

EDUCATION AS A PRACTICE OF FREEDOM AND THE CREATION OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES

A EDUCAÇÃO COMO PRÁTICA DE LIBERDADE E A CONSTRUÇÃO DE
COMUNIDADES DE APRENDIZAGEM

LA EDUCACIÓN COMO PRÁCTICA DE LIBERTAD Y CONSTRUCCIÓN DE
COMUNIDADES DE APRENDIZAJE

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on bell hooks' educational trilogy, this paper explores education through a critical, decolonial, and intersectional lens. Our goal is to understand how a liberating education, grounded in engaged pedagogy, can be incorporated into teaching practices to build learning communities. Inspired by the ideas of Freire and hooks, we reflect on bell hooks pedagogy can help reshape educational experiences through collective approaches. The theoretical-methodological framework of this study was informed by the work of teacher Sahmaroni Rodrigues de Olinda (2024) in the study group "bell hooks, engaged pedagogy and teacher education," as well as academic articles by scholars who engage with hooks' work, including Marinho (2023), Silva & Pontes (2023), Carreiro, Rodrigues & Palhano (2023), and Silva, Souza & Antunes (2022). These sources, published between 2021 and 2023, were selected based on a broader research effort using the descriptors: Engaged Pedagogy, Learning Communities, and bell hooks. The research reveals that, inspired by the legacy of Paulo Freire, bell hooks' engaged pedagogy calls for a break from traditional banking models of education and points toward a horizon of collective transformation. Both authors demonstrate that through liberatory education, it is possible to challenge structures of domination, foster critical thinking, and build authentic learning communities.

Keywords: Bell hooks. Engaged Pedagogy. Learning Communities.

RESUMO

Ao discutir a educação a partir de uma perspectiva crítica, descolonizadora e interseccional tendo como fonte a trilogia educacional de hooks, buscamos compreender como incorporar na prática docente uma educação libertadora, que tenha como método a pedagogia engajada para construir uma Comunidade de Aprendizagem. Deste modo, mobilizamos os pensamentos de Freire e hooks para refletir sobre as possibilidades de contribuição da pedagogia hooksiana na transformação das experiências didáticas através da ideia de coletividade. Os aspectos teóricos-metodológicos

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que orientam nossa investigação acerca da construção das comunidades de aprendizagem derivam das contribuições que o professor Sahmaroni Rodrigues de Olinda (2024) produziu no grupo de estudos “bell hooks, pedagogia engajada e formação docente”, ainda contemplam artigos de autores que pensaram com hooks como: Marinho (2023), Silva e Pontes (2023), Carreiro, Rodrigues e Palhano (2023) e Silva, Souza e Antunes (2022), todos publicados entre os anos de 2021 e 2023 e selecionados a partir de uma pesquisa mais ampla que usou os descritores: Pedagogia Engajada; Comunidade de Aprendizagem e bell hooks. A pesquisa nos mostrou que tendo como inspiração os desdobramentos da pedagogia de Paulo Freire, a Pedagogia Engajada de bell hooks enfatiza a necessidade de transgredir as fronteiras da educação bancária e aponta horizontes de transformação coletiva das realidades. Ambos autores nos mostram que com uma educação libertadora é possível enfrentarmos as estruturas de dominação, estimular o pensamento crítico e a reflexão para construir verdadeiras comunidades de aprendizagem.

Palavras-chave: Bell hooks. Pedagogia Engajada. Comunidades de Aprendizagem.

RESUMEN

Al abordar la educación desde una perspectiva crítica, descolonizadora e interseccional, basándonos en la trilogía educativa de Bell Hooks, buscamos comprender cómo incorporar una educación liberadora a la práctica docente, utilizando la pedagogía comprometida como método para construir una comunidad de aprendizaje. Así, movilizamos las reflexiones de Freire y Hooks para reflexionar sobre las posibles contribuciones de la pedagogía de Bell Hooks a la transformación de las experiencias docentes a través de la idea de colectividad. Los aspectos teóricos y metodológicos que guían nuestra investigación sobre la construcción de comunidades de aprendizaje se derivan de las contribuciones del profesor Sahmaroni Rodrigues de Olinda (2024) en el grupo de estudio "bell hooks, pedagogía comprometida y formación docente". También incluyen artículos de autores que han reflexionado en torno a la idea de "hooks", como Marinho (2023), Silva y Pontes (2023), Carreiro, Rodrigues y Palhano (2023), y Silva, Souza y Antunes (2022). Todos publicados entre 2021 y 2023, seleccionados a partir de una investigación más amplia que utilizó los descriptores: Pedagogía Comprometida; Comunidad de Aprendizaje; y bell hooks. La investigación demostró que, inspirada en los desarrollos de la pedagogía de Paulo Freire, la Pedagogía Comprometida de bell hooks enfatiza la necesidad de trascender los límites de la educación bancaria y señala horizontes para la transformación colectiva de las realidades. Ambos autores nos muestran que con una educación liberadora es posible enfrentar las estructuras de dominación, estimular el pensamiento crítico y la reflexión para construir verdaderas comunidades de aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: Bell hooks. Pedagogía Comprometida. Comunidades de Aprendizaje.



