that never finishes saying what it had to say. The classics "[...] are books that, the more we think we know by hearing about it, when they are actually read, the more they reveal as new, unexpected, unpublished" (CALVINO, 1993, p. 12). The actuality of a text or author is related to the place from which we leave and the objective we have for its reading. We need to strip ourselves of preconceived visions and disarm our thinking, explaining our intentions in relation to the interest of drinking in the "source". Calvino (1993, p. 14) warns of this, saying that for "[...] being able to read the classics, we have to define 'where' they are being read from, otherwise both the book and the reader get lost in a timeless cloud." As a classic, does Freire match with innovation, active methodologies and DICTs?

Freire's theory is remade as a phoenix. There's a lot to be absorbed in it yet. Although we have lived with Freirian pedagogy, we need to recognize that, with regard to the implementation of their ideas, we are still insufficient. What can he tell us that has not yet been said by other thinkers or we have not been able to interpret properly? We will deal with some points that we consider important to bring to reflection to relate to university pedagogy.

The incursion into Freire's works allows us to present concepts considered relevant to support the pedagogical thought that passes through university pedagogy. We have highlighted points of view that can be consistent and contribute to university pedagogy. These theoretical principles intersect, intertwine and depend on each other, during the teaching exercise and in the definition of a professional profile of the university professor.

### Methodical rigor, respect for students and their knowledge<sup>7</sup>

We believe that the university is the space of science and, as such, must defend rigorous knowledge, not that difficult or inaccessible, but put to the test, submitted to criticism, to overcome common sense and have the desired depth of a university knowledge that sustains a worldview without illusions. Santos (2004, p. 114) says that the university in the 21st century would certainly be less hegemonic, but no less necessary than it was in previous centuries. "Its specificity as a public good, lies in being the institution that connects the present to the medium and long term by the knowledge and training it produces and by the privileged public space of open and critical discussion that it constitutes."

Freire defended rigorous and elaborate knowledge, the result of intellectual discipline. "And these conditions imply or require the presence of educators and educating creators, instigators, restless, strictly curious, humble and persistent" (FREIRE, 1997, p. 29). The initial condition for knowing something is that of not knowing, humility and the recognition that we are not in possession of knowledge, but we desire it and are humble enough to recognize the condition in which we find ourselves. Epistemological arrogance limits the human being, because it makes him believe that he knows everything and that there is nothing else to learn.

The methodical rigor in Freire (1997) is consistent with what he calls "thinking right". It is not a question of the educator transmitting "truths" to the student, but of understanding that he needs to take his place in learning with autonomy. "It is precisely in this sense that teaching is not exhausted in the 'treatment' of the object or content, superficially done, but extends to the production of the conditions in which learning critically is possible" (FREIRE, 1997, p. 29).

The university works with standardized models, which, in many circumstances, prevent the understanding of students' trajectories and do not give them the attention they need. Freire (1992) insists that teaching is not reduced to transferring knowledge around an object or content. It is a much deeper act, whose validity occurs when students learn to learn, by understanding the reason for being the object of knowledge. "Therefore, teaching is a critical and non-mechanical act" (FREIRE, 1992, p. 81). In this regard, Arroyo (2011, p. 279) challenges us to put ourselves in the place of the students and ask ourselves: "[...] what good is knowledge that does not help us to know each other?"

For this to happen, teachers need their pedagogical sensitivity to be put into action and coherent "[...] with their democratic dream, respect the students and never, for this very part, manipulate them" (FREIRE, 1992, p. 80). Therefore, we start from the premise that the constant study and reflection, the critical look and positioning on the articulation of the curriculum focused on the reality of the university and the subjects that are inserted in it, is

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<sup>7</sup> The order of its presentation in the text does not necessarily mean the order of importance of those presented first in relation to the latter.

the force that mobilizes the professor. The university, as a space of relationships, houses students whose characteristics constitute the diversity (race, color, sex, social origin...) of their environment, which translates into a space of exchange, opportunity, experiences and conviviality related to learning processes. As an educational space, in addition to exchanges of knowledge, there is the acquisition of values, encouraging the development of attitudes of cooperation, solidarity, mutual respect, etc.

