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Inclusive pedagogical practices: how Freire's ideas can support minority education

Práticas pedagógicas inclusivas: como as ideias de Freire podem ajudar na educação de minorias

Prácticas pedagógicas inclusivas: cómo las ideas de Freire pueden contribuir a la educación de las minorías

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Abstract:
This article discusses the relevance of inclusive pedagogical practices in the face of growing diversity and inequality in schools, emphasizing the need to guarantee access, continued attendance, and learning for historically marginalized groups. In view of traditional and exclusionary methods that still persist in schools, Paulo Freire's work is presented as a fundamental reference for democratic and liberating education. Freirean thought, grounded in dialogue, problem-posing, and appreciation of students' realities and cultures, emerges as a path to overcome standardized teaching. Finally, the article proposes to investigate how Freire's ideas can underpin contemporary teaching practices that promote the genuine inclusion of minorities.

Keywords:
inclusive pedagogical practices; liberating education; dialogue; critical consciousness.

Resumo:
O artigo aborda a relevância das práticas pedagógicas inclusivas frente à crescente diversidade e desigualdade no ambiente escolar, destacando a necessidade de garantir o acesso, a permanência e a aprendizagem de grupos historicamente marginalizados. Diante de métodos tradicionais e excludentes que ainda persistem nas escolas, a obra de Paulo Freire é apresentada como uma referência fundamental para uma educação democrática e libertadora. O pensamento freiriano, pautado no diálogo, na problematização e na valorização da realidade e cultura dos estudantes, surge como um caminho para superar a padronização do ensino. Por fim, o artigo propõe investigar de que maneira as ideias de Freire podem fundamentar práticas de ensino contemporâneas que promovam a inclusão real das minorias.

Palavras-chave:
práticas pedagógicas inclusivas; educação libertadora; diálogo; conscientização.

Resumen:
El artículo aborda la relevancia de las prácticas pedagógicas inclusivas ante la creciente diversidad y desigualdad en el entorno escolar, destacando la necesidad de garantizar el acceso, la permanencia y el aprendizaje de grupos históricamente marginados. Frente a los métodos tradicionales y excluyentes que aún persisten en las escuelas, la obra de Paulo Freire se presenta como una referencia fundamental para una educación democrática y liberadora. El pensamiento freireano, basado en el diálogo, la problematización y la valoración de la realidad y la cultura de los estudiantes, surge como un camino para superar la estandarización de la enseñanza. Por último, el artículo propone investigar de qué manera las ideas de Freire pueden fundamentar prácticas docentes contemporáneas que promuevan la inclusión real de las minorías.

Palabras clave:
prácticas pedagógicas inclusivas; educación liberadora; diálogo; concientización.

1. Introduction

The discussion of inclusive pedagogical practices has become prominent in current educational debate, mainly because of growing diversity in schools. In contexts marked by social, cultural, ethnic, gender, physical, and cognitive inequalities, schools must guarantee access, attendance, and meaningful learning for all students. In this sense, the inclusion of minorities—understood here as groups with a history of marginalization or vulnerability—requires a review of pedagogical concepts, methods, and attitudes in order to overcome exclusionary practices that still exist in school life.

Inclusive pedagogical practices are linked to the need to provide democratic, critical, and liberating education. Paulo Freire's thought is therefore an important reference. By supporting dialogical, problem-posing education focused on students' realities, Freire proposes a pedagogical practice committed to social change and to valuing those who historically have not had a voice.

Although developed in a different period, his ideas remain relevant to the obstacles schools face in serving minorities. Despite advances in inclusion policies, some schools still use old practices focused on delivering content and standardizing students, which may intensify exclusion. It is therefore necessary to consider how Freire's ideas—dialogue, critical consciousness, respect for students' cultures, and education as a tool for freedom—can help build pedagogical practices that truly include everyone.

From this perspective, this study seeks to answer the following question: How can Paulo Freire's ideas help develop inclusive teaching practices aimed at minority education in contemporary schools? Its main objective is to analyze how Paulo Freire's theoretical foundations can underpin and improve teaching practices that include everyone in minority education.

