

## **Political and ideological violence against teachers: The pedagogy of the oppressed as an intervention and transformation measure**

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**Abstract:** Capitalist society is full of contradictions and incongruities that create a propitious space for violence to establish itself and grow in social relations. Violence has entered schools and has affected their members, jeopardizing the promoted sociability. Added to the neoliberal influence, whose deliberations continue uninterruptedly altering the Brazilian political-educational agenda, a process of political and ideological violence against Brazilian teachers is being sustained. In many cases, teachers feel subjectively and concretely oppressed in the face of the loss of rights they have earned, which puts them at risk of living with different forms of violence at all levels of the educational context. We propose that removing Brazilian teachers from their situation of political and ideological violence involves understanding their oppressed conscience, reviewing the reified and dehumanizing relationships that surround them, via Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Theory that can help change the thinking of teachers who are currently in a state of defeatism against oppression.

**Keywords:** education, oppressed, Paulo Freire, politics

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### **1. Introduction**

Historicity shows us that violence is inscribed in the cultural logic of modernity. The analyzed how the transformations arising from capitalism, such as the globalization process, widened social problems, including the phenomenon of violence [1]. For him, globalization has expanded the sense of impotence and uncertainties among subjects and, gradually, ends up potentializing and naturalizing violent everyday practices.

In the same line of discussion [2] added that subjects in the capitalist system experience a certain precariousness, vulnerability, exclusion, segregation, loss of rights and, in many cases, feel compelled to live on the margins of society at the frontiers of social formation, exposed to domination, exclusion, institutional practices of physical, psychological and moral control, which expose them to the phenomenon of violence. For both authors, there are several and serious negative effects of capitalist transformations. They agree that the most serious are social fragmentation, economic and social exclusion, social massification, inequality, and social injustice, aspects that prevail and become naturalized in practices of violence, in societies in general.

In the *Sociology of Conflict*, [3] explained that in terms of inequalities, globalization, as a phenomenon linked to capitalist society, exacerbated the “inequalities of life opportunities – health, housing, work, education, security, information, knowledge and political participation, significantly increasing the negative impact of violence on social interactions. From this point of view, from a historical-critical perspective, the phenomenon of violence turns out to be naturalized in social interactions and, unfortunately, is becoming an accepted social practice, sometimes even maintained as a device of power knowledge, disciplinary practices and regulatory measures, as devices (...) that establish a specific rationality that goes from the prescription of stigmas to the exclusion, effective or symbolic” [3] of social subjects.

In the case of Brazilian society, the phenomenon of violence permeates relations of power and oppression, marking the interactions between groups and social classes, threatening and weakening the community and citizenship. In terms of sociological theorists, added to our critical historical contribution, a social paradox is generated in Brazilian society: Although we live in times of a supposed democracy, contradictorily, what is oppressive and violent is sustained; as a justified rule, the phenomenon of violence, in many cases, by its own legal limits, pervades several social institutions, as in the case of the school itself.

This indicates that we live a reality that makes it possible to violate the rights of citizens, including teachers, imposing a socially degrading situation [1] – [3]. According to Marx's ideas [4], the degrading situation is associated with the political and ideological option that is sustained in capitalist society; this option

supports strategies that maintain processes of alienation, which avoids the reaction of social subjects. The concept of alienation in Marx fits the analysis of the nature of the relationship between the phenomenon of violence, politics and the deliberations currently focused on Brazilian teachers. Marx asserted that in a class society, whose rules are dictated by capital itself, the imposition of norms and rules will always be violent to legitimate the relationship of oppression – a relationship that is particularly inquisitive for a symbolic, psychological, moral, ideological and even physical violence, causing immeasurable damage to social subjects.

In a capitalist society, contradictions and incongruities create a propitious space for violence to establish itself and grow, so that it becomes one of the most serious global social issues of our time. Every day it gains a continuous prominence in the media, which it presents as a “spectacle,” its recidivism and its multiple forms – domestic, school, against women, physical, psychological, moral, symbolic and social, among others.

