

CONNECTING THE THOUGHTS OF PAULO FREIRE WITH THOSE OF CONTEMPORARY EDUCATORS

APROXIMAÇÕES DO PENSAMENTO DE PAULO FREIRE COM EDUCADORES
ATUAIS

CONECTANDO EL PENSAMIENTO DE PAULO FREIRE CON EL DE LOS
EDUCADORES CONTEMPORÁNEOS

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DOI: 10.54899/dcs.v23i87.4727

Recibido: 23/01/2026 | Aceptado: 17/02/2026 | Publicación en línea: 24/02/2026.

ABSTRACT

Paulo Freire has influenced and continues to influence numerous studies by some of the world's leading educators, providing a revolutionary portrait of new ideas and developments in education that can influence the possibility of social and political change. The authors consider diverse fields such as feminism, ecology, media, and individual freedom in the search for new ideas that can inform the fundamental practice of education and promote a more humane civil society. However, can we consider the theoretical benefits of Freire's thought in current education? Freirean thought is present in the construction of this theoretical base, but it is not evident how Freire's legacy interferes with the philosophical and ideological formation of other current educational thinkers. Thus, this study aims to understand how Paulo Freire's philosophical thought dialogues with other important thinkers in world education today. The intention is to draw a parallel between Freirean thought and renowned intellectuals such as bell hooks, Peter McLaren, Antonio Nóvoa, and Henry Giroux, Michael W. Apple, and observe whether the combination of these approaches contributes to the discussion and evolution of education. This theoretical research will seek in bibliographic sources the educational correlations of Freire with other theorists.

Keywords: Paulo Freire. Contemporary Education. Philosophy of Education. Critical Pedagogy.

RESUMO

Paulo Freire influenciou e continua influenciando diversos estudos de alguns dos principais educadores do mundo proporcionando um retrato revolucionário de novas ideias e desenvolvimentos na educação que podem influenciar a possibilidade de mudança social e política. Os autores levam em conta terrenos tão diversos como o feminismo, a ecologia, a mídia e a liberdade individual na busca de novas ideias que possam informar a prática fundamental da educação e promover uma sociedade civil mais humana. Porém, podemos considerar os benefícios teóricos do pensamento de Freire na educação atual? O pensamento freireano está presente na construção desta base teórica, mas não está evidente como o legado de Freire interfere

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na formação filosófica e ideológica de outros pensadores da educação atuais. Assim, este estudo tem como objetivo principal: compreender como o pensamento filosófico de Paulo Freire dialoga com outros pensadores importantes da educação mundial na atualidade. A intenção é fazer uma aproximação do pensamento freireano com intelectuais renomados como, bell hooks, Peter McLaren, Antonio Nóvoa, Henry Giroux, Michael W. Apple e observar se a combinação dessas aproximações contribui para a discussão e evolução da educação. Esta pesquisa teórica irá buscar em fontes bibliográficas as correlações educacionais de Freire com outros teóricos.

Palavras-chaves: Paulo Freire. Educação Contemporânea. Filosofia da Educação. Pedagogia Crítica.

RESUMEN

Paulo Freire ha influido y continúa influyendo en numerosos estudios realizados por algunos de los educadores más destacados del mundo, ofreciendo un panorama revolucionario de nuevas ideas y desarrollos en educación que pueden influir en la posibilidad de cambio social y político. Los autores consideran diversos campos como el feminismo, la ecología, los medios de comunicación y la libertad individual en la búsqueda de nuevas ideas que puedan fundamentar la práctica educativa fundamental y promover una sociedad civil más humana. Sin embargo, ¿podemos considerar los beneficios teóricos del pensamiento de Freire en la educación actual? El pensamiento freiriano está presente en la construcción de esta base teórica, pero no es evidente cómo su legado interfiere en la formación filosófica e ideológica de otros pensadores educativos actuales. Por lo tanto, este estudio busca comprender cómo el pensamiento filosófico de Paulo Freire dialoga con otros pensadores importantes de la educación mundial actual. La intención es aproximar el pensamiento freiriano a intelectuales de renombre como bell hooks, Peter McLaren, Antonio Nóvoa, Henry Giroux y Michael W. Apple, y observar si la combinación de estos enfoques contribuye al debate y la evolución de la educación. Esta investigación teórica explorará, a través de fuentes bibliográficas, las correlaciones educativas entre Freire y otros teóricos.