The specific objectives are: (1) to identify the pillars of Freire's thought concerning inclusion, dialogue, critical consciousness, and appreciation of students' cultures; and (2) to analyze how these ideas can support educational practices in today's schools, with a focus on promoting equality and the active participation of minorities.

The importance of this study lies in the need to reconsider teaching in view of the challenges of diversity and inclusion. By returning to Paulo Freire's thought, it seeks to assist in preparing teachers who are more sensitive to differences and focused on providing a school

that understands and values the variety of experiences and knowledge. It is expected to contribute to the academic debate on inclusion by providing theoretical information to guide more democratic and innovative pedagogical practices.

This is a qualitative study developed through a literature review. Paulo Freire's works were analyzed, as were more recent studies on inclusive education and pedagogical approaches aimed at minorities. The intention is to establish a dialogue between Freire's thought and the demands of today's school environment in order to understand the opportunities and limitations involved in using his ideas to promote genuinely inclusive education.

2. Paulo Freire: dialogue, critical consciousness, and appreciation of the individual

Paulo Freire's works establish theoretical foundations that connect directly with the development of inclusive pedagogical approaches. By questioning the banking model of education, which focuses on the one-way transmission of information, Freire (1996) proposes an education based on dialogue, in which teachers and students collaborate in constructing knowledge through a horizontal relationship. In this context, dialogue goes beyond a simple teaching technique and becomes an ethical and political attitude that recognizes the other as a holder of knowledge.

The importance assigned to students' experience is another element of Freire's thought (1987). For him, understanding the world precedes literacy, indicating that the educational process must begin with individuals' concrete realities and take their cultural, social, and historical contexts into account. This view is essential when addressing minority education because it challenges the logic of uniformity and recognizes diversity as a fundamental component of learning.

Critical consciousness is the process through which individuals understand their own reality critically and identify themselves as agents of change. According to Freire (1979), education must foster critical thinking, overcome passive attitudes, and encourage individuals' active participation in transforming society. In situations of exclusion, this dimension becomes even more important because it helps strengthen groups that have been marginalized throughout history.

In addition to the points already discussed, Freire (1996) emphasizes that dialogue is closely linked to love, humility, and commitment to human dignity. These ethical principles underpin a teaching practice that sees each student as someone who is always growing and developing. This completely changes how students are understood, because they cannot be

reduced to labels, diagnoses, or stigmas—something that unfortunately often happens to students who belong to social or ethnic minorities or who have disabilities.

In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire (1987) emphasizes that oppression affects both the oppressed person and the oppressor. He believes education must be liberating and enable people to view critically the structures that create inequality. This is especially important in schools, where prejudice and discrimination may be transmitted almost imperceptibly through what is taught, standardized tests, or the low expectations some teachers hold for certain groups. Liberating education, as Freire advocates, must create conditions for students to perceive and question these injustices.

According to Freire (1979), critical consciousness does not arise in isolation but results from a planned educational process, particularly through practices that question the diverse realities found in schools. Inclusive pedagogical practices inspired by Freire therefore do more than change what is taught; they also create spaces where people can speak, listen, and think critically. By valuing popular knowledge and students' life experiences, educators help strengthen the self-esteem and cultural identity of historically silenced groups and encourage their active participation at school. Freire's principles thus provide a consistent theoretical basis for inclusive pedagogical practices by defending education centered on respect, dialogue, and individual autonomy.

Reflection on Freirean foundations can be deepened in light of Brazil's National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), created in 2017. One of the document's general competencies is the ability to exercise empathy, dialogue, cooperation, and respect for differences. This is important because students need to learn to value diverse forms of knowledge and cultural experience. The BNCC approaches the Freirean perspective by recognizing that the educational process must consider students as whole persons and respect their contexts and identities.