The challenge of university pedagogy is to allow thinking to act on the everyday reality, transforming it through small actions that generate changes that are collectively woven, seeking to make the actions and knowledge more appropriate to the function of university education. Freire (1992, p. 85) makes a position in this regard: "I refer to the insistence with which, for a long time, I defend the need that we have, educators and progressive educators to never underestimate or deny the knowledge of experience made, with which the students arrive at school or informal education centers".

In *Pedagogy of Autonomy* (1997), Freire resumes the idea of respecting the knowledge of students, especially those from the popular classes who arrive at the university and opens space in pedagogical practice for the debate about these knowledges. "Why not discuss with the students the concrete reality to which the discipline whose content is taught should be associated, the aggressive reality in which violence is the constant and coexistence of people is much greater with death than with life?" (FREIRE, 1997, p. 33-34). If we think about the organization of work at the university and the curricula on which the pedagogical processes occur, we could think that there is no place for what Freire (1997) proposes. On the other hand, if we understand that the planning is done by the teacher, a thread of hope arises. It is his commitment to the choices and knowledge he prioritizes in his work. As an educator, he acts within certain limits and possibilities, but there is room for his protagonism, hence his responsibility to exercise autonomy in favor of the transformation of the world, which leads us to reflection in the sequence.

### Emancipatory knowledge and political commitment to the transformation of the world

Freire is part of that contingent of educators whose pedagogy contributes to feeding the humanist perspectives of teaching and academic training. One of the milestones of the university of the 21st century concerns its pragmatism and its utilitarian purpose as preparation for the world of work. According to Rossato (2009, p. 28), the "[...] *Homo faber* to the detriment of *Homo sapiens*. It privileges to do as opposed to thinking about social and human phenomena" (author's note). There is a dissonance between rhetoric and effective practice at university. There is a lot of talk about training subjects, citizens who have critical capacity and a broad view of the world, who are able to interact socially, but in practice what is seen are curricula of predominantly instrumental courses, full of technicality and

dehydrated disciplines and knowledge of a humanist character. "Every formation that disconsiders human, humanity, humanities becomes a preaching against man, and does not respond to the meaning of living and knowing" (ROSSATO, 2009, p. 32). Therefore, Freire (1997) was insistent in his purpose for educating as an act of humanization.

Looking at this picture, we wonder, like Rossato (2009), whether the humanities still take place at the university of the 21st century. This questioning leads us to a reflection on the man's project that we want to build through university education. On the other hand, the current context of modern-liquid society, spectacle, and tiredness (BAUMAN, 2001), leads us to question which subject-student we have today and how, from its subjectivities, we will develop it.

Freire (2004) fostered a senseless persistence in demonstrating that the conditions in which people find themselves are not the result of chance or divine design but result from the historical constitution of society based on an unequal and excluding economic-political model. He insisted that the diagnosis was not enough, because it was necessary to fight with all forces to provoke the transformation of these contexts. He saw in knowledge and in the change of state of human consciousness the tools that could be used for this.

[...] I would say that one of the things we should do is not wait for society to change. If we wait, it does not change; we must do, and it is by getting ourselves into the process, in the very intimacy of the moving process, that we discover the path and we are dismantling things that oppose change (FREIRE, 2004, p. 141).

In this sense, the context of the subject-student who attends the academy today cannot be ignored, even though this understanding is covered with complexity. These are times never lived and therefore not foreseen. Still, we believe that the knowledge with which we work and teach should serve as a possibility of coping with the fundamental problems that afflict us. "That is why achieving the most critical understanding of the situation of oppression does not yet free the oppressed. By devening it, however, they take a step towards overcoming it as long as they engage in the political struggle for the transformation of the concrete conditions in which oppression takes place" (FREIRE, 1992, p. 32).

Morin (2015, p. 18) draws attention by saying that the school and the university teach knowledge, but not its nature: "Teaching is not to focus on quantitative knowledge, nor to privilege specialized professional training, it is to introduce a basic culture that implies knowledge of knowledge". It is important to understand that it is temporary, nonlinear and stored in smaller and smaller spaces. Knowledge can result in more knowledge and can serve to break through the shackles that enslave many people. "Authentic liberation, which is humanization in process, is not something that is deposited in men. It's not another word, hollow, mythifying. It is praxis, which implies in the action and reflection of men on the world

to transform it" (FREIRE, 1983, p. 77). Those who have knowledge as the raw material of their work, as is the case of the teacher, should be aware of what is and what knowledge represents as a tool of liberation and humanization.