Palabras clave: Paulo Freire. Educación Contemporánea. Filosofía de la Educación. Pedagogía Crítica.



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INTRODUCTION

Paulo Freire, born in 1921 in Recife and deceased in 1998 in São Paulo, developed many theories and methods on philosophy and education. Freire is considered one of the most important thinkers in world education. His main work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is widely used as one of the fundamental texts in teacher training courses and in the emergence of so-called critical

pedagogy. According to Google Scholar, the book was the third most cited in the field of social sciences worldwide in 2016 (Green, 2016).

Paulo Freire was one of the best-known and most influential educational theorists of the 20th century. His impact on peace education, adult education, non-formal education, and critical literacy has been incalculable (Bartlett, 2008). His work continues to provoke new theories and transcends regional and cultural barriers and has been used in various countries through research in the field of human sciences. His ideas have spread internationally, resulting in the republication of his work in many parts of the world.

The book *Pedagogia da Autonomia* (Pedagogy of Freedom in English), his last book published during his lifetime, has already surpassed the mark of one million copies (Silva, 2021). This projection confers upon his body of work the character of a universal work that stands out in educational literature, in the testimonies of important authors in different countries, in the recognition of his work by important universities around the world, and in the growing number of research projects that rely on Freire's framework. Freire is a prominent presence in teacher training courses at the best universities in the world.

Freire's work has exerted considerable influence among progressive educators in the West, especially in the context of emerging traditions of critical pedagogy, bilingual education, social justice, and multiculturalism (McLaren, 2000). For the American philosopher and activist Cornell West, Freire captured the yearning for decolonization in what he calls "conscientization," a new self-perception in which people no longer see themselves as objects of history but strive to develop their own "selves" and bodies to rebuild a new nation (West, 2008).

We can add the thought of Enrique Dussel, along with Freire, since Dussel argues that Freire's idea of the consciousness-raising of the oppressed would be comparable to his own concept of the Ethics of Liberation of the oppressed subject and the change in behavior of the oppressors, in search of a "good life." This leads us to reflect on ourselves, subjects embedded in social reality, so that we can develop a critical view of social, political, and educational events surrounding oppression (Dussel, 2007). We can also develop connections between Freirean thought and that of many other educators and philosophers, which is the purpose of this research.

Freire's main approach to education was that people should bring their own personal experiences to the learning process, rather than simply memorizing theories and concepts. Freire's discoveries led to a collection of methods and concepts that are widely used around the world by various important thinkers.

His work consisted of promoting education as a practice of freedom, through the construction of the student's critical consciousness. This includes the development of their communication, learning, and social interaction skills. Paulo Freire's thought and work were mainly influenced by the historical context, the history of Brazil, and his own experiences in diverse realities and countries. Freire was influenced by other thinkers in the development of his own philosophical theory. The ideas that contributed to the development of Freire's philosophy and work are existentialism, phenomenology, humanism, Marxism, and Christianity. The ideas of Hegel, Karl Marx, Anísio Teixeira, John Dewey, Erich Fromm, Frantz Fanon, and Antonio Gramsci were Freire's main influences.

Freire passed away more than 25 years ago, and his legacy can be seen in various fields of knowledge, since Freirean thought is present around the world, but there are few studies that describe Freire's legacy in shaping the thinking of leading educators today.

Freire influenced various theories and practices, but which of these theories and practices are benefiting education? Thus, this theoretical study aims to relate the influences of Paulo Freire's pedagogical ideas to other contemporary educational thinkers who use Freire in the construction of their own philosophical thought. The main idea is to try to demonstrate if, and how, Freirean pedagogical praxis approaches the construction of the thought of other scholars, activists, politicians, and leaders who were influenced by the life and ideas of Paulo Freire. Among these are bell hooks, Peter McLaren, Antonio Nóvoa, Michael W. Apple, and Henry Giroux, whom this text will explore individually.

