

**Pedagogy of Democracy: The Education of the Working Class
in the First Writings of Paulo Freire**

***Pedagogia da democracia: a educação da classe trabalhadora nos
primeiros escritos de Paulo Freire***

***Pedagogía de la democracia: la educación de la clase trabajadora
en los primeros escritos de Paulo Freire***

Katia Reis de Souza ⁽ⁱ⁾

Maria Blandina Marques dos Santos ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾

⁽ⁱ⁾ Fundação Oswaldo Cruz – Fiocruz, Escola Nacional de Saúde Pública – ENSP, Centro de Estudos da Saúde do Trabalhador e Ecologia Humana – Cesteh, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil.
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2084-2606>, katia.reis@fiocruz.br

⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ Fundação Oswaldo Cruz – Fiocruz, Escola Nacional de Saúde Pública – ENSP, Centro de Estudos da Saúde do Trabalhador e Ecologia Humana – Cesteh, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil.
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0065-5635>, maria.marques@fiocruz.br

Abstract

This article aims to explore the foundational elements of Paulo Freire's pedagogy by examining the work titled “Educação e atualidade brasileira” (Education and Current Issues in Brazil), written in 1959. This piece is considered a crucial documentary record of the history of workers' education in Brazil, and reflects Freire's experiences during his time at Serviço Social da Indústria (SESI – Industry Social Service working with groups of blue-collar workers. The chosen methodology involves bibliographical research, including primary sources from Paulo Freire's works and secondary sources from commentators. We concluded that the analyzed period, referred to as the phase of "pedagogy of democracy," stands as a fundamental reference for the critical education of adult workers.

Keywords: Paulo Freire Method, Adult Education Policy, Democracy

Resumo

O principal objetivo deste ensaio consiste em problematizar a base germinal da pedagogia de Paulo Freire a partir da análise da obra intitulada Educação e atualidade brasileira, escrita no ano de 1959, interpretada como importante registro documental da história da educação de trabalhadores no Brasil. Essa obra foi o corolário das experiências de Freire no período em que atuou no Serviço Social da Indústria com grupos de operários. Adotou-se como metodologia de estudo a pesquisa bibliográfica por meio do levantamento em fontes primárias de obras de Paulo Freire e secundárias de comentadores do seu trabalho. Concluiu-se que o período analisado, denominado de fase da pedagogia da democracia, constitui-se como referência capital para a educação crítica de adultos trabalhadores.

Palavras-chave: método Paulo Freire, política de educação de adultos, democracia

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo explorar los elementos vitales de la pedagogía de Paulo Freire mediante el análisis de la obra titulada "Educación y Problemas Actuales en Brasil," escrita en 1959. Este documento es considerado un registro crucial de la historia de la educación de los trabajadores en Brasil, reflejando las experiencias de Freire durante su tiempo trabajando con grupos de trabajadores en el Servicio Social de la Industria (SESI). La metodología elegida implica una investigación bibliográfica, que incluye fuentes primarias de las obras de Freire y fuentes secundarias de comentaristas. Se concluyó que el período analizado, conocido como la fase de la "pedagogía de la democracia", constituye una referencia fundamental para la educación crítica de los trabajadores adultos.

Palabras clave: Método Paulo Freire, Política de Educación de Adultos, Democracia

Introduction

This essay problematizes the seminal basis of Paulo Freire's pedagogy based on the analysis of his first public work, titled *Educação e atualidade brasileira* [Education and current issues in Brazil] (P. Freire, 2003), hereinafter referred to as EAB, written in 1959 and published posthumously in Brazil in 2003, approximately 20 years ago. This manuscript can be interpreted as a legacy in the history of workers' education in Brazil, considering that it was the corollary of Freire's ten years spent with workers at Serviço Social da Indústria (Sesi [Industry Social Service]), when he worked as an educator in the Education and Culture Division of Sesi, in Pernambuco state. In this paper, this foundational period in the life of the educator and patron

of Brazilian education is called “pedagogy of democracy”, and “democracy” is considered not only the dominant theme of the book, but also the epistemological principle of the evolution of Freire’s pedagogical ideas.

From 1947 and 1957 Paulo Freire consolidated the pedagogical basis of his theory of education, whose experience is recorded in EAB (P. Freire, 2003), written as a thesis for the competition for teaching History and Philosophy of Education at Escola de Belas-Artes de Pernambuco. In the book, P. Freire (2003) problematizes aspects of adult education in Brazil at the time. Those aspects are still relevant, challenge the education of the working class, and will be brought to light in the context of that period.

By way of illustration, EAB was organized by five founders and directors of Instituto Paulo Freire, including Moacir Gadotti and Carlos Alberto Torres. In the preface (Torres, 2003), one of the organizers assures that EAB was Freire's first written work and that it systematizes the main theoretical and methodological trends of his later works. The book has 124 pages, in addition to a preface and three more introductory texts written by José Eustáquio Romão (Romão, 2003), Paulo Rosas (Rosas, 2003), and Cristina Freire (C. Freire, 2003). The latter is Freire’s daughter, who referred to the Sesi period as the “prelude to the Paulo Freire method” (p. LXXIX).