Freirean foundations emphasize the importance of considering students active subjects in the learning process. The BNCC (Brazil, 2017) also emphasizes this by proposing that students communicate effectively and respectfully while considering differences and similarities among people. This is fundamental to building a fairer and more equal society. The BNCC is therefore an important document for deepening reflection on Freirean foundations because it offers a relevant perspective on considering students as whole persons and valuing diverse forms of knowledge and cultural experience.

Freirean foundations and the BNCC share the idea that education should respect differences and promote cooperation and dialogue. This guidance aligns with Freire's (1996)

claim that teaching requires respect for students' knowledge. It shows that such respect is fundamental to teaching because it recognizes that students already possess valuable knowledge and experiences. Teaching with respect for students' knowledge, as Freire argued, is therefore essential to quality education.

Brazil's National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDB; Brazil, 1996) guarantees important principles, including equal conditions for entering and remaining in school and respect for freedom and tolerance. These principles align with Freire's (1979) idea that education should be a practice of freedom: schools should help form critical citizens committed to society. The LDB is fundamental to making this happen. The connection between Freire and educational legislation shows that valuing the individual is not merely a pedagogical choice but an ethical and normative imperative.

When the BNCC (Brazil, 2017) guides the development of competencies related to responsibility, citizenship, and critical thinking, it reinforces the importance of pedagogical practices that promote students' critical consciousness and active participation. The Freirean perspective therefore helps put the legal principles of equity and respect for diversity into practice in everyday school life, particularly in minority education.

If an elementary-school class welcomes a new student from another country who does not yet speak Portuguese well, the teacher can do something valuable instead of treating the language difficulty as a problem. The teacher can organize discussion circles in which the student shares aspects of their culture, native language, and life experiences.

In this context, the class is encouraged to compare expressions, clothing, and stories, and together they construct knowledge. This applies the principle that differences should be seen as learning opportunities rather than obstacles. The teacher shows that diversity is a form of wealth and that everyone can learn from one another. Instead of being regarded as someone without knowledge, the student is recognized as having important things to share. Dialogue becomes a way to include everyone and increase awareness of cultural differences in the classroom.

3. Challenges and prospects for inclusive education in contemporary schools

Firmly incorporating inclusive education as a guiding principle of educational policy is an important step toward recognizing every individual's right to education. Influential global documents such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) maintain that educational

institutions must welcome all young people, regardless of physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other characteristics.

In Brazil, the National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education (Brazil, 2008) affirms the urgent need to reform school practices to ensure access, participation, and learning for students who are the focus of special education. However, as Mantoan (2003) and Mittler (2003) emphasize, inclusion goes beyond merely enrolling students in mainstream schools; it requires profound changes in structures, curricula, and attitudes.

Mantoan (2003) states that inclusion entails overcoming exclusionary models and reassessing teaching concepts that prioritize uniformity, whereas Mittler (2003) argues that developing inclusive education systems requires the joint engagement of the school community, including administrators, educators, and students' families.

Despite legal progress, challenges remain in teacher training, curriculum adaptation, and cultural resistance within schools. In this context, dialogue with Paulo Freire's pedagogical thought is relevant because it offers elements for reimagining teaching practice based on the appreciation of plurality and students' dynamic participation.

Current challenges in inclusive education are being examined through a critical pedagogy that revisits and updates Freire's ideas in light of new social, political, and cultural configurations. Scholars such as Apple (2017) warn that educational reforms based on neoliberal ideas tend to reinforce standardized curricula, large-scale assessments, and teacher accountability. This may conflict with the principles of inclusion because it prioritizes measurable performance instead of considering differences among students.

Inclusive education is a challenge that must be addressed carefully to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to learn and develop, regardless of their differences. Paulo Freire's perspective offers a different view by showing that education is a political and ethical practice committed to social justice. It reminds us that education can be a powerful tool for changing society and making it fairer. According to Freire, education should help people understand the world around them, become more aware of social problems, and inspire them to pursue social justice and work toward a more equal society.