METHODOLOGY

The main objective was to understand if, and how, Paulo Freire's pedagogical ideas influenced the philosophical construction of current thinkers, in diverse historical, social, and educational realities, in Brazil and elsewhere in the world. These questions are investigated using conventional library sources, placing strong emphasis on the interpretation and analysis of primary sources, such as the Theses and Dissertations database (Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD)) and search engines like Scielo, Qualis Capes, and Google Scholar. This theoretical research will be qualitative and exploratory – to generate hypotheses for future research – and explanatory – to identify plausible relationships that shape the phenomenon of interest (Marshall, Rossman, 2016). Thus, the study begins with a review of literature related

to the importance of Freire in world education. It examines the literature to determine how Freirean thought influences other thinkers in various topics, beyond education, such as social justice, education, and politics. It examines how Freirean thought is understood and applied in various areas and what the effects of this application are. This research covers the use and collection of qualitative data that are scientifically published and that will allow us to investigate authors whom we can consider revealing reality and explain the truth (Lecompte, Preissle, Tesch, 1993). The interpretation of the data will be rooted in critical hermeneutics.

My ideological perspective is based on Freirean theories, where I can explore the meanings of social life, the historical problem of domination, alienation, and social struggle, a critique of society, and a vision of new possibilities (Creswell, 2013). The qualitative analysis of the information will begin by seeking themes that emerge from the generation of bibliographic data. The act of collecting, reading, and organizing data serves as the first phase of analysis. A primary method of qualitative analysis is through organization into units and aggregation of units into emerging categories. The analysis will be conducted to provide verification and authenticity of the influences created by Freirean practices in education.

The bibliographic search related to the topic will be conducted using books by authors involved in the subject, such as Paulo Freire, Peter McLaren, Joe Kincheloe, and specialized national and international journals, such as: *Educação em Revista*; *Educação e Sociedade*; *Cadernos CEDES*; *Cadernos de Pesquisa*; *Revista Brasileira de Estudos Pedagógicos*; *Paideia*; *Tempo*. Among the foreign publications researched were *Globalisation, Societies and Education*; *International Journal of Educational Research*; *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación*; *Convergence (Canada)*; *Teaching and Teacher Education*; *Qualitative inquiry*; *Forum Intercultural Philosophy and The Review of Education / Pedagogy / Cultural Studies*.

PAULO FREIRE AND BELL HOOKS

The American, Gloria Jean Watkins, who used the pseudonym bell hooks (1952–2021) and wrote her name in lowercase letters when born, was a renowned American author, feminist theorist, educator, and activist. She explained her pseudonym as:

One of the many reasons I chose to write using the pseudonym bell hooks, a family name (mother of Sara Oldham, grandmother of Rosa Bell Oldham, and my great-grandmother), was to construct a writer's identity that would challenge and master all the impulses that led me away from speaking and toward silence (hooks, 2019, p. 38).

Her work has focused on the intersections of race, gender, class, and capitalism, emphasizing "intersectional feminism" and the power of love in politics. She is the author of over 30 books, with

"Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom" being one of her major works. In this book, hooks criticized the "imperialist capitalist patriarchy of white supremacy" in traditional education, advocating for a more inclusive and "intersectional" approach to social justice that brings those on the "margins to the center." hooks uses Freire as a basic theoretical reference and presents Freire's importance in her own career.

In the book in question, she cites that she saw Paulo Freire as a monumental, transformative, and profoundly influential educator, whose work in critical pedagogy provided a revolutionary framework for challenging colonial mentalities and systemic oppression. She considered him a "challenging teacher" whose theories on education as a practice of freedom profoundly shaped her own pedagogical methods. Despite her intense admiration, she openly criticized his use of sexist language in earlier works, which he humbly accepted (hooks , 2013).