On a historical level, Freire's period at Sesi was marked by political and economic instability, with episodes with dramatic outcomes such as the suicide of Getúlio Vargas in 1954. During this period, the highlight in presidential successions was the election of Juscelino Kubitschek and the implementation of the goals and economic development plan, between 1956 and 1960, which led to the acceleration of industrialization in Brazil and the need for mass literacy training of the working class (Ribeiro, 1985). Regarding the labor movement, there was a fight against low salaries, eroded by high inflation, and terrible working conditions. Giannotti (2007) states that it was a period marked by widespread strikes and strong political mobilizations – the strike of the 500 thousand workers in Sao Paulo state is memorable. Nevertheless, it was in his daily work at Sesi that Freire experienced class antagonisms, and publicly disapproved of the institution's assistencialism and paternalism (Bonnaneti, 2017). Freire created spaces of participation and democratization for the dialogue with workers, such as the experience in blue-collar workers' clubs and in Sesi schools for the literacy training of adult workers. As reported in the book, Freire’s main pedagogical intention was to create an environment conducive to

participation aimed at preparing for self-government of work, the germ of political emancipation and blue-collar worker autonomy (P. Freire, 2003).

P. Freire (2003) strongly criticized the silencing of the people, which he named “Brazilian mutism” (p. 65) and which should be overcome by practicing community living and social solidarity, in opposition to the historical process of colonization and political submission. Critical and democratic dialogue, as an element of the pedagogical method, occupies a central place in Freire's theoretical and methodological contribution, harmonizing with the oral culture prevalent among workers. At that time, there was a significantly high number of blue-collar workers who did not have access to school education and who, in addition, did not have time to read due to their long and tiring working hours either. This led P. Freire (2003, 2014, 2017) to note, in practice, the importance of dialogue in the educational process of adult workers. The universalization of public education was part of the ideas of the struggles of the working class and left-wing intellectuals, just as Anísio Teixeira (Teixeira, 1957) argued in his famous book *Educação não é privilégio* [Education is not a privilege], published in 1957, an important reference of Paulo Freire in EAB.

P. Freire (1984, 2014) formulated important parameters of a pedagogy in which an idea prevails: workers' struggles and forms of resistance are formative social practices. Nonetheless, it was in EAB that the author vehemently argued for the incorporation of “democratic forms of life” (P. Freire, 2003, p. 66) into the experience of the Brazilian people. This thesis is very important in Freire's seminal book and serves as a parameter to understand that his method is based on pedagogical strategies that, in practical terms, enable forms of democracy with (and for) the working class. According to this thinker, democracy is, above all, experiential and formative and must be practiced through educational processes of a participatory and dialogical nature.

In the history of Brazil, the debate on democracy gains huge importance in the political scene and in class struggles. This perspective was part of the changes in Brazilian society in the second post-war period, in the acceleration of urban infrastructure transformations, in the failure of traditional mechanisms of political domination, and in the radicalization of social and ideological struggles. As for the struggle against illiteracy, it is one of the pillars of the civilizational process and of the emancipation of the working class. There was a fight for the right to full citizenship, universal suffrage, comprehensive access to literate culture, and public

mastery of the codes of law and science. P. Freire (2003, 2014) acted as a militant educator to overcome serious national problems such as poverty and social inequality.

For Gouvêa (2018), Paulo Freire's phase at Sesi can be considered the onset in his career as an educator and intellectual. The many times Freire was impelled to express his reflections on his pedagogical practice, work and life, he said: “SESI was a foundational time for me” (Freire, 2006, p. 19).

Therefore, the main objective of this essay is to problematize the germinal basis of Paulo Freire's pedagogy based on the analysis of the work titled *Educação e atualidade brasileira* [Education and current issues in Brazil] (P. Freire, 2003). As a study methodology, we adopted bibliographical research by surveying not only primary sources of the author's works (P. Freire, 1984, 2003, 2006, 2014, 2017) but also secondary sources from commentators on his work (A. M. de A. Freire, 2001; Gadotti, 1996; Rosas, 1996), and also interpreters of Brazilian history, such as Darcy Ribeiro (Ribeiro, 1985), Anita Prestes (Prestes, 2008) and Marcelo Badaró Mattos (Mattos, 2019). It is unnecessary to record the lack of primary source documentation accessible in public digital archives for research, regarding the time Freire worked at Sesi, in the institution's own collection. Still, we used documents and texts on the same period as the book, since written documents were vilified or despised during the dictatorship.

As for the analysis of materials, we undertook a bibliographic analysis of written documents, original and primary sources, and we were also guided by the researchers' personal reflection (Salvador, 1986). Furthermore, we used qualitative criteria of representativeness and relevance of the materials in relation to the research objectives and adopted the ideas of Carlos Rodrigues Brandão (Brandão, 2003), a popular educator and contemporary of Paulo Freire. Brandão states that, in the process of systematizing, analyzing and discussing data from research on education, it is necessary to choose: “Among all of them, among so many, opt for some stronger, more striking, more powerfully descriptive passages” (p. 142).

