

**The importance of the act of reading: theoretical-
methodological convergences and divergences with Paulo
Freire¹**

***A importância do ato de ler: aproximações e distanciamentos
teórico-metodológicos em Paulo Freire²***

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Abstract:

This article discusses the importance of reading in literacy processes based on an analysis of the work *A importância do ato de ler: em três artigos que se completam* and focusing on how the act of reading is understood by the educator Paulo Freire from the theoretical-methodological perspective of phenomenology associated to Christian existentialism. Freire was a defender of the concept of “word-world”, understood as the interrelationship between literacy and learning how to read and write. The analysis proposed articulates authors who dialogue with Freire, among them Mikhail Bakhtin and Magda Becker Soares. The article also presents some reflections on the contributions of the educator to the establishment of the “word-world” and the convergences and divergences between Paulo Freire’s phenomenology and Karl Marx’s historical materialism.

Keywords: reading, Paulo Freire, literacy, phenomenology, historical materialism

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Resumo:

*Este artigo discute a importância da leitura nos processos de alfabetização e letramento. Para isso, analisou-se o tratamento dado à essa prática pelo educador Paulo Freire na perspectiva teórico-metodológica da fenomenologia aliada ao existencialismo cristão, expressa na obra *A importância do ato de ler: em três artigos que se completam*. Freire foi o defensor da “palavramundo”, compreendida como a inter-relação entre o alfabetizar e o letrar. Na análise proposta, utilizaram-se autores que dialogam com Freire, entre eles, Mikhail Bakhtin e Magda Becker Soares. Este artigo também apresenta alguns reflexos das contribuições do educador para a efetivação da “palavramundo”, bem como aproximações e distanciamentos entre a fenomenologia de Paulo Freire e o materialismo histórico de Karl Marx.*

Palavras-chave: *leitura, Paulo Freire, alfabetização e letramento, fenomenologia, materialismo histórico*

Introduction

When we talk about education, it is impossible to disregard the importance of educational theories in the understanding of the concepts of man, society, and knowledge which have traversed the history of humankind from the Middle Ages to our times. These theories have contributed to our advancements in the educational field, influencing and also being influenced by the society in which the school, the educators, and the students are inserted.

Leading individuals to the responsible exercise of citizenship³ has been one of the greatest challenges of contemporaneity. From this perspective, we will analyze the emancipatory education defended by Paulo Reglus Neves Freire (1921-1997)—inserted in a broad process of adult literacy permeated by reading—in one of his works, *A importância do ato de ler: em três artigos que se completam* (1989)⁴ [The importance of the act reading: in three articles which complete each other]. For this purpose, we will articulate the work of authors who dialogue with Freire’s ideas, such as Gadotti (1989); Geraldi (1997); Feitosa (1999); Bronckart (1999); Bakhtin (2000); Rangel (2005); Soares (2003, 2004, 2016); Costa-Hübes (2009); Leite (2011); Sousa, Martins and Scarpelli (2012); Scorsolini-Comin (2014); Silva (2017) among others.

³ “Citizenship, relationship between an individual and a state to which the individual owes allegiance and in turn is entitled to its protection. Citizenship implies the status of freedom with accompanying responsibilities. Citizens have certain rights, duties, and responsibilities that are denied or only partially extended to aliens and other noncitizens residing in a country. In general, full political rights, including the right to vote and to hold public office, are predicated upon citizenship.” (“Citizenship”, 2018)

⁴ We have used the first part of the analyzed work’s title, “A importância do ato de ler” [The importance of the act of reading] in this article’s title to emphasize reading as the guiding line of the proposed discussion.

Paulo Freire highlights, in this and in other works, that the “word-world” is essential—opposing, thus, what we could call a “word-school”. It is not, therefore, possible to disregard that this educator’s work represents a turning point between a concept of reading defined by the mere codification, the “word-school”, and a more social concept of this practice, the “word-world”.

In this article we aim, at first, to point out some aspects of the personal and of the professional life of Paulo Freire to then refer to the work *A importância do ato de ler: em três artigos que se completam*, since we believe life and work are intertwined. We also sought to evidence Freire’s political pedagogy, manifested in the youth and adult literacy process he proposes. Moreover, we present some convergences between Freire, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Magda Becker Soares, the reflections of Freire’s contributions to the current literacy practices in the school context, and the convergences and divergences between Freire’s phenomenology and Karl Marx’s historical materialism.

Paulo Freire: the manifestation of the “word-world”

The life and the work of Paulo Freire are intertwined in a continuous movement of action, reflection, and action. We cannot understand his theoretical methodological presuppositions without focusing on his personal and professional life trajectories, or without comprehending how his own literacy process was, how much he desired to continue studying, and the insights derived from his professional experiences. In this crisscrossing of his life and his theoretical-methodological perspective we can understand the broadness and the depth of the meaning coined in the neologism “word-world”.