As an example of Freire's influence on hooks' thinking, she advocated for the flexibility of the classroom agenda according to the students' needs to reflect Freire's co-intentional educational principles. hooks believes that students should "be seen in their particularity as individuals and interact according to their needs" (hooks, 2013).

PAULO FREIRE AND PETER McLAREN

Peter McLaren is a renowned Canadian critical educator, author, and academic, recognized as one of the leading architects of critical pedagogy in North America. His work focuses on Marxist critical analysis, liberation theology, and educational reform against capitalism. Along with Freire, he was one of the forerunners of critical pedagogy, a philosophy of education and a social movement committed to transformation and social justice, widely influencing issues of social justice and education in Latin America.

McLaren has written or edited over 40 books, including *Pedagogy and Practice in the Age of Empire*, *Revolutionary Multiculturalism*, and *Lives in Schools*, and has received numerous awards, including the Paulo Freire International Prize for Social Justice. His approach combines education with revolutionary politics, aiming to challenge oppression and economic

inequality. McLaren is often credited with transforming Paulo Freire's theories into a "revolutionary pedagogy" that addresses contemporary social and economic issues.

McLaren absorbed Freire's thought into virtually all his works and helped to spread his ideas in the United States and Canada. McLaren describes Freire's reminder, in short, that in a world where many go hungry, where many are denied justice, and where many are deprived of their humanity, it is still too early to write the obituaries of revolutionary humanism and the project of democratic socialism (McLaren and Scatambourlo, 1999).

Peter McLaren says that Freire's conception of education as a profound political project oriented towards the transformation of society has been crucial for the education of revolutionary societies and societies in civil war, as well as established Western democracies (McLaren and Scatambourlo, 1999).

PAULO FREIRE AND ANTONIO NÓVOA

Portuguese scholar Antonio Nóvoa is one of the most renowned researchers in the field of Education, particularly for his studies on teacher training, the teaching profession, and educational policies. Nóvoa was rector of the University of Lisbon between 2006 and 2013, where he currently holds a full professorship. With a strong international presence, especially in Portuguese-speaking countries, Nóvoa has written important works, notably on teacher training, including **Teachers and their Training**, **The Teaching Profession**, and **The Return of Teachers**.

Nóvoa's thinking is evident, particularly in how both understand education, teacher training, and the political role of the school. Nóvoa cites Freire's importance for contemporary education when he describes that "Freire's life and work are inscribed in the pedagogical imaginary of the 20th century, constituting an obligatory reference for several generations of educators" (NÓVOA apud SAUL; SILVA, 2011). Nóvoa promoted Freirean thought in Europe and in Portuguese-speaking countries.

Nóvoa, along with the American Michael W. Apple, organized the book ** Paulo Freire: Politics and Pedagogy**, where they analyze the life, work, and thought of Paulo Freire in his pedagogical, political, and cultural dimensions. Analyzing the thought described in this work, Tomelin and Rausch (2022, pp. 7-8) describe that the thoughts of Paulo Freire and António Nóvoa

share many similarities that contribute to defining a different kind of teacher training for the future, considering the necessary process of metamorphosis in schools, including:

- the essential role of the school as a space for diverse interactions, which determines its consolidation as an institution in constant transformation, transcending models.
- the need for transformation in teaching, in schools, and in society itself because of the historical process that drives history.
- confronting the fatalism related to the idea that the future is merely a consequence of the past, leaving nothing to do but follow the natural flow of events, including the conception of the death of the school and of teaching itself.
- the essential originality to negate this fatalism by proposing a transformed and unique school for a chronologically unprecedented time, specific to new and permanent transformations.
- Peer-to-peer learning starting from lived context, prioritizing emerging demands from within the school itself, without ignoring external elements that may strengthen the school's transformative commitment to society.
- Rigor grounded in knowledge and culture, taking on a reflective, critical, and mobilizing character.