We adopted the following Freirean postulate as a theoretical assumption: workers' struggles and movements are considered pedagogical and emancipatory of the working class (P. Freire, 1984, 2006, 2014). In the words of P. Freire (2006): “Relations between classes are a political fact that generates class knowledge” (p. 93). The central thesis of this essay is that it was precisely in the first experiences of his life as an educator that Paulo Freire constituted

aspects of a pedagogy of democracy in action; such period has been little analyzed in the literature. To discuss the aforementioned thesis, we have chosen to organize this text into two sections, in addition to the introductory part: in the first section, titled “Democracy and work”, we argue that Freire, when experiencing the education of workers at Sesi, faced the contradictions and conflicts between capital and labor, especially confronting assistentialist and populist policies undertaken by Sesi and governments. Such policies main function is to mediate and ease class antagonisms, expanding forms of political domination of labor. The second section, called “Class Lessons”, an expression used by Freire to refer to his experience learning from blue-collar workers, summarizes how he related to workers and their leaders in the processes of literacy training and education of adults: permanently dialoguing and being the pedagogical and political link between educators and workers. This part of the essay also highlights practical strategies for composing the pedagogy of democracy. In EAB such strategies are called “agir educativo” [educational action] (P. Freire, 2003, p. 84), namely: Parent-Teacher Circles and aspects of Work Self-management.

Democracy and work: Sesi and the workers’ movement from 1947 to 1957

Since 1947, when Paulo Freire took over as director of the Education and Culture Division of Sesi, in Pernambuco, Sesi had educational centers in poor areas in the various micro-regions of the state, in which the provision of literacy training and education classes for workers and their families stood out. Freire began to face the challenge of the educational work with workers and especially the struggle against illiteracy. The increase in educational opportunities for all, through the expansion of elementary education to the illiterate, was the translation of an understanding of republican and democratic ideals, mainly by left-wing currents and movements (Batista & Guedes, 2021).

Sesi was established as an employers' organization in 1946, during the Gaspar Dutra government, to be, curiously enough, funded by deductions from the workers' payroll. AM. de A. Freire (2001) assures that, upon joining the institution, Paulo Freire was clear that he would develop participatory and democratic work. P. Freire questioned the institution's assistentialist nature and the forms of class domination, traveled through Pernambuco state, talking and

learning face-to-face from blue-collar workers, growers in the sugar-cane industry and fishermen. His resignation from office in 1957 was the result of strong criticism of his democratic actions and his libertarian style of educational action (Batista & Guedes, 2021). During Freire's period at Sesi there were four different governments in the presidency of the republic, which reflected the type of State that was being consolidated in Brazil and characterized the national development of industrial capitalism (Gouvêa, 2018). The years in question (1947-1957), according to Ferreira and Delgado (2003), were the time of a short and fragile democratic experience, later broken by the 1964 civil-military coup.

In the historicity of the workers' movements of the time, it is worth mentioning the peasant leagues in Pernambuco, a movement that, in general terms, was notable for the organizations of sugarcane cutters and mill workers in the fight for agrarian reform and against latifundia and exploitation in the countryside (Giannotti, 2007). In the urban scene, confrontation and persecution of workers' unions prevailed, mainly through the anti-communist ideological struggle (Ribeiro, 1985). As for the political scene in Latin America, the Cuban socialist revolution stood out from 1957 to 1959. P. Freire (2014) refers to it a lot in what is considered his most important work, *Pedagogia do oprimido* [Pedagogy of the Oppressed], completed in 1968, during his exile in Santiago, Chile. In the book, P. Freire (2014) develops the thesis of the pedagogy of revolution with contagious enthusiasm, analyzing revolutionary processes underway at that moment in history, especially in Cuba and Bolivia (K. R. de Souza & Mendonça, 2019).

As part of the documentary survey of Sesi's accessible institutional publications, we located the text titled *O Sesi, o trabalhador e a indústria: um resgate histórico* [SESI, the worker and the industry: a historical rescue] (Sesi, 2008). It argues that the institution was created to support tackling social issues in Brazil in the post-war period, a time when certain capitalist countries adopted the so-called welfare state. At this point, it is worth considering that a welfare state along the European lines was not consolidated in Brazil, although the country had finally entered a republican phase, consolidated by the 1946 Constitution. However, forms of class domination were established through welfare strategies originating from the business bourgeoisie, which had the support of the State. Workers' demands and claims that would bring about social changes in the political and institutional scene were rejected. For Rosas (1996), workers' participation in Sesi was ultimately limited to using the benefits granted, and often with contributions coming from their low salaries, which P. Freire (2003) vehemently criticized: "We

understand less and less the hypertrophy of these welfare institutions, dangerously stretched into assistencialist institutions, which leads them to solve the problems of their clients, of the ‘assisted’ – or rather, when and if such institutions solve them – without the collaboration of the assisted. Without consulting them. Undemocratically” (p. 19).