Rangel (2005, p. 28) posits that it is possible to notice, in Freire’s ideas, a critique to the so-called traditional, banking school, which transforms reading into a deciphering act, disregarding the universe of the individual reader and his or her daily life. Thus, there is a schism between school, what we learn in it, and life, i.e., the knowledges deriving from experience and from real communication needs.

Opposing this schism, we highlight some aspects from Freire’s personal, educational, and professional life histories, someone who, without a question, was dedicated to studying human behavior, who was a philosopher and an educator, and, above all, who was a curious

human being, attentive to the signs which life painted little by little, providing him, thus, with opportunities to construct his “word-world”, an expression which conveys a theory of knowledge formulated and defended by him.

In 1993, Freire was interviewed by Pelandré (1998, p. 53) and he affirmed he would rather not say he had a method. What he had, since he was young, was curiosity sided with the political commitment to the other, with the renegades and the excluded, with those who were forbidden to read the word, rereading the world. According to this interview, what he tried to do and what he continued doing, was having and understanding of what he called a criticism or a dialectics of the educational practice, inside of which, necessarily, there is a certain methodology, a certain method, that he would prefer to call a method of knowing, and not a method of teaching. To Freire, education was not restricted to simple proficiency of reading and writing, but, especially, to the quality of this proficiency which could be measured in the attaining of autonomy by students, constructed based on the respect to their idiosyncrasies and on the constant dialogical practice between them and their teachers, between citizens and society.

Freire always recollected the way he had learned to read and write from his mother. She would take advantage of the shadows from the mango trees in the backyard of their house to teach her son. From the memories of that time, there are others which are not so pleasant, such as the financial difficulties faced by his family and the exiles. He declared he had been through three exiles which caused him suffering: the exile of leaving his mother’s womb, the exile of leaving to Jaboatão, and the political exile which made him live abroad for 16 years (A. M. A. Freire, 2001, p. 4).

Paulo Freire concluded his studies in the school Colégio Osvaldo Cruz, where, years later, he would become a teacher. He graduated in Law, but never practiced it. In 1947, he began working as an assistant at *Serviço Social da Indústria* (Sesi) [Industrial Social Service] in the state of Pernambuco and, later, he became director of the Education and Culture Department (A. M. A. Freire, 2001).

Ana Maria de Araujo Freire (2001, p. 7), Paulo Freire’s wife, describes his work in the Department as not paternalistic nor populist, but popular—in favor of the popular layers of society. According to her, this work is the “seed” for the great “Pedagogical Thought of Paulo Freire”, because it is at this moment that he established contact with the people, listened to the

people, valued the people, and the composed his Theory of Knowledge. As she describes it, listening, to Paulo Freire, is not simply hearing—we can hear something and later forget it, and his act was not hearing for the sake of hearing—, it is listening and bringing it into his own heart, into his sensibility, his intelligence, his theoretical reflection. Elaborating, systematizing, and developing it to the people.

He also worked as a university professor; however, his higher education career was suddenly interrupted by the military dictatorship (A. M. A. Freire, 2001). In 1958, in the *II Congresso Nacional de Educação de Jovens e Adultos* [2nd National Congress of Youth and Adult Education], Freire was the rapporteur for the Pernambuco commission, and affirmed that the literacy process cannot take place over or towards the student, it must take place with the student (A. M. A. Freire, 2001). According to him, we must stimulate students towards social and political collaboration, decision, participation, and responsibility (A. M. A. Freire, 2001)

By exposing his view on youth and adult literacy, Paulo Freire was accused of composing a simple myth (A. M. A. Freire, 2001). Perhaps, a myth to those teachers still chained to the literacy method which focused only on smaller linguistic units or on decontextualized sentences, devoid of meaning, on pseudotexts, on endless copies, on handwriting exercises, and on mechanical reading. It was against all of this that Paulo Freire stood and proposed a constructive Theory of Knowledge in which each individual constructs his or her own knowledge based on triggering themes and words (A. M. A. Freire, 2001).

Triggering themes and words, in the educator's concept, are those which relate to the concerns of the community they are inserted in. To notice these words and themes we need to make a reading of the world before making a reading of the word. Words do not determine the world; it is the world that determines the words, and these two universes must become a unit, constituting, thus, the "word-world". It is from the broadness of this word, which encompasses our self-reading, the reading of the world surrounding us, and the written word, that people pronounce the world. If literacy does not happen from this perspective, we have only the reproduction of the "word-school".

It is important to notice that the author's ideas are still relevant today, since, as A. M. A. Freire (2001, p. 12) indicates, his pedagogy is the political pedagogy, and while there is a need for it, Paulo Freire's thought will survive because it is eternalized in his writings, in his speeches, in his pedagogical practices. His works are and will continue to be a landmark for pedagogy in the national and in the international levels (Feitosa, 1999).

