

Anísio Teixeira and the “right to education” – ideas that remember Dewey and inspire Freire^{1 2 3}

Anísio Teixeira e o “direito à educação” – ideias que evocam Dewey e inspiram Freire

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Abstract

This article deals centrally with the issue of the right to education, with the main author Anísio Teixeira, who took on the problem of defining inequalities in the social roles historically attributed to Brazilians, resulting in privileges. In this phenomenal order, education is committed to mirroring this state of injustice, a fact that could be relaxed by strengthening the quality of public school promoted by a renewing pedagogy. In John Dewey, Teixeira was inspired by the ideas of progressivism and encouraged to promote the necessary transformations from an archaic society to another modernizer. Paulo Freire dealt with similar problems, but suggested a pedagogy that could free individuals from oppressive conditions, whose school mechanism of banking education contributed to the achievement of domination. We saw connections between these authors who intended to boost development through innovative pedagogical actions. We based on the works of these intellectuals that allowed discussion, deepening and connections between the right to education and democracy.

Keywords: Right to education, Anísio Teixeira, John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Philosophy of education

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Resumo

Este artigo trata centralmente da questão do direito à educação, tendo como autor principal Anísio Teixeira, que tomou para si o problema das desigualdades definidoras dos papéis sociais atribuídos historicamente aos brasileiros, resultando em privilégios. Nesse ordenamento fenomênico, a educação se encontra comprometida com o espelhamento desse estado de injustiça, fato que poderia ser desconstruído pelo fortalecimento da escola pública e de qualidade, promovida por uma pedagogia renovadora. A partir de John Dewey, Teixeira viu-se inspirado pelas ideias do progressivismo, animando-se para promover as transformações necessárias para a passagem de uma sociedade arcaica para outra modernizadora. Paulo Freire ocupou-se de problemas semelhantes, mas sugeriu uma pedagogia que pudesse libertar os indivíduos das condições opressivas, cujo mecanismo escolar da educação bancária contribuía para a realização da dominação. Vendo conexões entre esses autores, que pretenderam impulsionar o desenvolvimento por ações pedagógicas inovadoras, fundamentamo-nos nas obras desses intelectuais que permitiram a discussão, o aprofundamento e as conexões entre o direito à educação e a democracia.

Palavras-chave: *Direito à educação, Anísio Teixeira, John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Filosofia da educação*

Introduction

Perhaps the proposal to put the question of the “right to education” again, bravely advocated for by a classic author of our philosophical-educational culture, may seem intriguing, to whom we offer the end of the thread, centralizing it and linking it to a discussion with the views of other thinkers, whose connections, however, are not always very evident. It is understood, in fact, that this is a topic to be recovered in our discussions, given the existence of other perspectives in progress, especially in political and academic debates. However, we begin questioning: approaching such a theme would be insisting on an already-explored defense and, who knows, even exhausted in its arguments? It would be a mere attempt to retrace an intellectual path, following in the footsteps of some masters, to convince readers that there are still rights to be conquered, contrary to those who mistakenly think that this would have been a stage already won by the public policies and institutional actions? Or is justification for the topic’s treatment sustained due to the risks these rights are at the mercy of today?

At first glance, the phrase “right to education” suggests the right of everyone to *schooling* that offers the necessary resources to the immature to understand the reality in the process of their development and, also, to insert themselves healthily in the world. Subliminally, the expression also refers to individuals requiring *care* to develop and enjoy the opportunities for their benefit and that of society. It is not appropriate for their growth to be left at the mercy of the occasional spontaneity of ordinary, routine life.

I believe that the proposal to deal with the subject is not part of an anachronistic panorama and that it will be worth bringing up the ideas that I am going to present here so that, at the end of the text, the situation in which we find ourselves and our arguments, enriched by the multiple aspects of the problem shown and explored by the thinkers selected for this purpose.

The discussion about the “right to education” gains strength in the context of the thinking of Anísio Teixeira (1968, 1969, 1971), who was heavily fed by the intellectual insights of John Dewey (1952, 1959, 1974), but who, in turn, was one of the great inspirations of the great Brazilian master Paulo Freire (1978, 1983, 1997, 2000, 2001). It is evident that these thinkers lived in different moments, times, and spaces which, in turn, made possible different focal points, interpretations, and emphases around a given situation, with their most glaring problems carefully developed in their extensive works. It is noted that this idea’s treatment is part of a current of debates in which we can observe links and concerns regarding democracy since the notion of the “right to education” presents itself, even if implicitly, as one of the necessary elements to the realization of such a political regime.