For P. Freire (2003), part of the revenue from the fee should remain with the workers' clubs so that the workers themselves could decide on their plans and, as a practical exercise, move forward projects of workers' self-government. Mattos (2019) highlights that, in the 20th century, the nature of the forms of class domination was influenced by the assumption of the need to prevent the threat of proletarian revolution and to maintain high rates of exploitation of the workforce. In the post-war period in Brazil, there was a pattern of dependent and late capitalist development, centered on the expansion of compensatory social policies devoid of universality. It was a period of democratic transition in which social forces and class interests were in tension and continuous dispute, especially over the democracy project itself. Regarding education in this context, P. Freire (2006) stated: “Everything must be visible. Everything must be explained. The pedagogical nature of the act of governing, its formative and exemplary mission, which demands, for this very reason, irrefutable seriousness from those who govern” (p. 174).

According to P. Freire (2003), democracy was constituted as a structuring ideal for the construction of the country. He argued that the theme democracy should be adopted as content in the education programs of the Brazilian people, not only in a theoretical or speculative way, but in a practical and experiential way, in the form of democratic actions:

We have always been interested, and from the outset, in the democratic experience through education. Child and adult education. Democratic education that would therefore be a work of man with man, and never vertical work of man over man or assistencialist work of man for man, without him. (P. Freire, 2003, p. 15)

After the end of the Second World War, the expression “social peace” was widely disseminated and used by industrial sectors with the aim of class conciliation. Some workers' unions attacked the slogan, saying that the expression was nothing more than a slogan used by employers to defend their interests. In this sense, Sesi chose the motto “For Social Peace in Brazil” (Weinstein, 2000, p. 162), supporting the Social Peace Charter, drawn up by industrialists, with a strong Christian democratic discourse, which recommended cooperation

between workers and employers. According to Weinstein, the Charter – written in late 1945 and published in 1946 – was based on a set of supposed social and labor benefits to be granted by the employer sector, in exchange for the mitigation of confrontations, strikes and conflicts by workers and their organizations. The discourse of political conciliation clashed with left-wing revolutionary theories, which proposed the intensification of social contradictions.

Communist militants from workers' organizations played an important role in supporting strikes during the period, although the Partido Comunista Brasileiro (PCB [Brazilian Communist Party]) suffered profound shocks to its party structure in 1958 due to the crisis of real socialism in Eastern Europe and the denunciations of Stalin's crimes. For Prestes (2008), a striking characteristic of social movements after the end of World War II was the fight against fascism, in a national context of widespread influence of nationalist ideas, such as unrestricted support for the strengthening of the national capital industry. The conflict between capital and labor was often relegated to the background. According to Prestes, the nationalist spirit was of great magnitude and was present in the intellectual debate of the time, which intensely influenced the germination of ideas about democracy in Freire. Prestes recalls, for example, that Nélson Werneck Sodré, in an opening class at Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros (Iseb [Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies]), defended, as a historical imperative, the overcoming of the contradiction between the national bourgeoisie and the working class. In his early writings, P. Freire (2003) was clearly influenced by the ideals of national developmentalism, and Sodré (1957) was a reference in EAB. However, when Freire spent time with workers, he was aware of the serious social problems they faced, such as low salaries and the exploitation of labor. In the book *Pedagogia da esperança* [Pedagogy of Hope] (P. Freire, 2006), he argues that the category struggle has historicity and changes in time and space:

Struggle is a historical category. Therefore, it has historicity. It changes from time-space to space-time. The struggle does not deny the possibility of agreements, of settlements between the antagonistic parties. Agreements are also part of the struggle. (p. 93)

In speeches made when Sesi was established, the employer and industrial class defined democracy as the antithesis of communism and the safeguarding of individual rights, which, from the perspective of the ruling class, were based on moral principles and values such as family and the worship of God (Weinstein, 2000). The founding of Sesi, according to Weinstein, faced resistance from unions, as many workers were suspicious of the institution's objectives,

which were strongly linked to the industrial class. Sesi's identification with union representatives linked to the government also made it even more difficult for unions to accept the organization. In 1947, the Dutra government undertook an anti-communist crusade in line with the business class, replacing elected union leaders with appointed directors. Giannotti (2007) recalls that, of the 944 unions existing in the country, 400 were subject to intervention by the Ministry of Labor. In this climate of strong repression, the organization of the working class was reduced to clandestinity in the factories. However, in São Paulo the "Strike of the 300,000" occurs in 1953 and, according to Giannotti, paralyzes the city. It was the result of the (clandestine) organization of workers structured by shops, in the so-called "factory committees", an international experience of the working class (Gramsci & Bordiga, 1981). P. Freire (2006, 2014) recognized the pedagogy of organized workers and social movements of the time and stated that the tradition of struggle and resistance should always be taken as pedagogical content for problematizing reality in order to make such tradition of struggle and resistance stronger in the defense against authoritarianism. We need "democratic substantivity", he stated (P. Freire, 2006, p. 114).