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INTRODUCTION

“[...] I lend my voice to the collective call for the renewal and rejuvenation of our

teaching practices. I urge everyone to open their minds and hearts to what lies beyond the boundaries of the acceptable, to think and rethink, to create new visions, a teaching that allows transgressions, a movement against and beyond borders. It is this movement that transforms education into the practice of freedom.” (tradução nossa)
bell hooks

In the Brazilian context, the pedagogy degree has historically centered on educational processes within and beyond the school environment. First regulated by Decree-Law No. 1.190/1939, the program was originally designed to train technical professionals in education, enabling experienced teachers to assume administrative roles such as guidance, planning, inspection, research, and development. Over time, these responsibilities were modified in response to evolving historical demands. Consequently, the program expanded its scope to include teacher licensure for early childhood education, the initial years of primary education, and the broader organization of educational processes, with teaching and learning at its core.

Accompanying the demands of professional training, the curriculum also established a set of canonical references that legitimized the knowledge required for the field. However, alternative perspectives that challenge dominant educational models have increasingly gained relevance, including those advanced by bell hooks. Her work presents a transformative vision of education, one that breaks with traditional structures and reimagines pedagogical possibilities.

This study investigates how education, when approached from a critical, decolonial, and intersectional perspective informed by hooks’ educational trilogy³, can be structured as a liberating practice. Central to this proposal is the concept of engaged pedagogy as a methodological foundation for the development of learning communities.

The motivation for exploring the formation of pedagogical communities through the lens of bell hooks stems from the intent to promote intersectional, emancipatory, and socially just practices in Brazilian classrooms. The classroom, as a space of potential, demands a reevaluation of paradigms and encourages an educational approach rooted in community, personal experience, and resistance to hegemonic logic.

The reflections presented here are grounded in the theoretical contributions of Paulo Freire and bell hooks, whose pedagogical frameworks provide insights into the transformation of didactic experiences through collective engagement.

³ Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom; Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom; Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope

This bibliographic study compiled and interpreted a set of academic works relevant to the topic. The methodological orientation was shaped by the theoretical perspectives of teacher Sahmaroni Rodrigues de Olinda, particularly through the study group “bell hooks, engaged pedagogy, and teacher education,” which emphasizes the co-construction of collective meaning based on individual worldviews and reflective teaching praxis (De Olinda, 2023). Additional contributions were drawn from scholars including Marinho (2023), Silva and Pontes (2023), and Carreiro, Rodrigues, and Palhano (2023), all of whom engage with hooks’ ideas in various contexts.

The structure of the paper is organized to provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the key concepts and the intellectual foundations of bell hooks’ educational theory. The first section presents the author and her theoretical contributions, including the significance of her pseudonym. The subsequent section explores the intersection between Paulo Freire’s liberatory pedagogy and bell hooks’ theoretical approach. Following this, the methodological path of the study is detailed, succeeded by discussions on engaged pedagogy as an educational model and the pedagogical community as a didactic possibility. The final section presents concluding remarks, emphasizing how hooksian pedagogy contributes to a transformative, critical, and socially engaged education.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section presents an overview of bell hooks’ intellectual contributions, the origins of her pedagogical thought, and her encounter with the liberatory pedagogy of Paulo Freire. Additionally, it examines Freire’s concept of freedom and its significance in shaping hooks’ educational framework.

bell hooks

bell hooks⁴ is the pen name of American author, educator, Black feminist, cultural critic, and anti-racist activist Gloria Jean Watkins. When publishing her first book, Watkins chose to

⁴ The choice to write “bell hooks” in lowercase reflects the author’s own political stance. This stylistic decision signifies her intent to challenge traditional linguistic and academic conventions. For hooks, the substance of the work takes precedence over her personal identity, as she stated, “what matters most in my books is the content, not who I am.” In this study, her preference and position are fully respected (Silva & Pontes, 2023, p. 96).

write under a pseudonym as a way of preserving her inner well-being while engaging in the public sharing of her ideas (hooks, 1990). The pseudonym, which honors her maternal great-grandmother Bell Blair Hooks, a woman known for her strong personality and outspoken nature, served as a symbolic link to her ancestry. According to the author, invoking the name "bell hooks" would awaken the spirit of her ancestor with every utterance.