Giroux (2011) discusses contemporary critical pedagogy and argues that schools must be places where people can resist exclusion based on gender, race, social class, and disability. Inspired by Freire, Giroux believes students must learn to think critically to understand how inequalities are created and work together to change them. Inclusion is therefore a way of teaching that forms part of a broader plan to make society fairer and more democratic.

In Brazil, authors such as Frigotto (2010) identify contradictions between the discourse of including everyone and the actual conditions of public schools, which face problems such as underinvestment, regional inequalities, and precarious conditions. Following Freire's thought, it is important to remember that no practice can truly change people's lives unless it considers the historical and social conditions in which they live. This encourages belief in the possibility of acting to transform reality.

Another important point is critical interculturality, discussed by Candau in more recent works such as her 2012 study. She emphasizes that including people from different backgrounds requires recognition and respect for each person's identities and differences, which must also form part of the curriculum. This approach extends Freire's ideas by combining dialogue, cultural diversity, and human rights. It also advocates pedagogical practices that confront entrenched prejudices and promote fairer relationships in everyday school life, helping to build a more equitable environment for everyone.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2019) proposed an interesting idea called the ‘ecology of knowledges.’ It contributes to an important debate about the close relationship between social justice and cognitive justice. In other words, Santos believes these two forms of justice are intimately connected. This aligns with Freire's ideas, which value historically marginalized knowledge and question hierarchies among different types of knowledge.

This perspective is very important in inclusive education. Students who belong to minorities should not merely be included in the dominant curriculum; their own cultural repertoires should also be recognized and valued as a fundamental part of education. This is essential to creating a fairer and more equitable learning environment. Santos's ecology of knowledges and Freire's ideas remind us that cognitive justice is crucial to social justice and that education should be a space where all forms of knowledge are respected and valued.

Contemporary challenges in inclusive education therefore involve not only overcoming physical or pedagogical barriers but also transforming the symbolic and political structures that produce exclusion. Perspectives grounded in Freirean ideas and updated by critical-pedagogy and intercultural-studies scholars indicate that building a genuinely inclusive school depends on the coordination of public policies, critical teacher education, and an ethical commitment to the radical democratization of education.

If a school enrolls students with disabilities but continues to use rigid, unchanging assessment practices, its pedagogical team may adopt a more critical view and begin holding meetings to discuss and reflect on the curriculum and student assessment. Teachers can use different approaches, including group work, process-based assessment, and accessible

resources. They understand that treating everyone equally does not mean treating everyone identically, but giving each student the appropriate conditions to learn as well as possible. Change does not occur without effort, but it shows that inclusion requires structural review and cultural change at school.

4. Connecting Freirean pedagogy with inclusive pedagogical practices

The connection between Paulo Freire's ideas and inclusive education reveals significant points of convergence. Both recognize students as protagonists in the learning process and advocate schools committed to social justice. For Freire (1996), teaching means respecting students' knowledge, a principle aligned with an inclusive vision that values differences.

Regarding education and cultural diversity, Candau (2008) emphasizes that schools should adopt intercultural practices that encourage recognition and dialogue among different identities. This approach connects with Freire's thought by highlighting listening and the collective construction of knowledge. Critical pedagogy inspired by Freire views education as a political practice aimed at transforming structures that generate inequality (Giroux, 1987). From this perspective, inclusive pedagogical practices go beyond technical adaptations; they involve an ethical stance toward inequalities affecting minorities.

Integrating Freirean principles into pedagogical practices can thus help create more democratic school environments in which diversity is seen as educational potential rather than an obstacle. The combination of dialogue, critical consciousness, and appreciation of students' cultures strengthens an idea of inclusion that goes beyond access to promote participation, belonging, and emancipation.

Paulo Freire's pedagogy, the BNCC, and Brazilian education laws work together to create a comprehensive educational project that values inclusion. The BNCC (Brazil, 2017) seeks to develop skills such as using information technology, presenting arguments, developing self-knowledge, and respecting differences. These skills can be taught through dialogue and questioning inspired by Freire. When students work together to learn, they collectively construct knowledge and develop as people. This is important to building a fairer and more equal society in which everyone has the opportunity to learn and grow.