In the case of education, violence is an indisputable social phenomenon that threatens the social function of the school, putting at risk the sociability promoted by it [5]. Therefore, if the social function of the school is shaken, teachers end up being questioned about the efficiency of their work, by society in general. However, as we will see in the body of this article, social questions are reinforced by a discourse, which is used by both school and teachers to sustain and reinforce the exercise of power of an authoritarian neoliberal state.

Historically, neoliberal deliberations have combined a “social apartheid” as advocated by [6], with broad social inequalities, through different refinements, nuances and forms that, in the case of the school, have extended the phenomenon of school violence. A type of violence that, in the particular case of the teachers who are also subject to it, has worsened the political-ideological violence sustained by the educational policies that follow the deliberations of international organisms. Deliberations that are performed organically so that teachers lose the specificity of their identity, reducing their bond with the collective of their group and school.

The same situation keeps teachers under constant stress, which changes their subjectivities, as [5] warned. With these altered subjectivities, in line with Freire’s interpretation [7], teachers lose their “critical capacity, the power to do, to create, to transform (...) and in concrete situations, they become alienated (...) which kills in dialogical man his faith in men,” and in his free and autonomous work. Still with Taylor, we observed that “men are accustomed to everything, even servitude, we are accustomed to everything, to poverty, to violence, to oppression,” to what is happening today with our teachers, and in the evil repercussions, there is the crisis of identity with the trade, causing, in many cases, the very abandonment of the profession.

### **The phenomena of ideological political violence against teachers**

The recognition of violence as one of the most serious global social issues of our time is growing today, as we have seen. Their reoffending creates insecurity and fear. In the specificity of educational professionals, the presence of violence leaves a lot at stake, and when entering schools, has affected its members, putting at risk the sociability promoted by them [3].

When neoliberal influence is added, whose deliberations continue uninterruptedly altering the political-educational agenda, there is no concern about the subjects involved, or about what they think or feel and, much less, whether they agree with the proposed changes. In many cases, education professionals feel subjectively and concretely oppressed in the face of the loss of rights they have gained, a situation that shapes different forms of violence at all levels of the educational context.

In the specific case of teachers, the manifestation of violence is also associated with the neoliberal corporate project,<sup>1</sup> which gives centrality to education, depending on the space it occupies in the training and qualification of the subjects. The transformations in the world of work demanded changes in the formative processes in order to reproduce the pattern of neoliberal sociability, articulated to hegemonic interests and values. Therefore, through education, and thus teachers, it would be possible to consolidate strategies to legitimize the new social project in order to obtain social consensus. That would be through education.

The discourses produced by UNESCO, particularly those reproduced in the [8], for example, reveal the conception of hegemonic education implanted with pragmatic principles associated with the notions of efficiency, flexibility, functionality, entrepreneurship and responsibility, along with changing the objectives of the social functioning teacher.

Our analysis is reinforced by [9], who affirmed that the political and educational reforms implemented in Brazil and Latin America from 1990 had a double focus: the constitution of a model of education geared mainly to the demands of the labor market, and the valuing of a conception of education as a means of disciplining poverty. Both approaches were effective in managing and guiding the direction attributed by educational reforms, which were “[...] marked by the standardization and massification of certain administrative

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<sup>1</sup> The neoliberal corporate project has systematically been implemented since the 1990s, with a focus on productive restructuring in the country. With it began the deliberations of several political, social and economic reforms that reached social life.

and pedagogical processes.” Although it is a commentary dated 2004, Oliveira is not far from what is happening with the implementation by the Ministry of Education (MEC) of the National Curricular Common Base (NCCB) [10], which assumes the same arguments of “systemic organization, guarantee of supposed universality, making it possible to lower costs or redefine expenditures and allow central control of implemented policies” [9].

In practice, there is a well-articulated process of change that involves politics, economics and education, imposing on teachers conditions of labor intensification, and in addition to the precariousness of teaching work, especially as regards the influence of their action that can serve as a direct route to the bourgeoisie, since associated neoliberal ideology becomes a relevant channel of the materiality of the goals of neoliberal policies and practices.