In the late 1940s, Paulo Freire held the position of Superintendent of the Regional Department of Recife, the capital of Pernambuco state, and was present at meetings full of impasses and disputes, such as the I Reunião Nacional de Técnicos do Sesi [First National Meeting of Sesi Technicians]. He criticized the assistencialism present in the institution, argued that assistencialist measures "numb the political consciousness of the assisted" (P. Freire, 2003, p. 19), and called such measures *papanoelismo* [SantaClausism], a critical and pejorative allusion to institutional assistencialism. For Bonnaneti (2017), Paulo Freire was a leader in taking a stance against the adoption of certain assistencialist measures imposed by Sesi, as they harmed the autonomy of workers, placing them in a situation of submission and exploitation. It is worth highlighting that assistencialism and paternalism recognize those who make up the working class not as subjects of knowledge, but rather as inferior and unprotected: "In fact, it's about time that these institutions focused on our reality and realize the disservice they have been doing to our democratization" (P. Freire, 2003, p. 18).

Throughout EAB (P. Freire, 2003), the development of critical consciousness always appears solidly linked to the construction of the democratic personality and the "sense of historical perspective" (p. 20), so that workers see themselves as a class and as subjects of their historical time:

We never dictated a solution to the workers linked to Sesi, through their clubs... The path for our projects was always dialogue. ...And from these truly democratic discussions, between us and the workers' leaders and, on some occasions, between us and the workers' assemblies, we often came out defeated on some of the points we defended. Not only defeated, but in some cases convinced. (P. Freire, 2003, p. 23)

It is no mere coincidence that, in the year after Paulo Freire left Sesi, in 1958, he participates in II Congresso Nacional de Educação de Adultos [II National Congress of Adult Education] convened by the government of President Juscelino Kubitschek, and presents the work titled “A educação dos adultos e as populações marginais: o problema dos mocambos” [Adult education and marginal populations: the problem of mocambos] (Gadotti, 1996). In that work, Freire discusses illiteracy from the perspective of social causes and states its elimination is conditioned on the development of society and the democratic involvement of workers. The thesis he defended in that congress was of great importance in Brazil, as it differed from other works that, as a rule, adopted parameters of traditional, verticalized and authoritarian education. Furthermore, Freire strongly criticized the precariousness of schools, the inadequacy of teaching materials and argued for the need for teacher education. The idea of implementing a permanent adult education program was born in the Congress, and Plano Nacional de Alfabetização de Adultos National (PNAA [Adult Literacy Plan]) was created. PNAA was led by Paulo Freire himself during the João Goulart government and extinguished by the coup d'état in 1964 (Machado, 2021).

P. Freire (2003) formulated the bases of the pedagogy of democracy by learning from workers and social movements, in contacts with unions and their leaders. Freire recognized the collective intelligence present in the struggles and achievements of the working class. He emphasized that blue-collar workers teach not institutionalized knowledge, but knowledge for life in common. For Kohan (2019), this knowledge is linked to collective existence and organization, which are intellectual abilities that hegemonic education disqualifies or devalues. P. Freire (2003) proposes a fundamental qualitative leap in terms of worker education, namely, self-management of work. He develops the idea that private and public institutions and large and small companies should adopt procedures that result in the exercise of self-government by workers, granting autonomy at work through the “exercise of participation and criticism” (P. Freire, 2003, p. 81). According to P. Freire (2003), we need “people capable of planning and

designing. Of leading” (p. 108). The preparation of workers to be leaders who are critical and an organic part of the working class was a central concern of Freire in his early writings.

“Class lessons”: Dialogue, action and self-management of work

And who educates educators? Marx and Engels (1986), in the famous third thesis on Feuerbach, drew attention to the fact that educators themselves must be educated. This thesis certainly challenges us to rethink dominant pedagogical processes in the Western world, just as P. Freire (2003, 2014, 2017) dared to question and experiment with in his work with blue-collar workers at Sesi, whom he spent time with and learned from for almost ten years. Thus, in this section, “Class lessons” – an expression used by P. Freire himself (2006) to refer to his experience with blue-collar workers during the period he worked at Sesi –, we summarize the way he related to workers and their leaders, recognizing them as subjects of knowledge and action: “It is not possible to understand history without social classes, without their conflicting interests. Class struggle is not the driving force of history, but it is certainly one of them” (p. 91).

Freire considered workers to be educators and bearers of their own pedagogy, which took shape in the context of protest and political struggle. In EAB, P. Freire (2003) states the fundamental lesson of recognizing ongoing learning from workers:

We humbly learned a very important lesson: not all things seen as good and right from our perspective are actually so from the blue-collar workers’ perspective. And there is no other solution but to try to gain workers’ acceptance through clarification, through the possibility of experiencing the proposed thing. Never through imposition. (p. 23)