Inclusion is a comprehensive educational project that seeks to prepare students to live in a diverse and complex world where they must communicate, solve problems, and work as a team. By following Freire's principles and the BNCC, educators can create a more dynamic, engaging, and effective learning environment. Through knowledge and active listening,

teachers promote both content learning and stronger democratic participation. Teachers who genuinely listen to students and share knowledge effectively help create a more equal and participatory environment.

Knowledge is a primary condition for people to express themselves clearly and assertively, while active listening allows everyone to be heard and understood. Teachers thus play an important role in forming critical and active citizens capable of contributing to a fairer and more democratic society. Knowledge and active listening are therefore essential to strengthening democratic participation.

Brazil's Inclusion Law, enacted in 2015, determines that the education system must provide appropriate conditions for access, continued attendance, participation, and learning. Inclusion therefore goes beyond simply enrolling students. This view aligns with Freire's idea that education should be a tool for humanizing and emancipating people, ensuring that everyone can express themselves and participate actively at school. Giroux (1987) also emphasized that schools can be sites of resistance and transformation when they adopt a critical and reflective approach. The Inclusion Law and the ideas of Freire and Giroux converge on the importance of education that values everyone's participation and promotes social transformation.

Considering Candau's (2008) contributions, the promotion of intercultural education is supported by the BNCC (Brazil, 2017) and current legislation, particularly because they recognize the ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity of Brazilian society. Law No. 10,639 of 2003, which made the teaching of Afro-Brazilian History and Culture mandatory, and Law No. 11,645 of 2008, which included Indigenous themes, demonstrate a legal commitment to valuing minorities and overcoming their historical invisibility.

The integration of Freirean thought and legal foundations thus strengthens the construction of inclusive pedagogical practices aligned with national standards. By promoting dialogue, critical thinking, and respect for differences, educators put constitutional and curricular principles into practice and help build a school that recognizes diversity as constitutive of human development and democracy.

Imagine a project that combines areas such as History, Portuguese Language, and Arts to explore cultural diversity. The teacher can ask students to research their family and community roots and relate their findings to the BNCC and the laws valuing Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous history. Throughout the project, minority students can share their stories, create texts and artistic presentations, and participate in critical debates. This would enrich learning and provide a platform for these students to express themselves and be heard. The practice

integrates curriculum, legislation, and Freirean pedagogy, promoting content learning, recognition, belonging, and democratic participation.

5. Conclusions

The analysis developed in this study made it possible to understand how Paulo Freire's ideas can help create pedagogical practices that include everyone. His ideas provide ethical, political, and methodological foundations centered on dialogue, critical consciousness, and valuing people's cultures, thereby helping to build a democratic school in which everyone participates and attention is given to minorities.

Considering the objectives established, Freire's ideas are especially important because they emphasize dialogue, critical consciousness, and recognition of students as participants in history. These ideas are fundamental to including everyone because they change how education is understood: they help abandon the assumption that everyone must be the same and reject the treatment of education as the mere deposit of knowledge into students as though they were bank accounts.

Education is still conducted in this manner in many places. Moreover, these ideas can help create more effective teaching practices today when combined with the BNCC and Brazil's legal framework for education. It is therefore possible to promote equality, active participation, and a sense of belonging among minority students.

It can therefore be concluded that inclusion, in light of Freirean thought, concerns the guarantee of access to school and entails transforming pedagogical relationships, reviewing curricula, and committing to social justice. Inclusive education must be understood as a political-pedagogical project that recognizes diversity as educational wealth and as a constitutive condition of democracy. Freire's perspective remains current and necessary in the face of contemporary challenges because it reaffirms education as an act of hope and social responsibility. Strengthening inclusive pedagogical practices inspired by Freire therefore means investing in a school that welcomes differences, learns from them, and transforms itself through them.

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