In the same book, Nóvoa reflects on the importance of Freire as an essential reference for world education, he says (1998):

The life and work of Freire are inscribed in the pedagogical imagination of the 20th century, constituting an obligatory reference for several generations of educators. (...) The proposals he put forward have been appropriated by different groups, who have relocated them in various social and political contexts. (...) Based on his own educational conception, which crosses social theory, moral commitment, and political participation, Paulo Freire is, in himself, an unavoidable asset to current pedagogical reflection. His work functions as a kind of critical consciousness, which keeps us on guard against the depoliticization of educational thought and pedagogical reflection.

It is noticeable in the writings that, while Freire offers the ethical and political foundation; Nóvoa develops this foundation in the field of the teaching profession and the school.

PAULO FREIRE AND MICHAEL W. APPLE

As seen previously, Apple, along with Nóvoa, organized and promoted the book *Paulo Freire: Politics and Pedagogy*. Being American, Apple is one of the leading interpreters of Freire's ideas in the United States (and in several other countries), where he is seen as a prominent educational thinker, alongside other major figures in pedagogy, and his work remains relevant to public and inclusive education and human rights.

Michael W. Apple is Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, internationally recognized for his studies on educational policy, curriculum, power, ideology, and

social justice, being one of the leading names in critical theory and education and thus, one of the "fathers" of critical pedagogy.

Freire and Apple are complementary. Freire offers the ethical, dialogical, and emancipatory foundation of education, while Apple deepens the critical analysis of the power structures that condition the school, especially when discussing the curriculum as a form of manipulation. Together, they help to understand education both as a practice of freedom (Freire) and as a political struggle (Apple).

Despite their differing approaches, both authors converge on valuing the teacher as a critical subject. Freire conceives of the educator as an educator-learner, ethically and politically committed to the emancipation of the learners (Freire, 1996). Apple, similarly, defines the teacher as a critical intellectual, capable of resisting the impositions of the system and acting consciously in curricular and institutional disputes (Apple, 2012).

Thus, it can be stated that Freire and Apple offer complementary perspectives: while Freire emphasizes the pedagogical and dialogical dimension of educational practice, Apple deepens the analysis of the social and political structures that condition education. Together, they contribute to a critical understanding of the school as a space for human, democratic, and socially committed formation.

PAULO FREIRE AND HENRY GIROUX

Henry A. Giroux, an American thinker, is professor emeritus at McMaster University. University (Canada) widely recognized as one of the leading theorists of contemporary critical pedagogy, especially for his contributions on education, culture, power, democracy, and resistance. Giroux engages directly with Paulo Freire, Michael W. Apple, and the tradition of Critical Theory.

According to Rodrigues (et al., 2017), Giroux belongs to the group of theorists known as Critical Theories related to the political dimension of the curriculum and who, unlike traditional perspectives on schooling, do not focus on questions about the organization of teaching, but on critical positions that examine the essence of teaching in what is transmitted by the school.

Giroux incorporates Freirean thought into his writings, as Silva (2010, p. 44) points out.

Giroux's work is influenced by concepts developed by previous theories and those of his own time: such as the Frankfurt School, regarding technical rationality in a critique

against the emphasis on bureaucratic foundations; as well as Michael Apple in his avoidance of a pessimistic view of the educational context; and Paulo Freire in the theme of the liberating conception of education, the notion of cultural action, and the perspective of a curriculum that challenges dominant technical models.

Giroux and Freire converge when they defend some ideas in a similar way, pointing to a pedagogy of possibilities; they value cultural action; the participation of people in pedagogical action with the appreciation of their actions, meanings and culture; and the interactions between pedagogy, politics and power (Rodrigues et al., 2017).

SUMMARY TABLE OF CONVERGENCES BETWEEN FREIRE AND OTHER THINKERS

Although the thinkers mentioned above are situated in distinct socio-political contexts, they share with Freire an understanding of education as an ethical, political, and transformative practice. The table below presents a synthesis of the main convergences between these authors and Freirean thought, highlighting both the points of dialogue and the theoretical specificities that characterize each contribution. This is an analytical tool that aims to demonstrate the permanence and vitality of Freirean pedagogy in the contemporary educational debate.