### Exercise of a dialogical and humanizing pedagogy

Freire's reference to dialogue is in the condition of collective, respectful, and liberating educational practice. He advocated a pedagogy in which each has the right and conditions to express "his" word.

When we try to enter into the dialogue, as a human phenomenon, we are revealed to something that we can already say to be itself: **the word**. But when we find the word, in the analysis of dialogue, as something more than a means for it to be done, we must seek, also without constitutive elements (FREIRE, 1983, p. 91, author's note).

For this, dialogue is the presupposition and the means. In times of intolerance and unique thinking, humanizing implies tension "[...] between what tradition has bequeathed to us and the circumstances and dynamism present" (BOUFLEUER, 2020, p. 20), so that care for life avoids so many episodes for which we no longer wish to go through.

Looking at the current pedagogical models, Freire (1997) insisted on his deposition, because they were magistrocentric and vertical. What he proposed was horizontal relationships between people who were willing to teach and learn. "Therefore, we cannot put ourselves in the position of being superior that teaches a group of ignorant, but in the humble position of the one who communicates a knowledge relative to others who have another relative knowledge" (FREIRE, 1979, p. 29).

Dialogue is pedagogical when it concerns both "[...] to the content itself as to how the educator is used to expose the meaning of his message" (VASCONCELOS; BRITO, 2006, p. 74). Human communication can occur in a variety of ways: looks, gestures, words, facial expressions, silences... But it can be one-sided when an emitter transmits a "message" to a receiver, without any kind of exchange or complicity. The teacher-student relationship can occur in this way, with only one communicating, transmitting information to the other, which assumes a passive condition. It is not necessary, however, that something be expressed in words, since the classroom is full of languages and silences. The true pedagogical relationship is one in which the freedom to speak or silence is the starting point. Not a few times, the teacher speaks and the student hears or pretends to listen. In this situation, there is no place for what Freire understood by dialogue.

Silence can be a dialogical moment when the subjects, by their own choice, decide not to "speak", but to let the silence "speak", without the dominance of one over the other. What

we observe in the classrooms is the absolute exemption or non-authorship of the student in the pedagogical relationship. There are many silencing and little silence, a condition for reflective thinking to occur. "The critical-dialogical posture always presupposes one's own manifestation and listening to the other, recognizing the similarities and differences that constitute human coexistence free of indoctrination, authoritarianism and systemic violence" (GOERGEN, 2020, p. 141-142). There's a lot of background noise, little listening and almost nothing to trade. If there is no interaction, consent and openness, one cannot speak of a dialogical pedagogy, but imposing, transmissive, which generates little learning, since the student "blocks" the teacher as a condition of self-affirmation of his identity, as a way of preserving his state and his knowledge as a student. According to Boufleuer (2020), in the dialogue we have the possibility of recognizing each subject in his dignity. We can only be in our authenticity and not when the other directs us.

Freire's proposed dialogue is not a simple conversation of a romantic character. It has a deeper meaning, because it harbors conflict, contradiction, the opposition of ideas and the unsealing of the conditions of the subjects, with the aim of getting them out of oppression or epistemological and political blindness. Dialogical pedagogy creates the conditions for dialogue to happen and helps in the development of attitudes and actions that promote humanization. By conceptualizing the entry "dialogue/dialogicity" in the *Paulo Freire Dictionary*, Streck, Rendín and Zitkoski (2008) highlights the hopeful character of this term in the Freirian humanizing perspective. According to the author, it is a way of telling the world, but also of doing so, since Freire challenges us to the construction of an educational project that, in view of its liberating perspective, begins with methodological coherence, which dispenses with dialogicity as a fundamental aspect. "That is, education begins with the example of the educator by showing his way of being to the students and giving a practical testimony of his convictions" (STRECK; RENDÍN; ZITKOSKI, 2008, p. 153).