From the perspective of understanding history, there is no doubt that Freire's works are deeply connected to the problems of the Brazilian people and that both democracy and adult illiteracy were important social issues. According to Ribeiro (1985), the sixth general census carried out in Brazil in 1950 recorded a population of 51,722,000 inhabitants, including 1,256,307 factory workers and millions of illiterate people over 15 years of age. Fígaro (2015) recalls the lack of a literate and qualified workforce until the mid-1950s to meet the growing industrialization of the country. The Brazilian State was faced with the need for literacy and

professional training for more than 50% of the population. The author draws attention to the fact that, between the 1950s and 1960s, Brazil made considerable progress in reducing illiteracy, from 50.5% to 39.6% of the population. It was the first time such a sharp drop in illiteracy rates in a period of just 10 years was recorded in the country. Also according to Fígaro (2015), the probable factors in this significant drop were: redemocratization, with greater participation of the population in the country's national political life; and the implementation of adult literacy programs. Paulo Freire was a protagonist in the movement to fight illiteracy among the working masses. He defended the thesis of the close relationship between education in general, democracy and political education, and took a strong stance in favor of the poor, oppressed working class: "Literacy is more than rudimentary reading and writing. The problem for us continues, transcends the eradication of illiteracy and lies in the need for also eradicating, through education for democracy, our democratic inexperience" (P. Freire, 2003, p. 87).

Education alone does not transform the world, but transformation implies education, stated the author of *Pedagogia da esperança* [Pedagogy of Hope] (P. Freire, 2006). Thus, "it is not enough for the worker to have in mind the idea of the object he wants to produce. He must produce it" (p. 32). Still in the same sense, he argues that achieving a more critical understanding of the situation of oppression does not yet liberate the oppressed: "by revealing it, however, they take a step towards overcoming it as long as they engage in the political struggle to transform the concrete conditions in which oppression occurs" (P. Freire, 2006, p. 32). According to the author of EAB (P. Freire, 2003), adult education is one of the emphatic demands of social and political responsibility of the democracy being learned.

Certainly, the lessons grasped by Freire in educational practice and transformed into the thesis presented in EAB can be interpreted as the phase of democratic essays, in which the thinker consolidated the pedagogical basis of his theory of education in connection with important Brazilian intellectuals of the time, like those of Iseb, such as Guerreiros Ramos and Álvaro Vieira Pinto, among others (P. Freire, 2003).

In this context, we highlight Paulo Freire's lesson regarding the importance of the educational and political role of intellectuals in the political and social scene. In many passages of his first work, P. Freire (2003) cites the intellectuals of Iseb, which can be considered an important body for the Left in Brazil. (Romão, 2003). The strong philosophical and political influence of this group stands out in EAB, starting with its title – *Educação e atualidade brasileira*

[Education and current issues in Brazil] –, considering that the book *O nacionalismo na atualidade brasileira* [Nationalism in Brazilian Reality] by the then Director of Iseb, sociologist Hélio Jaguaribe, in 1958, seems to have been an important source of inspiration for Freire. Jaguaribe (1958) argues that the process of decolonization and real independence of Brazil, at that time, involved overcoming the division between developmentalist currents and those linked to the colonial order. To this end, Brazil needed new structural forms of State functioning, which should provide the bases for an education of the people which is conscious, responsible and linked to national interests.

The alliance between traditional intellectuals and the working class, emphasized by Paulo Freire in his first work, focuses on the ideological unity between the low and the high, between *the simple* and the intellectuals, as in Gramsci's (2013) sense. It was precisely in *Pedagogia da esperança* [Pedagogy of Hope] that P. Freire (2006) reported, in an unprecedented way, the debates he had with Italian workers who wanted to clarify theoretical and practical aspects of the experience of workers' struggle in relation to his works. He names the resistance of these workers *pedagogical-union positions*. During this period, Freire was in exile in the late 1960s, a time when the so-called “Italian Workers’ Movement” (Oddone et al., 1986) was being created. And, in fact, Freire’s pedagogy spread and influenced libertarian educators and workers all over the world.

In his early writings, P. Freire (2003) coined key concepts that are still relevant today and that were not taken up again in his subsequent works, such as “democratic responsibility” (p. 16) and “sense of historical perspective” (p. 20). Such key-concepts regain originality today in the face of the growth of the fascist right in Brazil and in the world. The author states:

We were increasingly convinced yesterday and we are convinced today that Brazilian men must become aware of their social and political responsibility, since this responsibility exists. Living that responsibility. Participating. Acting. ...The greatest danger lies in the violence of the anti-dialogue [of antidemocratic processes]. (P. Freire, 2003, p. 16)

For P. Freire (2003), historical responsibility refers to the commitment to carry out pedagogical dialogue close to workers in the sense of including them, individually and collectively, in the debate, creating circumstances capable of protecting workers from some dangers of the massification of education. V. E. B. de Souza & Barbosa (2021) assert that Freire, during the period he remained at Sesi, sought to understand the working class through their life

experiences, needs and language, fulfilling his role as an educator for reality and current issues. Thus, he led the creation of discussion groups on the relationship between workers' families and school. In EAB (P. Freire, 2003) the author strongly criticizes rigid and authoritarian patriarchal families who deny freedom and dialogue:

Hence, all activities with families that may result in a review of their attitudes towards their children seem to us to be not only important but also urgent. A review of their attitudes that places them in a democratic leadership position in which the opportunities for children to participate in the family's destiny increasingly expand. (p. 45)

True democracy rests on the foundations of public consciousness and common interest, stated P. Freire (2003, 2006). He categorically defended the thesis of the need for education through dialogue in participatory activities with groups of workers in which they are encouraged to exercise critical reflection. Constitutive aspects of the theory of workers' education were used years later, in the presentation of the adult literacy method (P. Freire, 2014), as components of democracy promotion. In this sense, in EAB the following aspects are worth highlighting: the educational actions inspired by pedagogical principles that recommended bringing teaching closer to life problems; and the adoption of participatory and democratic strategies in institution management, such as Parent-Teacher Circles and self-management of work. Therefore, it is also in his early writings that P. Freire (2003) emphasizes forms of concrete educational actions, aspects of the pedagogy of democracy, which he names “Agir educativo” [Educational action] (p. 84).