Table 1 - Summary of the convergences between Freire and other thinkers

Author	Central focus	Conception of education	The role of the teacher	Political and cultural dimension	Critical highlight
Paulo Freire	Liberating education and awareness	Education as a practice of freedom; dialogical and contextualized learning.	Educator-learner, critical mediator of learning.	Education is inherently political; combating oppression.	Critique of "banking education"; centrality of the historical experience of the oppressed.
bell hooks	Education as a practice of freedom, inclusion, and resistance.	Education as an instrument of social transformation; horizontal and affective dialogue.	Professor as an ethical and emotional facilitator; an inspirer of engagement.	Feminist and anti-racist education; combating marginalization.	It emphasizes intersectionality, care, and the inclusion of historically excluded voices.
Peter McLaren	Critical, radical, and Marxist pedagogy	Education as a practice of emancipation; focus on class struggle.	The teacher as a political agent and social transformer.	Education embedded within class relations and capitalism; resistance to economic and cultural control.	Marxist inspiration; radical critique of economic, cultural, and political oppression.

Antonio Nóvoa	Teacher training and teacher professional development	Teacher training as identity and ethical construction; education as a social and political practice.	The teacher as a historical subject and author of their own practice.	Education as an ethical and democratic practice; valuing teaching experience.	Dialogue with Freire; critique of technocracy and standardization; emphasis on reflection and teaching practice.
Michael Apple	Educational policies, curriculum and power	Education as a field of ideological dispute; curriculum legitimizes official knowledge.	The professor as a critical intellectual who can resist institutional impositions.	Analysis of power structures, hegemony, and inequality in education.	Emphasis on criticism of neoliberal reforms and the commodification of education; macrostructural focus.
Henry Giroux	Education, culture and democracy	Education as a cultural and critical practice; school as a space for citizenship.	Professor as a critical intellectual and agent of social change.	Criticism of neoliberalism, the media, and commodification policies; defense of democracy.	It expands critical pedagogy to the cultural field; analysis of media and civil society.

Source: Prepared by the author (2026)

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Freire passed away in 1997, yet his ideas remain relevant, influencing thinkers and teachers worldwide. Paulo Freire is considered one of the most influential educators of the 20th century, and his main work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is one of the most cited in the humanities.

However, Freire himself encouraged critical and autonomous thinking and humbly accepted any disagreements, saying that he did not want to be followed or copied, but to be recreated. According to Kohan (2019), "...I always say that the only way someone can apply, in their context, some of the propositions I made is precisely to remake me, that is, not to follow me. To follow me, the fundamental thing is not to follow me ... and I earnestly ask: do not copy me! Reinvent me!". As seen, the contemporary authors presented here have helped to reinvent Freire's thinking on issues of education and social justice.

The main objective of this study was to understand how Paulo Freire's philosophical thought dialogues with other important thinkers in education worldwide today. This objective was achieved, since the text revealed how Paulo Freire's influence transcends national borders and manifests itself significantly in the work of several contemporary critical education theorists. Among them, bell hooks, Peter McLaren, António Nóvoa, Michael Apple, and Henry Giroux stand out. Although each develops their own perspectives, it is possible to identify important

convergences with Freirean thought. These convergences were observed because the authors present argue that education is not neutral and that teachers are critical agents of transformation.

Freirean perspective , there are differences in emphasis, with hooks and McLaren discussing the issue of pedagogical and emancipatory praxis in the classroom, while Nóvoa focuses on teacher training, ethics and professional identity, while Apple and Giroux present a macro focus on policies, curriculum and culture, as well as a critique of neoliberal reforms, and finally, hooks and McLaren promote greater attention to issues of gender, race and class.

The text presents a possible dialogue, with Freire as an ethical and pedagogical reference, contributing to teacher training through Nóvoa, with Apple and Giroux expanding a structural and cultural analysis of education, and hooks and McLaren articulating a critical, intersectional, and political perspective.

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