The adoption of a pseudonym also symbolized a reclamation of voice and identity. It offered a space for self-expression that had been denied during childhood and allowed her to honor the people who raised her while asserting her individual agency. Moreover, the pseudonym acted as a constant reminder that her ideas were deeply personal, yet not the totality of her being (hooks, 2014). It underscored a connection to a legacy of strong women who carved their own paths.

Born in 1952 in the state of Kentucky, in the southern United States, hooks grew up under racial segregation. During her early education at Booker T. Washington School, a segregated institution, she experienced learning as a revolutionary act. She recalls:

Almost all our teachers at Booker T. Washington were black women. They were committed to nurturing intellect so that we could become scholars, thinkers, and cultural workers-black folks who used our "minds." We learned early that our devotion to learning, to a life of the mind, was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization. Though they did not define or articulate these practices in theoretical terms, my teachers were enacting a revolutionary pedagogy of resistance that was profoundly anticolonial. Within these segregated schools, black children who were deemed exceptional, gifted, were given special care. Teachers worked with and for us to ensure that we would fulfill our intellectual destiny and by so doing uplift the race. My teachers were on a mission (hooks, 1994, p. 2).

To fulfill this mission, these educators established personal connections with students and their families, preparing them to resist racism through the power of knowledge. The school became, for hooks, a place of joy and intellectual empowerment, challenging the values and beliefs imposed by her home environment (hooks, 1994).

Growing up under the constraints of racial segregation and gender inequality, girls from working-class communities had limited prospects: marriage, domestic labor, or teaching. Hooks, considered too intelligent for the traditional gender roles, especially in a society where "men did not like smart women" (hooks, 1994, p. 2), was expected to become a schoolteacher. At the time, teaching was viewed as a near-celibate vocation, requiring personal sacrifice and unwavering dedication.

Although she aspired from a young age to become a writer rather than a teacher, hooks later acknowledged that many of her most joyful and fulfilling moments occurred within the classroom setting. After two decades in academia, she reflected on the deep sense of purpose and ecstasy she experienced in teaching.

With over thirty published books, hooks consistently engaged with social critique from an intersectional lens. She denounced capitalism, white supremacy, imperialism, and patriarchy, what she termed the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks, 1994), as interconnected systems of domination.

In her 1989 publication *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, hooks introduced a new writing style rooted in personal experience. This method, which she called “self-recovery,” transformed lived experiences into theoretical insight.

By theorizing her personal history as a Black woman born into racial segregation and shaped by the impositions of patriarchy and capitalism, hooks gave voice to the shared realities of many women worldwide. Her personal narrative became a means of collective articulation.

Brazilian historian Mariléa de Almeida (2019), in the preface to the Brazilian edition of *Talking Back*, describes this process as follows:

[...] taking politics as a field of action, the author’s writing suggests that courage lies not only in denouncing the other, but also in turning inward to assess how we may reproduce that which we seek to oppose. In this view, hooks’ personal reflections are not narcissistic or self-promoting acts but rather practices of self-recovery, an ethic of self-care that, as Foucault emphasized, is never separate from care for others. (Almeida; hooks, 2019, p. 13, our translation)

Through self-recovery, hooks awakened critical consciousness and confronted the wounds inflicted by racism, sexism, and class oppression. Although not all theory heals, hooks found refuge in the act of theorizing as a way to understand life’s complexities and soothe personal and collective pain.

[...] a place where I could imagine possible futures, a place where life could be different. This lived experience of critical thinking, of reflection and analysis, became a space where I worked to explain the hurt and make it go away. (hooks, 1994, p. 61)

For hooks, theory became a place of healing, a reflective process through which individual and collective suffering could be acknowledged and transformed.

Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and the Pedagogy of Liberation

With over twenty published books, translated into more than forty languages, and having been among the first Brazilians exiled during the military dictatorship (1964–1986), Paulo Reglus Neves Freire, recognized as the patron of Brazilian education, requires no extended biographical presentation in this context.