With a focus on teachers, the extension of political deliberations directly affects teacher training processes. According to the directives of international organizations, the courses have become exclusive, lightened, preferably at a distance or in service, devaluing the relation theory and practice. By discarding knowledge as the fundamental basis of training, teachers become disenchanting and become precarious and reduced to exploitation [11].

Among the many evil aspects of teachers, what stands out most is their accountability for the ills, challenges and weaknesses of national education. This blame was not considered, however, to the material conditions experienced by teachers, such as their working conditions, remuneration, lack of career plan, precarious forms of hiring, intensified working hours, poor infrastructure, pedagogical materials, equipment, excessive amount of students, etc., conditions that generated subjective changes in teachers. And yet, due to the direct action of violence and oppression against teachers, they continue to pose a threat to the process of maintaining ideological dictates in education.

It turns out that teachers feel particularly devalued in contemporary times. They feel excluded, rendered almost invisible in the face of their historicity – past and present – which leaves the future of their social function uncertain in our historical moment. As oppressed subjects, demobilized politically, the sensation of union indifference is exacerbated, which contributes to the loss of the collective meaning of teaching work.

As Freire described in the book *A Shadow of this hose* (1995), teachers live their “presence” in the here and now, but as a “presence marked by absence,” which in Freire’s terms means oppressed and subjected, which removes the possibility of exercising an office that can generate autonomy and critical sense, the essential basis of emancipation and liberation.

Certainly, the emancipatory educational action has been jeopardized, whether by itself or by other oppressed people. As Freire said, living his “presence by absence,” besides sustaining a contradiction, despite being particularly human, because it effectively places teachers as historical subjects, reveals the fact that they suffer a kind of violence and dehumanization. Dehumanization is “destructive of the bodies and minds of human beings” and, according to [5], has resonance in the maintenance of an educational political project of domestication, pragmatic and apolitical, which is ideologically almost aseptic in defense of the conception of education as a commodity.

To evoke the idea of Freire with his speech about the “presence by absence” of teachers, it reinforces that it occupies the place of a dehumanized subject – and in the worst case, the persistence of a culture of silences, which in the figurative sense echoes, in a good tone, the suffering of these professionals. In a vulnerable situation of violence and oppression, they fail to recognize in others (and in themselves) the existence of a common human nature.

In keeping with Freire’s [7] perspective, dialectics helps us to identify a liberating knowledge, totally embedded in the historical, political, cultural and social experience of teachers. He clarifies that to be at the heart of conflict and struggle for power, the conditions of liberation are brought about, because possibilities of awareness circulate about how they are kept in the prison of a domesticated mind, reviewing the ontological meaning of their existence through work, towards humanization.

This is a deeply epistemological assumption and it seems to us that it carries the embryo of an answer that is associated with the core of Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* [7], above all for reaffirming a worldview and a way of being and being in it, as a political option and militant intervention in violence against teachers. Conceives of praxis as inherent in the dialectical movement that is recursive, retroactive to the reality of teachers – and vice versa, instituting a movement that can give rise to the voices of indignation against violence and oppression [12].

As [5] has argued, dialectics polarizes “objectivity-subjectivity, deduction-induction, intelligence-sensitivity” as complementary extremes that complement each other, clarifying how neoliberal logic sustains a “bayonet on the tip of which is a human being, or rather, not a being regarded as only unworthy, but a dehumanized being.”

By consolidating the mechanism of neoliberal ideological domination in the historical process of our society, education has become the target of open and continuous controls that reinforce coercion and damage to

education professionals. The control movement is based on the defensive discourse of a democracy that protects the society from neoliberal economics, from which the government makes use of educational policies and strategies that transform education into a reproduction machine, as previously discussed.