For P. Freire (2003), educational action is a process for political education, collective consciousness and social action. This education begins in primary school, which must also be understood as an institution that is part of a local culture. Freire argues that every school should adopt a schedule of more than 4 hours a day, with qualified teachers who are familiar with local, regional and national problems and who, above all, encourage “a taste for research” (2003, p. 88). Furthermore, the creation of conditions to stimulate community and group spirit should be encouraged and practices with individualistic characteristics should be avoided. According to P. Freire (2003), these spaces must be true “Work Communities” (p. 85). For the author, education must be, above all, the creation of new democratic habits and mental dispositions, replacing old habits of passivity with experiences of participation, solidarity and collaboration.

As for Parent-Teacher Circles, they were established as spaces for speaking, listening and discussion. Such circles developed the following democratic precept: social participation is a citizenship right, to the extent that this practice problematizes educational reality and the construction of ways to overcome problems. Batista and Guedes (2021) emphasize that democracy is a set of principles and practices that require a learning process which takes place through exercise with others. Therefore, the authors highlight the importance of Parent-Teacher Circles as significant political and pedagogical spaces for the mobilization and construction of citizenship. Also according to Batista and Guedes (2021), these circles were tools for teacher education which place teachers as subjects of practice. Such practice is learned together with teaching, makes their knowledge an object of reflection and transformation and thus fosters exercising educational action as a liberating praxis in the context of work. Batista and Guedes (2021) state that this is

a formative process that goes beyond the school walls and is fully experienced with parents, adults who are often on the margins of rights and citizenship, and who did not have the opportunity to study at the regular age. Parents experienced a formative process that carried the possibility of contributing to the organization of information and experience acquired by adults. (p. 208)

Parent-Teacher Circles are strategies for creating “Family associations within each school” (P. Freire, 2003, p. 94). In this sense, the author of EAB vehemently defends that, rather than large-conference approaches, there should be group discussion approaches. P. Freire (2003) emphasizes that, since learning about democracy is existential, it should be carried out in small groups previously agreed upon, “whose theme will also be previously known to both parties that will discuss it” (p. 94). For Machado (2021), Freirean Parent-Teacher Circles allow us to think epistemologically and politically about school pedagogical practices in such a way as to enable them to become, even today, strategies for democracy in public education.

Certainly, the Sesi period allowed Paulo Freire to observe, in practice, hierarchical relationships that devalued workers' knowledge. Thus, he realized that the educational action in institutions, whether public or private, should be based on self-government of work, which is interpreted here as a pedagogical precept of the Freirean method in his early writings. According to Rosas (2003), Paulo Freire experienced the phase of Sesi management in an unusual way, given that there was no talk of *co-management* at the time. He developed an innovative practice of

participatory management – “at SESI, Paulo Freire began the experience of *managing with*, going beyond the *managing for*” (Rosas, 2003, p. LX).

Additionally, V. E. B. de Souza and Barbosa (2021) state that Freire's practice as a manager at Sesi had several positive consequences in the history of education, based on emphasis on dialogue and listening, as well as on the recognition and encouragement of the formation of class consciousness. The authors recall that from 1989 to 1991 Freire served as Secretary of Education in Sao Paulo state. He was secretary to the first female mayor of São Paulo city, Luiza Erundina de Souza. According to the authors, Freire valued democratic leadership, in defense of social transformation that allows governing through popular councils.

Paulo Freire developed the theme of self-government as an expression of democracy in national institutions. For P. Freire (2003), “there is no self-government without dialogue-action” (p. 65). He states that we have historically lacked experiences of popular participation in the public sphere, obstacles raised by the policy of submission, exclusion and interference since the period of the colonization of Brazil. Thus, for P. Freire (2003), “before being a political form, democracy is a way of life” (p. 76). Freire contrasted the exercise of self-government and critical participation of blue-collar workers with the paternalism present in institutions; the privileged spaces for pedagogical action should be the workplaces of workers themselves.