Freire's pedagogical method “directly challenges structures of exploitation and social organization” (Feitosa *et al.*, 2022, p. 217, our translation). As such, his thought stands in direct opposition to the logic of a society shaped by inequality and domination and is perceived as a threat by far-right movements that, in recent years, have sought to distort and attack his legacy, a reaction rooted in fear of subverting the established order (Feitosa *et al.*, 2022).

Indeed, Freire's theory is disruptive. It aims at transforming the individual into an active subject, capable of interpreting the world and positioning themselves within it. His vision promotes education as a path to liberation from the oppressive conditions imposed by neoliberal ideologies, which hinder any possibility of “collective and radical social transformation” (Feitosa *et al.*, 2022, p. 203, our translation).

The notion of liberation occupies a central place in Freire's thought and is intrinsically tied to the concept of freedom. First introduced in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2005), liberation is described as a praxis (Jones, 2008, p. 301, our translation), “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire, 2005, p. 79). This transformation must emerge from the reality of the learner, whose life experiences, when acknowledged and validated by educators, create the “conditions for knowledge construction and co-production” (Feitosa *et al.*, 2022, p. 205, our translation).

This form of education promotes “human development rooted in context, with the goal of critically transforming the individual, their community, and the world. It enables subjects to free themselves from the ignorance and passivity imposed by capitalist class society (Feitosa *et al.*, 2022, p. 205–206, our translation).

Encouraged to critically reflect on their social, political, and economic reality, the oppressed, according to Freire (2005), are best positioned to recognize the mechanisms of oppression. For this reason, “the pedagogy of the oppressed, must be forged with, not for, the oppressed must” (Freire, 2005, p. 48).

As a Black woman who lived through racial segregation and had yet to develop a political vocabulary, bell hooks recognized in Freire's work a new way to interpret her social condition, one that allowed her to cease being an object and instead become a subject. She found, in Freire's writings, the acknowledgment of the oppressed's subjectivity.

Despite identifying the sexist elements in Freire's language, hooks did not allow that to prevent her from engaging with his work. In *Pedagogy of Hope: A Reencounter with the Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1994), Freire himself reflects on these criticisms and the numerous letters he received following the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in New York. He candidly addresses his initial reaction, shaped by a patriarchal and authoritarian ideological background:

I remember reading the first two or three letters i received as if it were yesterday, and how, under the impact of my conditioning by an authoritarian, sexist, ideology, i reacted. and it is important to bring out that, here at the end of 1970 and the beginning of 1971, i had already intensely experienced the political struggle, had spent five or six years of exile, had read a world of serious works, but in reading the first criticisms that i received, still said to myself, or repeated, what i had been taught in my boyhood: "now, when i say 'men,' that of course includes 'women.' " and why are men not included when we say, "Women are determined to change the world"? no man would feel included in any discourse by any speaker, or in the text of any author, who would write, "Women are determined to change the world." after all, men certainly dislike it when i say to a nearly all-female audience, but with two or three men in it, "you should all" For the men present, either i do not know syntax, or else i am trying to "have some fun" at their expense. The one thing they cannot think is that they are included in my discourse. how can one explain, except on an ideological basis, the rule according to which, in a room filled with dozens of women and only one man, i have to say, "you are all workers, and dedicated ones", with all the variable terminations in the masculine gender? indeed it is not a grammatical problem, but an ideological one. (Freire, 1994, p. 56/57).

In his later works, Freire revised this language, making a conscious effort to address both masculine and feminine forms. However, "his use of this grammatical resource does not necessarily imply an admission of intentional sexism, as some scholars of his work have demanded" (Andreola, 2016, p. 611, our translation).

Although hooks did not passively accept Freire's worldview, she acknowledged that "to have work that promotes one's liberation is such a powerful gift that it does not matter so much if the gift is flawed" (hooks, 1994, p. 50). She compares the experience to drinking water with a bit of dirt: imperfect, yet essential (hooks, 1994).

Her encounter with Freire's ideas occurred during graduate school, at a time when she was "the politics of domination, the impact of racism, sexism, class exploitation, and the kind of

domestic colonization that takes place in the United States,” (hooks, 1994, p. 46). His work helped her shape a resistant identity and challenge both colonial processes and colonizing mentalities.