However, which education should we advocate for as a right? Here is another difficulty often overlooked.

Dewey and Teixeira move from *industrialism*, *science*, and *technology* associated with elements such as *new knowledge*, *urbanization*, *the modern world*, and other factors concerning the developmental spirit that breaks with the traditional model of the time and that, in a *new scenario* – typical of the first half of the 20th century, mainly –, triggers movements, giving rise to a *new mentality* that produces demands, calls for changes, training requirements, more flexible dispositions, among others. Education, then, is called upon to compose the new panorama in a more contemporary way with the then-new social, political, and cultural moment that is being established. Freire (2001), in another moment and national context,

highlights the same factors⁴, but advances with his criticism of the oppressive mechanisms that can deepen inequality, favoring manipulation and inhibiting the desired transformations. His liberating educational proposal refers to the state of domination, which needs to be overcome by awareness, which requires an effectively transforming *praxis*. Eager for reaction to the oppressive state, he tells us: “Education is becoming, more and more, among us, in almost all centers, a popular demand – another system of national anti-quietism” (Freire, 2001, p. 41). This anti-quietism refers to the resistance to the impediment of people’s voice in the face of national issues and the issues of each one as an individual and social entity, since the theft of the word and its immediate product, illiteracy, make the effective participation of the subject in the social life and its understanding of reality, resulting in serious dehumanizing consequences.

Thus, moved by an analytical, theoretical spirit and mining of the writings of the authors placed here on the agenda, we build links, from the idea of *human rights*, with the education thought by the three authors in the context of democracy that they want to conquer, improve, and see accomplished.

First nexuses

The work *Educação é um direito* (1968), by Teixeira, first published in 1967 and which, according to the author himself, is paired with another book, also originated from his work in 1957, entitled *Educação não é privilégio* (1971), is well known. This was consulted by Freire, among others from Teixeira, when he was elaborating *Educação e atualidade brasileira* (2001). *En passant*, it should be said that, in this book, Freire also resorts to *Democracy and education* (1952), originally published in 1916 by Dewey, the well-known inspirer of the Bahian author.

As already pointed out, Brazilian authors seem to agree on the characteristic features of Brazilian society in the 1950s and 1960s, given the statements that follow. Here is what Teixeira tells us:

⁴ On these factors, we take as a basis Freire’s work, *Educação e atualidade brasileira* (2001), originally produced in 1959 as a *Competition thesis for the chair of History and Philosophy of Education at the School of Fine Arts of Pernambuco* at the then University of Recife, which, since 1965, has been called the Federal University of Pernambuco. (Torres *et al.*, 2001).

With the advancement of knowledge and technology, the long revolution of our times has radically transformed the world and human society. This new modern world, marked by extreme dynamism, represents the phase of intensive industrialization. This industrial revolution expands to the current forms of urban concentration and massive work organization. Then arises the contemporary society, globally industrialized, which consists of a complex of highly organized systems that work based on an extreme division of labor and extreme impersonality. In reality, society acquires a highly rationalized constitution, with its multiple systematized and, at times, mechanized services. *The man is apparently fragmented by the multiple functions he has to perform.* Significant development of formal education is necessary to understand and integrate into this society, *which is now indispensable for every citizen* before only necessary for some. (Teixeira, 1969, p. 323, emphasis added)

Dewey (1952) is dedicated to clarifying that the practice of an occupation, or specialism, does not mean emptying the set of other interests resulting from the individual's experience in the continuous process of living. The activities of individuals correspond to their various interests, linked to their performance in the various occupations they must perform throughout their lives. In actual existence, the origin of the problems presented to the subjects, who try to solve them through investigation, when nourished by education, is found. Thus, the school can help them carry out their activities with intelligence. Dewey (1952) criticizes the tendency he saw happening to separate specialties from other spheres of life in the name of a necessary deepening. However, he warns:

This means emphasis upon skill or technical method at the expense of meaning. Hence it is not the business of education to foster this tendency, but rather to safeguard against it, so that the scientific inquirer shall not be merely the scientist, the teacher merely the pedagogue, the clergyman merely one who wears the cloth, and so on. (Dewey, 1952, p. 403).