By commenting on Freire's work, Feitosa (1999, pp. 18-19) explains that in the last decades we have witnessed the evolution and the recreation on his epistemological thesis, i.e., of his Theory of Knowledge, which indicates the construction of new educational paradigms and the constant recreation of the pedagogical praxis. Freire, who was declared through Law no. 12.612, from April 13th, 2012, the Patron of Education in Brazil, has also influenced the movement denominated Critical Pedagogy. It is from this perspective of unicity between personal, educational, and professional lives that we will discuss one of his works, *A importância do ato de ler: em três artigos que se completam*.

The importance of the act of reading to Freire

All the learning acquired from his trajectory in Brazil, combined with his experiences in the activities he performed during his exile⁵, especially with the project of youth and adult literacy develop in the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe, located in the Gulf of Guinea in the African continent, underpinned not only the texts composing the book *A importância do ato de ler: em três artigos que se completam* but also Freire's political-pedagogical thought. This political pedagogy becomes even more evident we he proposes that the youth and adult literacy process should emerge from the interests of the students, from triggering themes, and not from pre-conceived programs, and also when he refers to the act of reading in the book analyzed in this article (Freire, 1989).

In the preface to the analyzed work, Severino (1989, p. 7) explains that the book was constructed based on a lecture about the importance of the act of reading and on a article exposing the experience with youth and adult literacy developed by Freire and his team in São Tomé and Príncipe. In the third and last article, Freire discusses the *Exercise Workbooks: Practice*

⁵ Freire's exile began in Bolivia. He then went to Chile, where he worked as an advisor for the Instituto de Desarrollo Agropecuario and for the Ministry of Education, and as a consultant for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at Chile's Instituto de Capacitación e Investigación en Reforma Agraria. In this country, he wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He then went to the United States as a visiting professor at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In Geneva, he was an advisor to the World Council of Churches, an educational advisor for third world countries, and the president of the executive board of the Institute of Cultural Action (Idac). The educator also spent time in the African, Asian, and European continents ("O exílio", 2005).

to *Learn* and the *Second Popular Culture Notebook* which were used by the Adult Education Program in São Tomé and Príncipe.

The book expresses, significantly, Paulo Freire's view of education, which inevitably includes the appropriation of "word-world". Hence, the educator organizes this work in three interconnected texts, namely: (i) "The importance of the act of reading"; (ii) "Adult literacy and popular libraries"; and (iii) "The people speak their word: Literacy in action"⁶.

In the first text, Freire provides a long account of his childhood. It is written as if he is reliving every moment, every detail. He carefully and poetically describes his house, his family, the situations he experienced, the people he interacted with, i.e., his reading of the world as a child.

When he mentions school and the contact with reading the word which, according to his logic, should come from the reading of the world, constituting the "word-world", he demonstrates that his was not always the case. All the richness of the world which surrounded him, and which surrounds everyone who occupies a school chair, frequently ends up being ignored by and in the school. Addressing this matter, Geraldi (1997, p. 112) affirms that the quality (depth) of a reader's plunge in a text depends on this reader's previous plunges—no only into the works the reader has read, but into the reading he or she makes of his or her own life.

In other words, Paulo Freire, in his own time, was already referring to the literacy processes described by Soares (2003). According to this researcher and educator, literacy and learning how to read and write constitute different, albeit interconnected, processes. Learning how to read and write can happen even before a child enters school; however, it is in the school environment that it can formally happen, because it is there that the child and the adult can acquire the necessary tools to decode (read) and to code (write). It must take place by means of specific methods (Soares, 2016), because it is aimed at heterogeneous children and adults, who learn in a distinct way and present distinct needs. Literacy, conversely, begins outside of school, is enhanced in the school environment, and is developed throughout our existence. Opposite to this concept, we perceive that an "insistence on a quantity of reading without internalization of texts proposed for understanding rather than mechanical memorization reveals a magical

⁶ In this article, we cite from the English versions of these three texts included in the volume *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*, collecting works by Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo.

view of the written word” (Freire, 2005, p. 23), incurring in what can be called functional illiteracy⁷.

Paulo Freire (1989, 2005) proposes an interactive methodology promoting a dialogue between author and reader mediated by the text; between written text and lived text, mediated by the teacher—not only by the teacher responsible for Portuguese Language classes, but by teachers from all school subjects. This means that all teacher must be politically committed to promoting the contact of their students with the “word-world”, which is processual and can be understood as literacy. It is, therefore, an emancipatory political process beginning even before a student learns how to read and write and continuing in the post-literacy proposed by Freire and comprehended by Soares as simply literacy.