Freire’s emphasis on education as a practice of freedom had an immediate impact on hooks. Having grown up in a rural and impoverished community, she had direct contact with illiteracy from an early age. Reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* gave her a sense of inclusion, especially since class issues were rarely addressed in the United States context. Feeling a deep connection with rural workers and the people of Guinea-Bissau, she later wrote: “I came to Freire thirsty, dying of thirst (in that ' way that the colonized, marginalized subject who is still unsure of how to break the hold of the status quo, who longs for change, is needy, is thirsty)” (hooks, 1994, p. 50).

In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, hooks devotes an entire chapter to describing her encounter with Freire's work, whom she would later meet in person. To discuss him, she constructs a dialogue between Gloria Watkins and bell hooks, “I wanted to speak about Paulo and his work in this way for it afforded me an intimacy familiarity-I do not find it possible to achieve in the essay. And here I have found a way to share the sweetness, the solidarity I talk about” (hooks, 1994, p. 45).

Inspired by Freire’s pedagogy of emancipation and liberation, bell hooks expanded upon his foundations by incorporating the dimensions of race and gender. In doing so, she developed an engaged pedagogy committed to education as a practice of freedom. The theoretical perspectives of both Freire and hooks align in their rejection of the banking model of education, instead advocating for a radical pedagogy where the idea of freedom is realized through educational practice.

A radical pedagogy in which the idea of freedom is strengthened and made concrete through an educational practice capable of liberating learners from rigid colonial, prejudiced structures that devalue popular knowledge, thereby weakening meaningful political, social, and rights-based participation and equality (Silva & Pontes, 2023, p. 99, our translation).

In this sense, both Freire and hooks conceptualize pedagogy as inherently liberating, anchored in a practice that neither detaches itself from the world nor perpetuates structures of domination. Dialogue is central to this approach, enabling students to experience both love and joy in the process of learning.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a literature review as its methodological approach to examine the educational work of bell hooks, relying exclusively on bibliographic sources that offered a comprehensive view of the topic through credible references (Sousa et al., 2021).

Through a bibliographic investigation, the research identified thematic intersections between the theories of Paulo Freire and bell hooks. These commonalities helped define the central research problem, which then guided the selection of relevant academic publications and the synthesis and interpretation of the articles analyzed in this study.

A literature review involves identifying, analyzing, synthesizing, and interpreting secondary sources authored by scholars who have previously interpreted others' works, allowing us to gain an overview of the topic, its gaps, and its contributions (Bento, 2012). Based on this premise, this research selected articles published between 2021 and 2023 using the following descriptors: Engaged Pedagogy, Learning Community, *and* bell hooks.

The theoretical and methodological framework guiding this investigation into the formation of learning communities was shaped by the contributions of teacher Sahmaroni Rodrigues de Olinda (2024), developed within the research group "bell hooks, Engaged Pedagogy, and Teacher Education." Additional insights were drawn from authors who engaged directly with hooks' thought, such as Marinho (2023), Silva and Pontes (2023), Carreiro, Rodrigues, and Palhano (2023), and Silva, Souza, and Antunes (2022).

The initial search using the descriptor Engaged Pedagogy yielded 680 articles. To narrow the scope, titles were used as exclusion criteria, those that clearly did not relate to the central theme were discarded. When the search was refined by adding Learning Community to the descriptor, results were reduced to 90 articles. Finally, including the name bell hooks brought the number down to 76. With this more manageable set, abstracts were read to determine which studies would be included in the analysis.

During the selection process, several exclusion criteria were applied. Articles were excluded if they connected hooks theory to thinkers other than Freire; described community-building experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic; focused on early childhood education, psychology, geography, philosophy, or other unrelated fields; or merely cited hooks without exploring her concepts of engaged pedagogy or learning communities in depth.

Within the final selection, Silva and Pontes (2023) contributed reflections on school diversity and the challenges of contemporary education. These authors found in Freire and hooks the possibility of envisioning a dialogical pedagogy that values historically marginalized communities. Similarly, Silva, Souza, and Antunes (2022) explored hooks vision of schooling as a liberatory communal experience, emphasizing political, critical, and reflective teaching as a path toward societal transformation. Marinho (2023) offered a focused analysis of Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom, highlighting hooks core proposals for critical pedagogy, while Carreiro, Rodrigues, and Palhano (2023) emphasized the importance of expanding canonical frameworks and positioned engaged pedagogy as a viable route for building learning communities.

In addition to bell hooks trilogy on education, this research also draws on two key works by Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) and *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1992). These texts provide essential insights into the concept of freedom, a recurring and central theme in hooks pedagogical framework.

This study was designed as a qualitative inquiry, a methodological choice that allows for diverse approaches and critical reflection on the research object (Flick, 2009). Given the study's limited sample size, it underwent two key revisions to broaden its scope.