From the factors listed so far, it can be deduced that, despite a certain optimism regarding progress and modernization, some concerns about the necessary expansion of popular and public, quality, humanizing, and democratic education become elements advocated for by the authors here under discussion. For the Dewey-Teixeira duo, this school also has to be different, new and imbued with the modern spirit to match the expectations and needs of the time being. So, Teixeira resorts to the New School or progressive model, already implemented in the United States and in other countries, which has Dewey as one of the intellectual pillars of the proposal, aiming to carry out a program of renewal for our country.

While Teixeira's suggestions, along with other Brazilian intellectuals who joined the famous renovating and modernizing movement of Brazilian education, spanned decades of the 20th century, having been discussed in the process of elaboration and implementation and suffered setbacks by its critics, Freire is noted to take a strong and radically lucid position, inflamed by the demands of his time regarding the "[...] increasing participation of the people in the elaboration of development" (Freire, 2001, p. 30):

It is pretty accurate that industrialization has promoted its [the people's] transformation from an almost uncommitted spectator into a naive 'participant' in large areas of national life. However, what is needed is to increase its awareness of the problems of its time and space. It is to give it an 'ideology of development.' Moreover, the problem then becomes a problem of education. (Freire, 2001, p. 31).

Such ideas have already emerged from the North American thinker in more remote times, in which unprecedented transformations in the world were glimpsed. So, excited about the development, Dewey also points out some dangers that could be embedded in the modernization process and the directions adopted by industrialism and its possible consequences. This is his opinion at the beginning of the 20th century:

Even today, in our industrial life, apart from certain values of industriousness and thrift, the intellectual and emotional reaction of the forms of human association under which the world's work is carried on receives little attention as compared with physical output. (Dewey, 1952, p. 26)

It would, therefore, be necessary to invest in different education, expanding and perfecting the accidental experience of ordinary and routine associations, and different from the educational formulas proposed by the predictable and controlling traditional training. Contrary to these dangers, Dewey (1952) wants to see an education that purports to be a *democratic experience*.

In Brazil, in the most advanced decades of the 20th century, industrialization, which was booming in the 1950s and 1960s, brought up a strong impasse, in Freire's view (2001), as it explicitly revealed a profound difficulty: on the one hand, the need to make the people emerge to better act in national public life and, on the other hand, the notorious democratic inexperience of our country. For him,

[...] what has been characterizing our current public life is this game of contradictions. It is the people emerging on the political scene, rejecting their old quietist positions and demanding new positions – now of participation, action, and interference in Brazilian life. It is the people emerging and demanding solutions but, at the same time, assuming attitudes that strongly reveal the signs of their ‘democratic inexperience.’ Brazilian ‘democratic inexperience’ that clarifies positions so common among us, even in urban centers, of police all-powerfulness, in disrespect for man. The almighty power of authority is still based on ‘do you know whom you’re talking to?’ Disrespect for the rights of the weakest by the hypertrophy of the strongest. ‘Inexperience’ that explains the revealing practice of clan politics, embodied in formulas such as: ‘to friends everything – friends are those who passively follow the boss – to enemies, the law.’ This law, however, appears only in the formula because the exact translation of this attitude, or this anti-democratic posture, would rather be this: ‘To friends, to those who follow the lines of the boss’s policy, everything – including impossible things, for whose solution there is always a ‘way’ - to the enemies, nothing, i.e., hardly what the law itself establishes.’ (Freire, 2001, pp. 26-27)

We observe that Freire sees essential changes in the political, social, and economic scenario taking place in Brazil. However, he is concerned that this will deepen the oppressive regime even further and expand its actions of injustice, prejudice, and marginalization of many concerning the scope and the guarantees established by law. For him, the danger could arise from the distance of a considerable part of the population regarding the human rights proper to an economically developed society, but which should never neglect its democratic pretensions.

Nevertheless, being attentive to the necessary changes that he saw happening in his time, Freire followed the dynamism of the world and human society but was always concerned with advocating for man from the oppressive systems that could be reinforced, forged, and installed here, there, or elsewhere, producing prejudice, exclusion, and exploitation, all in the name of developing the so-called modern world. Dewey also shared such concerns, safeguarding the time-space in which his life passed. The American author was concerned, for example, with the relationship between liberal education and professional and industrial education, focused on productive work, whose offer, since antiquity, has always been given to different classes in terms of their social direction, i.e., whether they exist to be free or enslaved. These ancient contexts have long prepared the models to be reproduced according to mechanisms of preserving this state of the organization and broad social experience. Dewey (1952) draws attention to this fact, stating:

So we lose rather than gain in coming to think of intelligence as an organ of control of nature through action, if we are content that an unintelligent, unfree state persists in those who engage directly in turning nature to use, and leave the intelligence which controls to be the exclusive possession of remote scientists and captains of industry. We are in a position honestly to criticize the division of life into separate functions and of society into separate classes only so far as we are free from responsibility for perpetuating the educational practices which train the many for pursuits involving mere skill in production, and the few for a knowledge that is an ornament and a cultural embellishment. (Dewey, 1952, p. 339)

Completing his argument, Dewey claims a single solution to this problem: the *effective constitution of a democratic society*, in which “[...] all share in useful service and all enjoy a worthy leisure” (Dewey, 1952, p. 340). The author placed at the roots of human culture the cultivation of various dualisms, among which we cite those responsible for determining the positions that individuals should occupy in society: on the one hand, mechanical and routine work based on external purposes, established by those who order the activities of the performers and reward them with advantages and benefits proportional to the result produced; on the other hand, activities related to cultural goods, leisure, and the enjoyment of the spirit, only possible for those at the top of society. For Dewey, the circumstance of the first group makes his work illiberal, whose education corresponding to it would be illiberal and immoral, as it is intended simply to offer the skills for the achievement of the purposes posed externally to the performer. Thus, education aimed at the free man starts from understanding that the one who directs and commands does so from outside the former’s field of activities. There we see favorable conditions for the fructification of authoritarianism and, in the words of Freire (1978), oppression and alienation. What is worse, dehumanization involves both groups! Therefore, the only way out would be the installation of a humanist and awareness-raising pedagogy about the situation in which the subjects find themselves, as this would be able to break with the contradiction of this unjust organization, resulting in the overcoming of the state of oppression and the emergence of the “new man,” i.e., “[...] no longer oppressor, no longer oppressed, but man freeing himself” (Freire, 1978, p. 46). Dewey, in his work, also undertook efforts in the search for the *new man*, educated by a *new school*, to better prepare him to face modern society: more complex and demanding of new skills and knowledge, but challenging and dangerous if the subject does not follow its dynamism. The American author appeals to democratic education to guarantee reflection for all, i.e., the activity of thinking, as a guide for all practical activities, placing recreational, artistic activities and those produced in idleness or leisure as having equal quality, thus reconciling those aspects of human life that

appear to be falsely separate. Teixeira (1969), attracted by Dewey's suggestions, rebelled against the problems he faced in our country that impeded the impetus for changes and development and the implementation of a compelling new model of education, a situation that, for him, was aggravated by the lack of structure, the lack of a public education system, the centralizing and authoritarian political difficulties, and the elitist and colonialist educational tradition ingrained in our society. In this way, "The nation [...] had let itself get used to reflex, passive development, by force of circumstances, for the very reason that life had been, if not easy, without major demands [...]" (Teixeira, 1969, p. 133). However, we are aware of the author from Bahia's commitment, throughout his life, and on several fronts, to conquer the ideals of a country different from what he had observed until then.

With his transforming magnifying glass, our Pernambuco author, however, insists on education as an indispensable resource for men and women to emerge from the alienating, violent –even when violence is not explicitly manifested –, manipulative, and domesticating state that kept them away – and tended to distance them even more – from the possibilities of genuinely inserting themselves in the humanizing processes. Freire (2000) understands that only in this way could these people effectively participate in the course of these changes, understanding their rhythm and the factors present in them, amid a situation in which they concretely find themselves and act *as an active part of history*. The most appropriate resource, according to him, for this to be remarkably possible is *liberating education* since it is not just *any education*. The author confesses his dream of a genuinely democratic and even utopian society: a "[...] sane insanity is the creation of a world in which power is based in such a way on ethics that, without it, it crumbles and does not survive" (Freire, 2000, p. 131). And then he argues in favor of this dream:

In such a world, the great task of political power is to guarantee freedoms, rights and duties, justice, and not to support the will of a few against the weakness of the majority. Just as we cannot accept what I have called "liberating fatalism," which implies the unproblematized future, the inevitable future, we cannot accept domination as fatality. No one can categorically say to me that such a world, made up of utopias, will never be built. This is, after all, the substantively democratic dream to which we aspire, if consistently progressive. However, dreaming of this world is not enough for it to come true. We need to fight incessantly to build it. (Freire, 2000, p. 131)