According to Freire, the dynamism of the educational process must be contemplated at every moment, inside and outside the school. Moreover, he highlights the importance of this dynamism in the youth and adult literacy process, defending “that words used in organizing a literacy program come from what I call the ‘word universe’ of people who are learning, expressing their actual language, their anxieties, fears, demands, and dreams” (Freire, 2005, p. 24). What is the purpose of an adult literacy program in which the experience of the teacher is more important than the experience of the student? Perhaps, a wrong answer to this question has been responsible for the school evasion of so many adults and young people, who arrive in the classroom with expectations and are met with a complete denial of what they had hoped to find. Regarding the oppressors and the oppressed, reading, when taken as a constitutive part of the human being and worked in a political perspective, gives the oppressed the tools for them to start a counter-hegemonic action⁸.

In the second text of the analyzed book, “Adult literacy and popular libraries”, Freire explains that it is impossible to talk about a critical literacy without having a clear understanding of the meaning of critical reading and, based on these two concepts, the author also defends the necessity of establishing a critical perspective of the role of the library. These views supported

⁷ According to Leite and Cadei (2016, p. 14) functional illiteracy means being able to, overall, reading, counting, and writing simple sentences, but not of interpreting texts or putting ideas on paper.

⁸ Souza (2013, p. 56) refers to Raymond Williams to define hegemony as something which does not exist only passively as a form of domination, but which finds continuous resistances. This led Williams to formulate the concepts of counter-hegemony and of alternative hegemony. Since then, the notion of counter-hegemony has been associated with Gramsci. Souza also affirms that the concept of counter-hegemony has been, also, associated to the ideas of resistances as a result of the Cultural Studies works.

by the author are opposed by a naïve outlook of education and to the neutrality of the educational act.

Another important aspect for achieving a critical, emancipatory, and political education is having a consistency between discourse and pedagogical practice. We cannot take an emancipatory theoretical perspective and continue using an oppressive practice. Freire (2005) also posits that this consistent posture must exist at all times, especially during the youth and adult literacy process, because

only authoritarian educators deny the solidarity between the act of educating and the act of being educated by those becoming educated; only authoritarians separate the act of teaching from that of learning in such a way that he who believes himself to know actually teaches, and he who is believed to know nothing learns. (Freire, 2005, p. 27)

Freire defends the importance of popular libraries as spaces which provide access to the society of knowledge, especially for the less favored social classes. Hence, if we consider education as a political act, libraries become possible means for the emancipation of the oppressed. However, we cannot ignore the political ideas guiding the actions involving these libraries (Sousa, Martins & Scarpelli, 2012).

The popular library becomes a cultural center to Freire (1989, 2005) and not a place for the simple grouping of books. It is a space for individual and collective work, for manifestations and conversations, not for silence. There, reading must be experienced in its essence, i.e., in the relationship between text and context, in the reading between the lines, in the interaction between the perspectives of different readers.

The catalogue of this educational space must not contemplate only classic, elitist literature⁹, but also popular expressions, with the oral stories, the recipes, the beliefs, the suburban musical rhythms, and everything which culturally characterizes the popular classes of society. After all, everything has its own value which cannot be denied. Due to the relevance of the popular libraries, not only for the youth and adult literacy processes but for the full education of the less favored classes, political policies and their respective programs must contemplate the desires, the struggles, and the needs of the population (Sousa, Martins, & Scarpelli, 2012).

⁹ As Alves (2015) posits, the selection of celebrated works of literature means a social valorization which seeks to discriminate target audiences aiming to further distinguish and distance the hegemonic classes from the popular classes.

Freire, in the book *A importância do ato de ler: em três artigos que se completam*, supports the promotion of a critical reading of the world and of the word, since these are the starting and the ending points of a truly transforming political education. The question which transverses this emphasis is whether there actually is a political will for this type of education to occur, i.e., when will we go from a guiding discourse to a reflected practice?

In the first part of the third article, “The people speak their word: Literacy in action”, Freire recounts the experience of adult literacy he developed in the African islands of São Tomé and Príncipe. Moreover, the author exposes how his relationship with that country’s government, where he took over the position of consultant, demonstrates he always sought a consistency between his theoretical presuppositions and his practice. The literacy and post-literacy processes developed by the educator and his team put in practice the questions addressed herein. They used as support material a series of books called *Popular Culture Notebooks*, the first volume of which focuses on literacy¹⁰.

Even though the educator preferred to refer to his idea of education as a “theory of knowledge” rather than as proper method, several authors have referred to the Paulo Freire method as it was implemented in the Cultural Circles¹¹. The material used by the educator and his team, in these Circles, aimed at a political education: a rereading of the current reality mediated by the word and by the surrounding world. The proposed post-literacy is the continuation of the literacy process, a deepening of the acquired knowledges and of the constructed understandings. In other words, they are the multiple literacies, i.e., the understanding and the interpretation not only of oral and written language, but of the political, the economic, and the cultural languages of the society the students were inserted in.