The first, and most significant, modification occurred during the preliminary research phase. Initially, the project aimed to analyze hooks *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* exclusively. However, the research trajectory was revised to include the full educational trilogy, thereby offering a more comprehensive exploration of the concepts of Engaged Pedagogy and Teaching in Community.

The second change followed from this expansion. Reading the other two books in hooks trilogy deepened our understanding of Engaged Pedagogy and its significance for learning communities, which led to the development of a dedicated section outlining the principles of this pedagogical approach. Finally, it is important to emphasize that both Engaged Pedagogy and Learning Community are rooted in hooks lived experiences as a university professor and reflect her practical and theoretical engagement with education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Engaged Pedagogy

In societies shaped by class hierarchies, dominant interests are often preserved through the marginalization of those who are poorer and less educated. Paulo Freire's politically grounded educational philosophy directly addresses this imbalance, offering a path toward transformation and critical awakening for those traditionally silenced (Pereira & Sartori, 2021).

One of the core ideas Freire championed, education as a practice of freedom, became a foundational influence on bell hooks. Drawing from his work, she sought to disrupt the traditional "banking" model of education, where students are treated as passive recipients of information. Instead, hooks imagined a classroom where learning is an active, transformative experience.

As a teacher, hooks believed that every student must be an engaged participant in their own development. For her, true education happens when knowledge is collectively cultivated, like a field that requires the labor of all who benefit from it. As she wrote: "Freire's work affirmed that education can only be liberatory when everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we all labor" (hooks, 1994, p. 14)

This ethos of collective engagement echoes the teachings of Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh. Through his socially engaged form of Buddhism, Hanh emphasized the integration of consciousness and action, mind, body, and spirit, in a way that honors each individual's unique needs, aspirations, and spiritual dimension. hooks saw strong parallels between Hanh's approach and Freire's: both called on students to be fully present, connecting awareness with lived experience (hooks, 1994).

Rejecting the long-standing division between body and mind in Western education, hooks (1994) credits Hanh with helping her embrace a more holistic teaching practice. She came to understand that showing up in the classroom as a whole person, and seeing her students that way, only deepens, rather than diminishes, the learning experience. She emphasized the importance of reaching each student as a unique individual, breaking away from the mechanistic logic of factory-like schooling and instead encouraging them to challenge and transcend barriers of race, class, and gender.

hooks' pedagogical approach emerged from a rich interplay of anti-colonial, critical, and feminist frameworks. As she explained, these traditions inform one another, creating a vibrant

and powerful vision of teaching “[...] who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students” (hooks, 1994, p. 13).

In this fusion of pedagogies, and building on Freire’s legacy, hooks frames education as inseparable from the practice of freedom (Carreiro et al., 2023, p. 6, our translation). Freire wrote:

Education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination—denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people. (Freire, 2005, p. 81)

For both Freire and hooks, education must be rooted in dialogue. The classroom should not reproduce hierarchies where the teacher speaks and students absorb. Instead, they envisioned an interactive space where knowledge is co-created, where learning speaks directly to life and experience. Teachers, hooks insisted, “should never present knowledge without also showing students how it connects to their broader lived realities” (hooks, 1994).

Engaged Pedagogy, for hooks, demands that educators resist reinforcing systems of domination. It calls for a classroom where:

Students are invited to take ownership of their becoming, spiritually, intellectually, emotionally. The goal is to resist all forms of oppression rooted in patriarchal, imperialist, capitalist, white supremacist structures that reduce knowledge to skill sets and education to mere preparation for exploitative labor markets (De Olinda, 2023, p. 493, our translation).

In a truly engaged classroom, resisting oppression isn’t a theoretical exercise, it’s part of the daily exchange between teacher and student. Everyone is invited to bring their full selves into the room, to share openly, and to emerge stronger and more empowered from the collective process (hooks, 1994).

Compared to more traditional critical or feminist pedagogies, Engaged Pedagogy is more demanding. As hooks wrote: “unlike these two teaching practices, it emphasizes wellbeing. That means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own wellbeing if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students” (hooks, 1994, p.15).

In *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*, hooks underscores the transformative potential of this approach:

Engaged pedagogy is vital to any rethinking of education because it holds the promise of full participation on the part of students. Engaged pedagogy establishes a mutual

relationship between teacher and students that nurtures the growth of both parties, creating an atmosphere of trust and commitment that is always present when genuine learning happens. Expanding both heart and mind, engaged pedagogy makes us better learners because it asks us to embrace and explore the practice of knowing together, to see intelligence as a resource that can strengthen our common good. (hooks, 2010, p. 22).