Thus, when talking about humanization and its implications, we will go to the heart of the question about what education means in the university and what its function means. The university is an educational environment and, as such, according to Goergen (2020, p. 124), its function is to prepare young people in an appropriate and realistic way to work in the job market, "[...] but presupposes coping with the task of unveiling and basing, from the humanistic perspective, the anthropological meanings underlying pedagogical practices, aiming to form subjectively conscious and socially responsible citizens". The idea of humanization carries in its bulge the understanding of human incompleteness. It is only possible to speak of human formation when we know that there is a possibility for the human being to improve as an existential project. And that can happen to death. If we were born ready, none of this would be possible.

There is always room for improvement because we are constantly coming. Severino (2020, p. 35) reinforces that, due to the radical historicity of our "[...] existing, our way of being is not a ready reality, but a continuous becoming, a permanent coming to be, a process of construction, imposing the need for formation". In the author's view, it is clear the intrinsic role of education: "[...] invest in the establishment, consolidation and preservation of technical, political and cultural practices that constitute this humanization and contribute to preventing their dehumanizing effect" (SEVERINO, 2020, p. 35). Hence the responsibility of those involved in this formative process: to understand this openness of the human being and to give rise to an education that exercises autonomy and freedom. If this is not the case, education is compromised by being imposing and castrating, limiting the space of human growth and being in the face of the ethical action expected of the educator.

### Ethics in the teacher-student relationship

The ethical crisis that befalls Brazilian society is not an isolated phenomenon. It is systemic and resonates in all institutions and instances. As professors at the university, we also have a share of responsibility, because many of our graduates are not the best examples of ethical behavior. Therefore, Freire (1997) stated that educating is an ethical act. When it's not like this, we'll be talking about diseducation. In Boufleuer's view (2020), his profound ethical sense is constitutive of teaching, which is only realized in the "concrete and present presence" of face-to-face encounter.

In the view of Dalbosco (2020, p. 36), education "[...] as a broad preparation comes before education as learning of a specific craft, implying, from the point of view of content, that the ethical formation of the human being is prior to professional training, and should also support it." Ethics is not given or takes place as a natural process in people. There is a need to educate them for ethical conduct.

Freire (1997) stated that it is not possible to think human beings far from ethics, let alone outside it. "That is why transforming the educational experience into pure technical training is to love what is fundamentally human in the educational exercise: its formative character" (FREIRE, 1997, p. 37). In Morin's view (2015), among the universal sources of ethics are solidarity and responsibility, and it must be formed in minds from the consciousness that the human being is an individual and, at the same time, part of a society. Thus, the university professor, through his training, has a commitment to himself and the collectivity to make the world a habitable space for all, rejecting proposals that serve to exclude or instrumentalize the human being transforming it into *homo machina*.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The arguments constructed throughout the text aimed to specify some aspects of university pedagogy, as well as to cross-reference concepts of Freire's theory, to demonstrate that it constitutes a dense thinking, from which we can still use ourselves to sustain pedagogical practices in the university environment.

Although he is an internationally recognized Brazilian educator, with extensive literature produced on various topics of pedagogy and other areas of education, Freire's thinking faces a lot of resistance in academia. We have a few guesses as to why. In our view, this is partly due to the lack of knowledge about his theory. Many simply reject him for hearing about him, but they never became interested and did not read his works. Others do not sympathize with his way of thinking, because Freire touches on neuralgic and structural issues of Brazilian society, such as social exclusion and lack of political clarity, making them feel uncomfortable. There are those who have had contact with the Freirian theory but use it in the form of "theoretical jargon" and their practice has little of Freire. We also found a group that embodies Freire in his educational practice and seeks to be coherent in his thinking and acting.

The initial question "is there a place for Freire's theory in contemporary university pedagogy?" was with us throughout the text and the elaborate ideas demonstrate the validity of Freirian thought in this space. After a century of his birth, some situations he denounced still need to be adjusted and debated. But he was a sower of hope, of the belief that change is possible and that we are free to make choices and put them into practice, because it is not enough to have knowledge, we need to go to fight and work to transform what we consider ugly and inhuman, making the beauty of the world happen, as Freire liked to say.

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