¹⁰ This article was first published in a special number of *Harvard Educational Review*, in February 1981, which focused on the theme “Education as transformation: identity, change and development”. When it was included in the book analyzed in the present article, Freire added a second part (Freire, 1989, 2005).

¹¹ Paulo Freire used the Cultural Circles in the youth and adult literacy practices instead of traditional classrooms. Organizing the students in a circle enabled a more democratic relationship between the participants and the pedagogical team. The themes being discussed sought a critical reading of the world, starting from the context in which the students were inserted.

In the second part of this third article, the author exemplifies the work performed with a transcription of parts of the *Exercise Workbooks: Practice to Learn* from the literacy phase, and of some texts from the *Second Popular Culture Notebook*, from the post-literacy phase. The activities suggested in these notebooks demonstrate a concern with leading students to understand the importance of a constant practice of reading and writing. Moreover, they seek to entice students' curiosity and train their looks to perceive the country's social, political, and economic matters.

Even though the texts composing the book come from lectures performed by Freire, they can be articulated with each other by means of the books guiding line: reading. Another relevant aspect is that the book (re)introduces Freire's pedagogical thought and, at the same time, exemplifies the practical exercise of this thought evidencing that reading and practice are interconnected, reinforcing the idea that the "word-world" cannot exist only as discourse, as a theoretical concept of reading, of literacy, of teaching-learning, but as the process itself of learning-teaching inserted in the daily lives of literate adults and young people.

The reflections proposed by the analyzed book evidence Freire's humanist thought inspired by Christian existentialism¹² and by phenomenology¹³. Saviani (1987) ponders on Freire's concept of dialectics and asserts that it is a dialectic philosophy of idealist nature, i.e., a dialectics of consciences which, from the phenomenological-existential perspective, can be considered a synonym of dialogue.

It is also possible to notice, in Freire's works, the influence of John Dewey's pragmatism which, according to Japiassú and Marcondes (1996 as cited by Zanella, 2007, pp. 110-111), values practice over theory and believes we should give more importance to an action's consequences and effects than to its principles and presuppositions. From this influence comes

¹² Christian existentialism seeks to reinstate a vertical transcendence, as it sees the relationship with God as essential for answering the human condition. It has as its basic presupposition the notion that man cannot be self-evident, as he was during classic rationalism, when he explained his own destiny by means of determinisms of several kinds, still inheritors from categories such as race and social class ("O existencialismo cristão", 1987, pp. 689-690).

¹³ According to Silva, Lopes, and Diniz (2008, p. 255), the term phenomenology refers to the study of the phenomena, of that which the conscience perceives, of that which is given, trying to explore it. The very thing being perceived, thought, or spoken, both about the bond which ties the phenomenon to the one it is a phenomenon of, and to the bond which ties it to the Self to whom it is a phenomenon. Such philosophical discipline is characterized by assuring the meaning given to the phenomenon. It defends that the world is the phenomenon, that what is shows itself, even though it needs to be unveiled. As Silva, Lopes, and Diniz (2008, p. 255) posit, phenomenology seeks to reach the phenomenon, to unveil the meaning of that which shows itself, in order to arrive at that which the thing is.

Freire's emphasis to the need to begin the teaching process by listening to the student, encouraging a constant dialogue, valuing previous knowledge and the collective construction of new knowledge.

The discipline of phenomenology has as its main basis the description. We must, hence, consider that our ordinary view does not allow us to see the phenomenon by itself. Thus, the researcher takes into consideration the context, i.e., his or her life experience. This benefits and permits a questioning of the phenomenon the researcher is trying to understand (Silva, Lopes, & Diniz, 2008).

Freire, adept of the phenomenology, shows us that his life and his work are inseparable. The way through which he learned how to read and write from his mother and the experience he had while working at the Sesi in Pernambuco underpinned and propelled his reflections and actions in the field of youth and adult literacy, in Brazil and in his exile. In the analyzed book, he describes how the "word-world" came into existence in his and in his students' lives, emphasizing the reading of the world and of the word in a continuous dialectic movement of action, reflection, and action, mediated by the dialogue. Phenomenology, as Silva, Lopes, and Diniz (2008, p. 255) affirm, is concerned with explaining the structures through which the experience is verified, describing them in their universal structures. And this Paulo Freire, the philosopher and educator, has done remarkably well in all of his works.

Convergences

Paulo Freire and Karl Marx

Even though Paulo Freire always declared he was adept of a phenomenology combined with Christian existentialism, we can also find similarities between his philosophy and Karl Marx's historical materialism. Gadotti (1989, p. 115), referring to Freire's philosophy, highlights that his humanist thought was inspired by Emmanuel Mounier's personalism, as well as by existentialism, by phenomenology, and by Marxism. It is from this perspective of indicating convergences and divergences between Freire's and Marx's thoughts, aiming to better understand the method deriving from these philosophies, that we will propose some considerations.