This mutual dynamic means that the teacher's voice is not privileged above all others, and students are not the only ones encouraged to be vulnerable. Learning becomes a shared, human experience. But hooks is clear: "that empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks." (hooks, 1994, p. 21).

hooks also argued that sharing personal experiences can deepen students' understanding of academic material. In her view, students crave knowledge that speaks to them directly, learning that heals, that challenges, that nourishes. Teachers, then, must be willing to engage in transformative practices that challenge inherited assumptions and broaden students' perspectives. As De Olinda (2023) notes, this means bringing in authors and thinkers from marginalized backgrounds, Black, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+, who offer alternative worldviews and lived experiences.

In essence, Engaged Pedagogy is about collective learning. It thrives on connection, resists oppressive systems like white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, and demands the presence of the whole person, teacher and student alike. Through it, hooks envisions a space where true learning communities can take root.

Building A Pedagogical Community

Human life is sustained by stories. Stories connect us to realities different from our own, they guide, transform, teach, and heal. They open us to others, help us listen deeply, and illuminate our work. In both classroom settings and broader communities, stories can serve as a powerful foundation for building meaningful connections. As bell hooks writes:

One of the ways we become a learning community is by sharing and receiving one another's stories; it is a ritual of communion that opens our minds and hearts. Sharing in ways that help us connect, we come to know each other better. (hooks, 2010, p. 51-52)

Through this perspective, dialogue becomes the foundation for any authentic teaching and learning process, regardless of individual differences or similarities. In Teaching Critical

Thinking: Practical Wisdom, hooks (2010) emphasizes that building a learning community begins with recognizing that every student has the potential to contribute. However, she cautions that this does not mean every voice must be heard at all times, or that every voice should take up equal space in the classroom. She observes that, often, students who are not yet prepared dominate discussions. This makes it all the more important, she argues, to cultivate an appreciation for speaking with intention and contributing meaningfully.

To create a space of collective learning, hooks calls for a shared commitment to the learning environment. She writes: “I’m trying to say that we are all equal here to the extent that we are equally committed to creating a learning context.” (hooks, 1994, p. 153). This does not erase the teacher’s authority but repositions the educator as a co-learner in a space where multiple forms of knowledge coexist.

The experience of a classroom grounded in community is marked by rigorous critical thinking. Students are encouraged not only to comprehend course content but to act upon that knowledge, because, for hooks, thinking is itself a form of action (hooks, 2010). Learning, within this framework, affirms every student’s capacity and centers the common good. “It culminates in a collaborative dynamic where the classroom becomes a site of knowledge-sharing, pedagogical mediation, and emotional exchange” (Carreiro et al., 2023, p. 8, our translation).

Love is central to this process. For hooks (2003), love is not merely a feeling but an ethical and political foundation for learning. She recognized, however, that talking about love in the context of teaching is, in itself, engaging a taboo conversation. Yet she insists that love, as an ethic, must be embedded in educational spaces if we are to pursue true personal and social transformation. This stands in opposition to the objectivist logic that often dominates academia.

Vinícius da Silva, translator of hooks’ *Salvation: Black People and Love*, reflects in the video *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* that:

Love, as a political and ethical commitment, paves the way for social transformation. It enables subjects to form epistemological and philosophical agendas aimed at their own emancipation. But love is not an end, it is a path (Ação Educativa, 2021, our translation).

Love generates empathy, solidarity, community, engagement, and dialogue across difference. hooks (2003) critiques objectivism for being incompatible with humanistic inquiry and education, because objectivism resists emotional connection between teachers and students. It sterilizes the classroom, denying learners the chance to see themselves as knowing subjects.

Objectivity, she explains, aims to eliminate all traces of subjectivity, any bias, emotion, or particularity, in the pursuit of supposedly “pure” knowledge. As Palmer (quoted in hooks, 2003) states, this logic assumes that only knowledge free from emotion or personal context can be legitimate. In response, hooks advocates for a different kind of rigor, one rooted in care, connection, and the well-being of students. As Berbert (2022) puts it, care becomes a political act that prepares students for radical openness, an openness that engages both mind and heart.