In EAB, Freire idealized the structuring of democracy through local self-government in which educational institutions and especially schools are the center of the organization and the debate about general problems and the specific ones of their community by means of “parliamentarization” (p. 106) and the formation of “primary groups” (p. 95):

Imagine what would result from a democratic, self-governing experience in any area, even a large city, where a whole chain of primary, lower and upper secondary schools with the elaboration of the university, linked to each other... linked to factories. Linked to clubs. (P. Freire, 2003, p. 95)

Therefore, although in EAB P. Freire (2003) does not directly cite theorists in the field of socialist education, there is a clear relationship between the precepts of his early writings and the foundations of Pistrak's (2018) pedagogy, for example. In the book *Fundamentos da Escola do Trabalho* [Fundamentals of the School of Work], in the same way as Freire, Pistrak (2018) redefines the role of the Soviet school in preparing workers capable of actively participating, transforming the school not only towards the interests of the working class but also into an active basis for

local collective life. Furthermore, Pistrak highlights a significant aspect that should be at the basis of the school of work, which consists precisely in the connection between education and current issues. Thus, the fundamental task of the school is to study the present, master it, penetrate it, and criticize the past, in the sense not only of fighting against this past, but also of creating and acting to transform the present with a view to the future. K. R. de Souza (2022) assures that – by highlighting, in EAB, the study of current issues based on common problems related to the lives of workers, their work, neighborhood and city through, above all, dialogue and social participation – Freire’s aim was for workers to become subjects of the educational process and responsible for the course of history.

In his first work, P. Freire (2003) also highlights fundamental themes – still relevant today – for overcoming authoritarianism, such as the contempt for manual labor, which, according to the author, is related to the disdain for work done by artisans and slaves in our history, deeply marked by colonization. Such history must be overcome. Undoubtedly, P. Freire (2003) establishes dialogue and action as the pedagogical foundation of democratic processes in his early writings: “An education through dialogue. An education through participation... which develops critical thinking” (p. 51). Paulo Freire stated that dialogue does not flourish under bossiness, impositions, verticalized relationships, or paternalism. Based on this understanding, he emphasizes that “mutism is worse than illness” (P. Freire, 2003, p. 61), as “Brazil was born and grew without the experience of dialogue” (P. Freire, 2003, p. 61). He draws attention to the fact that it is precisely in massification that alienation takes on large and profound proportions, which can lead to “fanaticization” (P. Freire, 2003, p. 37).

Finally, we note that the main thesis that resonates in EAB is that the fundamental historical contradiction of the Brazilian people is related their “democratic inexperience” (P. Freire, 2003, p. 12). Consequently, there is a need for immersion in public life, which begins with democratic processes in the working class education in school life. To conclude, we offer the reader a reflection made by P. Freire himself (2003) in EAB, which – given the problems we face in rebuilding democracy and education in Brazil – seems to have been written for today:

Never in Brazil have we had more favorable conditions for a review of our education, in terms of authenticity, than today, despite all the contradictions that have characterized our current times. One of the tasks of the education that we need is to reduce and even overcome some of the antinomies of our current times. (p. 57)

Final Thoughts

We understand that the book *Educação e atualidade brasileira* (EAB) is an important historical reference on education for the working class and that it reminds us of the structural problems of worker education even today. Thus, we have briefly highlighted the following political and pedagogical categories throughout the text, which represent Freire's educational contribution in his early writings: dialogue, historicity, class struggle, education for democracy and for action, social and political responsibility, and self-government.

Without a doubt, the history of education for adult workers in Brazil is directly linked to Paulo Freire, but there are few studies that focus on recognizing an original pedagogy aimed at the working class. We found that the germinal basis of the core of Freirean pedagogical ideas is the practice of democracy with workers. Although Freire does not exactly discuss the concept of democracy, he points to social participation as opposed to the merely representative characteristic of the democratic process.

Freire had a learning career with the working class that culminated in his resignation from Sesi – he took on other jobs, such as extension work at Universidade de Recife, and joined the Movimento de Cultura Popular (MCP - [Popular Culture Movement]). He was always linked to the development of education for adult workers.

In the end, we verified that the period when Freire worked at Sesi – here interpreted as the phase of the *pedagogy of democracy* – was a time of gestation of and experimentation with democratic educational practices with workers.

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Notes

Submission data:

Submitted for evaluation on December 14, 2023; accepted for publication on May 19, 2024.

Corresponding author:

Souza, Katia Reis - FIOCRUZ - Escola Nacional de Saúde Pública, Rua Leopoldo Bulhões n. 1480, Manguinhos, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, 21040-900, Brasil.

Authors' contributions:

Santos, Maria Blandina Marques - Conceptualization (Support), Formal analysis (Support), Research (Support), Validation (Support), Writing, review and editing (Support).

Souza, Katia Reis - Conceptualization (Lead), Formal analysis (Lead), Research (Lead), Validation (Lead), Writing, review and editing (Lead).

Support and Funding:

Programa de Saúde Pública da Escola Nacional de Saúde Pública Sergio Arouca (Ensp /Fiocruz), por meio de recursos Capes Proex Nº: 1673/2024 / 88881.974063/2024-01.

Copy Editing services:

Portuguese version - Copy editing and standardization of citations and bibliographical references (7th. Edition APA): Andréa de Freitas Ianni <andreaianni1@gmail.com>

English Version: Ana Paula C. Renesto <anapaularenesto@gmail.com>

Responsible editors:

Associate Editor: Adriana Varani <<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7480-4998>>

Editor-in-Chief: Chantal Victória Medaets <<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7834-3834>>