Michels and Volpato (2011, pp. 126-127) identify in Freire's vast bibliographical production, the presence of a strong influence of the principles of phenomenology, because the educator's thought shows a marked concern with rupturing the empiricist, rationalist ideology which separates man from the world. These authors also perceive, in several of Freire's works, a concern with emphasizing the close relationship between the things, the world, and the individual, between the object and the conscience.

There is not, in the discipline of phenomenology, a separation between object and conscience. On the contrary, there is a necessary relationship between them; a relationship which is not accidental, but intentional. To Freire, it is necessary to invest in this conscience, in broadening it, so a transformation of the observed objects can be achieved. The educator defends and works towards the non-alienation of individuals' consciences in a capitalist, liberal society. In this constant struggle against individuals' alienation, especially of those from the popular classes, there is a convergence with the presuppositions of Marx's historical materialism, which seeks to unveil the contradictions of a class society—a position also sustained by Freire.

We can find, in many of the educator's works, passages which evidence this position. Freire (2000) affirms, for instance, in his most notable work, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, that "it is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves" (p. 65) and that they can overcome their "conviviality" with the oppressive regime. This discovery does not happen without a mediation or, in other words, a privileged space for a mediating educative action, inside and outside of the school's walls, which originates from the "word-world". Hence, "this discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis." (Freire, 2000, p. 65)

Both Freire and Marx use the word "praxis" regarding transformation, albeit in different concepts. For the first, according to Zanella (2007, p. 118), the transformative praxis happens by means of mediation and of dialogue; for the second, it is through class struggle.

The mediation proposed by Freire is crucial for the promotion of conscience for people who until that moment did not recognize themselves as citizens. This conscience change, when done by a community—as was the case in São Tomé and Príncipe—can transform the local world and also motivate a broader change.

According to Marx and Engels (2002), “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (p. 219) because there has always been those who dominate and those who are dominated. Hence, praxis, from a Marxian perspective, is an action seeking to transform the world, the structure of society, and work relations (Silva, 2017).

In the eleven “Thesis on Feuerbach”, from 1845—especially in the second, the eight, and the twelfth—, we can perceive the amplitude of the concept of praxis in Marx’s works:

2. . . . Man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-worldliness of his thinking in practice. . . .

8. All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice. . . .

11. The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it. (Marx, 2010, p. 4-5)

This indicates that, from a historical materialistic perspective, we start from the real, from the material; however, this materiality needs to be unveiled and analyzed under the light of theory. Conversely, from the perspective of phenomenology, the emphasis lies on practice, on theorizing, and on understanding this practice by means of reflection.

Another interesting point is how both authors regard dialectics. To Freire, following on Greek philosophy, dialectics is defined as the art of dialogue, something crucial for the Freirian thought. According to the Marxist thought, reality is not static, it is in constant movement. Thus, dialectics is how we think this reality impregnated with contradictions, i.e., starting from a thesis, defining an antithesis, and arriving at the synthesis.

Still seeking to highlight the convergences and divergences between Freirian and Marxist philosophies, we can also observe the question of the concept of man. Freire is a Christian existentialist, which makes him a metaphysical idealist, i.e., he “sees reality as consisting in, or depending upon, (finite or infinite) minds or (particular or transcendent) ideas” (Bottomore, 2001, p. 247). Materialism, conversely, considers that the world precedes the man, hence, as Lenin (1975 as cited by Zanella, 2007, p. 105) posits, nature is considered as primary while spirit is secondary, placing the being in the foreground, and thought in the background.

There are other aspects composing Freire's thought which could be compared to those emerging from Marx's philosophy; however, we will restrict ourselves to the ones already indicated, evidencing that Freire could never be considered a Marxist. Nevertheless, we must consider that Freirian philosophy has subsidized a teaching method based on dialogue and on problematization, which can be regarded as an advancement in terms of education, as exemplified in the book *A importância do ato de ler: em três artigos que se completam*, in the recounts of Freire's pedagogical experiences, and in other of his works.

According Zanella (2007, p. 121), in Marxist philosophy, the theoretical-methodological method of historical materialism seeks to highlight the objective knowledge as a strategic knowledge for the emancipation of the working class, because this is the knowledge at the productive basis of the capitalist society. Acquisition of this knowledge, as Zanella posits, allows the working class to become instrumentalized, improving their conditions in the struggle for overcoming the capitalist mode of production.

Paulo Freire, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Magda Soares

When we affirm there is a convergence between the works of Mikhail Bakhtin and Paulo Freire, we must contextualize both authors. The first, a Russian philosopher, a Marxist, considered a specialist in human languages, has dedicated his life to linguistic and literary studies. However, Bakhtin did not restrict his work to these two areas and has addressed different subjects. As Leite (2011, p. 51) points out, this makes it possible to place Bakhtin between the restricting term "philosopher", "linguist", "philologist", "literary critic", "semiologist", and even though we know he has practice all of these activities, it is better to simply call him a thinker.