This shift requires a profound transformation in our educational paradigms. “To decolonize education,” as Carreiro et al. (2023, p. 9, our translation) argue, “is to decolonize our pedagogical practices.” It means disrupting colonial logics and reimagining teaching as a liberatory, inclusive, and intersectional practice. hooks invites us to transgress the structures of colonial education and to embrace a pedagogy rooted in freedom, one that allows every student to feel safe in sharing their voice. She writes:

It has been as a teacher in the classroom setting that I have witnessed the power of a transformative pedagogy rooted in a respect for multiculturalism. Working with a critical pedagogy based on my understanding of Freire's teaching, I enter the classroom with the assumption that we must build "community" in order to create a climate of openness and intellectual rigor. Rather than focusing on issues of safety, I think that a feeling of community creates a sense that there is shared commitment and a common good that binds us. What we all ideally share is the desire to learn-to receive actively knowledge that enhances our intellectual development and our capacity to live more fully in the world. (hooks, 1994, p. 40).

This sense of community is not only a pedagogical strategy but a foundation for personal and collective transformation. Love, for hooks, is a political act, one that fosters solidarity, affirms diverse identities, and challenges systems of domination. It is the force that makes the classroom a space of resistance.

As Berbert (2022, p. 246, our translation) observes, “hooks critical pedagogy embraces aspects that traditional academic settings often suppress, especially emotional dimensions seen as incompatible with institutional rationality.” In doing so, hooks repositions themes often sidelined in educational research and connects them to broader systems of oppression.

Ultimately, building a learning community requires seeing education as a practice of freedom. This vision demands an ethical and pedagogical commitment to dismantling racism, misogyny, classism, ableism, and all other forms of systemic violence that shape both society and the classroom (Carreiro *et al.*, 2023).

Such work must be carried out by educators who are committed to democracy, teachers who reject the use of education as a tool for reproducing dominant values. These are educators who see learning as a holistic process, not a fragmented activity that alienates them and their students from the world (hooks, 2010).

In this way, Engaged Pedagogy finds its fullest expression through the practice of learning communities. It is in these Spaces, grounded in collective learning, critical consciousness, and care, that hooks vision of social justice, inclusion, and empowerment comes to life (Carreiro *et al.*, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Throughout this work, it became clear that the foundational pillars of bell hooks' Engaged Pedagogy are deeply rooted in the teachings of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh. From Freire, she embraced the idea of education as a practice of freedom, an essential tool for the critical awakening of the oppressed. From Hanh, she drew upon the holistic integration of mind, body, and spirit, which allowed her to envision the learner as a whole being. By weaving together these two influences and grounding her reflections in the realities of feminist classrooms, hooks shaped a pedagogical practice in which lived experience becomes a cornerstone for knowledge construction.

In critically engaging with the forces that shape society, hooks developed strategies of resistance and survival to challenge the silencing of marginalized voices. She rejected models of education rooted in technocratic logic, instead advocating for a liberatory approach, an education that, like Freire's, seeks to empower rather than suppress (Ação Educativa, 2021).

Her work reveals that hope is central to Engaged Pedagogy, not as naïve optimism, but as a grounded, collective act of "hoping forward toward transformation, self-actualization, and freedom" (Carrero *et al.*, 2023, p. 13, our translation). This notion of hope, influenced by her readings of Freire, was not without critique; hooks openly questioned the gendered language in his work. Yet, she found in Freire a framework and a vocabulary capable of confronting the many intersecting forms of oppression she had endured since childhood.

We also observed that Engaged Pedagogy was shaped by personal experience. In her educational trilogy, hooks often recalls the silencing she experienced in desegregated schools and

in higher education. For her, every voice matters, each one with its own specificity and power to contribute to the formation of learning communities.

Dialogue, confessional narratives, and attentive listening are central to building the pedagogical relationship between teachers and students. Through her pedagogical lens, hooks teaches us how to nurture a sense of community grounded in critical, decolonial, and intersectional thought (Carreiro, 2023).

Love, collective responsibility, empathy, critical awareness, and open dialogue form the fabric of an authentic learning community. This shared effort generates enthusiasm and lifts from teachers the unrealistic burden of creating a dynamic classroom community solely through their will or charisma (hooks, 1994).

Inspired by the legacy of Paulo Freire, bell hooks' *Engaged Pedagogy* calls for a transgression of the "banking model" of education and opens new pathways for collective transformation (Carrero *et al.*, 2023). Both thinkers affirm that a liberatory educational practice enables the dismantling of dominant power structures and the fostering of critical reflection. In this light, the classroom remains a radical space of possibility, available to those who enter it with open minds and open hearts.

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