There is an adaptation of the educational system to world rules and norms; the impositions generate the expansion of the supposedly democratic and economic education that marks the education for its impoverishment. The influence of impoverishment marks the functioning of education and ends up reaching the exercise of teaching activities and, consequently, also marks established social relations. Such influence is alienating and always generates criteria for naturalization of practices of violence and social oppression. As Freire [7] stated, there is a need for the perspective of a political education that will make a radical difference in confronting the violence implied in domination, as is the case with teachers.

### **Some considerations**

#### **The Pedagogy of the Oppressed as a mediator of intervention in violence against teachers**

As we have discussed, intervening and suppressing the violence imposed on teachers occurs either through the recognition of their role in social conformation or, on the contrary, in the possibilities of emancipation. Both possibilities always involve the actions of teachers, their knowledge, their political and ideological choice, and in order to accommodate these possibilities, the teacher identity is not characterized, the centrality to the discourse on the poor quality of education, affirming that it is a function of their lack of skills. A statement that reinforces the consensus around a slogan is: Teachers are poorly trained and are therefore incompetent. One of the serious aspects of violence against teachers is associated with the perverse and ambivalent movement that rejects and blames it, inducing new forms of violence and reinforcing oppression.

Although it is broad and complex, political and ideological violence against teachers can be briefly associated with their formation; the theoretical base is reduced, with changes in the locus of formation, making distance learning (DL) or learning outside public universities preferable, excluding the critical environment in which future teachers could move, live and exchange experiences. In the end, the *The Pedagogy of Hegemony* [13] expresses the ideological and oppressive nature that suppresses the possibility of awareness and emancipation of social subjects – teachers.

By masking and making it difficult to understand this reality, according to [14] synthesis, the organic connection of neoliberal strategies continues to promote the broad “job reconversion” of teachers [15]. Proclaiming the idea that what they have is to be technical, articulated “organically to the production of the worker required by the market” [15]. Violence is tacit; the most perverse element of the process is that it invests in the subjectivity of the teachers, who become the killers of their own captivity, not measuring efforts to meet the goals imposed on them. Alienated, many end up working for the maintenance of active consensus and transposition of hegemonic dialogue, valuing what imprisons them. The terrible suffering generated by frustration, and sometimes humiliation, strengthens the logic of oppressive determinism.

We question at the beginning of this reflection whether it would be possible to identify liberating knowledge? What about how teacher learning can become liberating? The dialogued answers come in the form of theoretical and epistemological reflection, since it involves revising conceptions about what is delegated to teachers and how this influences their action. To remove teachers from their condition of political and ideological violence is to understand their oppressed conscience, to review the reified and dehumanizing relationships that surround them, and to change their thinking about the world that currently generates defeatism and pessimism among most teachers.

Freire went on to point out that it is necessary to return to human praxis, inspiring a practice of freedom for those involved in the educational process to leave the torpor that plagues them today. Let’s look at an excerpt from the author’s speech:

[...] while banking practice implies a sort of anesthesia, inhibiting the creative power of students, problematizing education, which is authentically reflexive, implies a constant act of lack of reality. (...) The more they are problematized (...) as beings in the world and with the world, the more they will feel challenged. (...) Challenges (...) capture the challenge as a problem in their connections with others, on a plane of totality and not as something petrified, the resulting understanding tends to become increasingly critical, therefore, increasingly disempowered [7].

As defined by Freire, the change of the violent reality that oppresses the teachers implies replacing the reification of the subjects with the subjectivization of the I, which occurs only through pedagogical praxis. For [7], emancipation is an act of courage, and requires a dialogic (and pedagogical) relationship committed to the cause of liberation, dignity and autonomy.

Freire further asked: Are teachers important or are they not?

(...) its task is or is not indispensable. And it is around this that the struggle, which is difficult and protracted and implies the impatient patience of educators and the political wisdom of their leaders, must insist. (...) It is indispensable to fight in defense of the relevance of our task [7]

The recognition of the importance of teachers projects their social teaching function into the future, to the search for freedom of the self and others [5]. This path impels the struggle for freedom, for humanization, returning hope to the critical capacity to read reality and to act to transform it.

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