From the several concepts coined by Bakhtin, one which better converges with Freire is the concept of dialogism. For both thinkers, dialogue is essential in the relationships people establish between themselves and with the world surrounding them. Both authors do not refer to the simple oral conversation which places people in from of each other, but look for the essence of this practice, understanding that it is a socially and culturally marked historical product (Scorsolini-Comin, 2014, p. 250).

Bakhtin refers to the dialogue as the legitimate space for the confrontations which are typical of social interaction. Moreover, he affirms that it is through dialogue that these confrontations can be better understood, rethought, and re-signified in a narrower perspective, related to the individual, or in a broader perspective, related to the social context (Bakhtin, 2012 as cited by Scorsolini-Comin, 2014). Scorsolini-Comin (2014, p. 250) also posits that for Bakhtin the presence of the other's words in the self's words is one of the first elements characterizing the concept of dialogism, which presupposes a relativization of individual authorship.

It is important to differentiate Bakhtin's dialogism from Freire's "dialogicity" (in Portuguese, *dialogicidade*). As Scorsolini-Comin (2014, p. 253) defines it, dialogicity extrapolates the definition of a characteristic of language (such as the term dialogism) or of a discursive mark and becomes a social instrument for the humanization of the human being, for the fight against asymmetrical relationships, for the emancipation of individuals from the structures which imprison and alienate them from their own conditions.

Hence, we can understand dialogicity as being characteristic of human language, as what defines us as social beings. Our discourse is the fruit of the appropriation of the other's discourse, re-elaborated by us. In this constant movement of verbal and non-verbal communication our re-elaboration will also be incorporated by the other, will go through a new re-elaboration, and, thus, we continuously constitute ourselves. Dialogicity is a political exercise against the anti-dialogical, alienating practice. It is not enough to consider ourselves human beings, we need to practice the exercise of being human everyday, humanizing ourselves permanently. Dialogicity is this exercise (Scorsolini-Comin, 2014).

Another interesting convergence is between Freire and the educator Magna Becker Soares (2004), who observes the rise of "literacy" in Brazil in the 1980s. This term characterized a process which was distinct from and broader than learning how to read and write. Without forgetting that both processes must happen simultaneously, since they are inseparable, Soares (2004, p. 14) explains that learning how to read and write is developed in the context of and through the social practices of reading and writing, i.e., by means of the activities of literacy, which, in turn, can only be developed in the context of and through the learning of the grapheme-morpheme relations, i.e., by means of reading and writing.

We can notice that these discussions regarding reading, writing, and literacy, proposed by Soares, although originally focusing on children, can also be applied to the youth and adult literacy defended by Freire, since they are complementary practices, characterized by a critical mastery of reading and writing. Both Soares and Freire are concerned with the intelligent and reasonable use literate people will make of reading and writing. They think about improving these individuals' relationships with the social context they are inserted in and where relationships of every order take place. They hope school, in the case of Soares, and the Culture Circles, in the case of Freire, will take on the role of constructing a knowledge based on the “word-world”, and not only on the “word-school”.

Understanding the possible convergences between Freire, Bakhtin, and Soares contributes for the betterment of the current reading and writing practices, which comprehend the practice of teaching how to read and write through literacy, both for children and for adults and young people, and the reading and writing practices provided not only by the Portuguese Language classes, but by all subjects in elementary and secondary schools. Starting in the second half of the 1990s, the *Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais de Língua Portuguesa* [National Curricular Guidelines for Portuguese Language] (Brasil, 1998) and the *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais* [National Curricular Guidelines] (Brasil, 2013) have guided the reading and writing practices in the theoretical-methodological perspective of the discursive¹⁴/textual¹⁵ genres.

As Costa-Hübes (2009, p. 3) affirms, the discursive genre proposed by Bakhtin and the textual one proposed by Bronckart were selected by the National Curricular Guidelines as the object of teaching for Portuguese Language classes, considering that this school subject has been increasingly supported, with a greater focus, by the social interactionist concept of language. This concept of language theoretically underpinned by Vygotsky (1989) and Bakhtin (2000), has been discussed in Brazil, for a while, by many educators based on the presupposition that language is interactive, dialogic, and, thus, needs to be analyzed in real use situations, which is only possible by means of the several textual genres circulating in society, since, as Bakhtin

¹⁴ Dias, Mesquita, Finotti, Otoni, Lima, and Rocha (2011, p. 145) affirm that Bakhtin understands discursive genres manifested in texts from a discursive-interactionist perspective. Being social and happening at a determined context, genres are diverse—as are the language productions—and are defined as relatively stable types of enunciation, characterized by the thematic content, by the style, and by the compositional structure used.

¹⁵ Dias et al. (2011, p. 146) posit that Bronckart refers to Vygotsky's and Bakhtin's theories from a different perspective and adopts the social discursive interactionist project in which language emerges from the diversity and the complexity of the different practices, which incurs in the adaptations of language and creates different types of texts.

(2000, p. 279) posits, every instance of human activity is always related to the use of language, effectuated by oral and written enunciations, concrete and unique, emanating from the members of one or another sphere of human activity.

Discussions regarding textual genres go in the direction of Freire's thought, who used, as teaching content, current events from the students' experiences. As Costa-Hübes (2009, p. 8) indicates, when we interact with others, we use enunciations which already existed in society, selected according to the interaction needs and shaped according to the interlocution act in which the speakers are inserted.

Another relevant aspect in consonance with Freire's ideas is that, by using the textual genres circulating in society, in the several interlocution situations, schools will not privilege only the elitist genres which circulate in the dominant social classes, but will also be working with the genres which circulate in the popular classes, such as the ones from the musical sphere: rap, hip-hop, among others.

We agree with Bakhtin (2002 as cited by Rangel, 2005, p. 41) when he affirms the organizing core of every enunciation, of every expression, is not what is within, but what is outside: it is situated in the social context surrounding the individual. Hence, school cannot keep itself distant from this, insisting in instilling the "word-school"—so distant from the desires of the students, who, before being students, are social beings—while undervaluing the "word-world" which surrounds and constitutes them.

Based on this social interactionist theoretical perspective, in which textual genres become the object of analysis, there is also a methodological proposal enabling the convergence of the school with the students' lives, denominated didactic sequence¹⁶. There is a significant number of national and international bibliographic productions regarding textual/discursive genres which are also part of the Languages and Pedagogy undergraduate programs and of the ongoing teacher education programs. This serves as evidence that educators have already appropriated this theoretical framework; however, we must intensify the research analyzing how this is being put into practice in schools in the initial and final years of elementary and secondary school—especially in the public network of education, where we find the popular social classes.

¹⁶ According to the socio-communicative needs of students, we select a certain textual genre (oral or written) about which we systematically organize a set of activities aiming to better understand the genre (Costa-Hübes, 2009).

The practice of the “word-world”, of teaching how to read and write through literacy, certainly demands more from the educator than the practice of the “word-school”, which has led so many children, young people, and adults to functional illiteracy. Taking a theoretical-methodological perspective demands much more than being available; it demands theoretical knowledge, awareness of the political function of the educational act, and a desire of change facing the surrounding world. Hence, we notice there are enticing conversations between Freire, Bakhtin, and Soares which can be developed not only in the discursive level, but mainly in the methodological sphere, with the required adaptations inherent to each reality.

The perception of this theoretical-methodological interweaving motivates us, since from it we can see: (i) the overcoming of the “word-school”, which expresses the educational monologue, the competitiveness, the vertical relationship between teachers and students, the content exclusively related to the evaluative processes and not to the social practices, and the excluding and discriminatory functional illiteracy; and (ii) the establishing of the “word-world”, which is translated into a political emancipatory educational practice, characterized by teaching how to read and write through literacy, by the respect to the differences, by the constant dialogicity and dialogism between teachers, students and the objects of knowledge, and by a full education of the individual.

Final considerations

Paulo Freire, the world-renowned educator and philosopher, was certainly a great thinker. His emancipatory pedagogy brought forth a new horizon for the education of the popular classes. Even 20 years after his death, his ideas are able to establish a dialogue with authors, researchers, educators, and philosophers from all areas of knowledge, proving, thus, that his writings are still significant today.

In the work we have selected, *A importância do ato de ler: em três artigos que se completam*, which focuses on reading, Freire highlights that, when properly worked in the school environment—and more specifically in the literacy process of children, young people, and adults—the practice of reading constitutes what he denominates the “word-world”. From this perspective, the educator contributes to the current discussions about the use of oral or written discursive/textual genres, in the sense described by Bakhtin and Bronckart, as the objects of

teaching-learning how to read and write. Moreover, we could establish a conversation between Freire and Soares regarding the processes of learning how to read and write and of literacy.

We can establish a dialogue between Freire and other thinkers who share his theoretical underpinnings—namely phenomenology and Christian existentialism—, deepening and broadening Freire’s own significant writings. Moreover, we can also establish connections with thinkers such as Marx, who defends historical materialism. It is the contradiction, as defined by Marx and similar authors, which promotes new actions, since reality is not static, it is in constant movement.

Conversely, through the discussions proposed by this article we could notice there is a distance between the research and the methodological discourses and propositions permeating the educational universe. It is in this aspect that we, educators and researchers, must focus.

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Submitted to evaluation in March 25th, 2018; reviewed in August 6th, 2018; accepted for publication in September 14th, 2018.