Having observed the ideas established by Freire, we can summarily apprehend the core meaning of his concerns for the location of his *unmistakable and unlimited defense concerning human dignity, general and unrestricted*, as the center of his humanizing proposal. Thus, we can see that Freire is indeed discussing the topic of *education and human rights* and explains: “The fundamental thing if I am consistently progressive, is to witness [...] my respect for the dignity of the other. To their *right to be* concerning their right to have (Freire, 2000, p. 55, emphasis added). Therefore, he further states that

[...] no one can seek [to be more, the search for ‘oneself,’ to seek to be what they want and in their own trajectory] in exclusivity, individually. This solitary search could translate into having more, which is a way of being less. *This search must be done with other beings who also seek to be more and in communion with other consciousnesses; otherwise, some consciousnesses would be objects of others. It would be ‘reifying’ consciences.* (Freire, 1983, p. 28, emphasis added)

This is Freire’s call for constructing a democracy that does not simply mean highlighting the successful individuals but also their actions committed to forming the necessary connections with others in a situation of liberation and their common interests.

Indeed, if there is no effective awareness of incompleteness – the engine of human development – and the strength and responsibility of the search for humanization, fatalism ends up deepening and giving the regime of domination the victor, thus asserting the gap among a legion of beings dependent on others, fortunate and privileged.

That is why the proposal to associate the theme of *human rights* with democracy since it is understood that such notions are interdependent, and the possibility of their realization calls for *democratic education*. Thus, if we refer to the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, together with the ethical and moral principles that implement the humanizing vision, we will find such concerns in the authors presented here.

Freire confesses to being an admirer of Teixeira, whom he refers to as “[...] one of the most lucid Brazilian educators today, Professor Anísio Teixeira, in whom the educator harmonizes with the thinker and the social scientist” (Freire, 2001, p. 12). Following Freire’s indication about Teixeira and paying attention to his texts, one can find his undeniable engagement with the problems of his time. Teixeira is committed to democracy and, for the realization of such a regime, sees in education “[...] the very condition for its existence [...] supreme duty, the supreme function of the State [...] the only justice that seems broad and

deep enough to appease men's thirst for social justice [...]” (Teixeira, 1968, p. 89). Moreover, he emphatically adds, in the sequence: “Education is, therefore, not only the basis of democracy but social justice itself” (Teixeira, 1968, p. 89). However, he warns:

Democracy is the regime of the most difficult of education, the education by which man, all men, and all women learn to be free, good, and capable [...] Education makes us free through knowledge and knowledge and equal through the ability to develop our innate powers fully. The social justice par excellence of democracy consists in this achievement of equal opportunities through education. Democracy is literally education. (Teixeira, 1968, pp. 88-89)

If we assume that education is an undeniable need that aims at the entire society, whose governments must guarantee to all individuals the right to enjoy favorable conditions for their growth and the possibility that, when they return to the various social instances as “formed” citizens, to be able to expand their individual and collective development, we do not see how not to pair education with democracy. Clearly, this statement is impregnated with many issues that revolve around, for example, the problem of *inequalities*, whose factors are often outside the scope of the educational institution itself. However, we have to admit, based on the authors highlighted here, that education itself is often associated with the conditions that contribute to the intensification of inequalities, making it difficult for a democracy to flourish, given the criticisms of traditional education by Dewey, of Brazilian backward and elitist education by Teixeira, and to banking education attacked by Freire. This further reinforces the commitment of these authors in their theses in defense of education, especially school education, concerning teacher training, among other related topics, which could be deepened in another reflection.

Furthermore, when we point out the state's responsibility to guarantee a quality school for all, we bring to the discussion the constitutional right as a necessary beacon for the achievement of the right to education. Then, we feel the urgency of the stuff of democracy. With it, the educational institutions themselves are instituted with principles guaranteeing human freedoms, social justice, and expanding the understanding of the world by each of its members.

On the other hand, understanding that “[...] all regimes depend on education” (Teixeira, 1968, p. 88), even the most inhuman ones, Teixeira argues that democracy is a challenging regime because “[...] it depends on the most difficult of educations and the

greatest amount of education.” Furthermore, “[...] it depends on making the son of man – thanks to his incomparable power of learning – not a taught animal, but a man” (Teixeira, 1968, p. 88).

We have undoubtedly seen passionate speeches about education’s powers in a democratic environment so far. However, to be carried out in this way, education needs a basic structure and an organic condition proper to an institutional situation that fosters ideas, values, and actions inherent to democracy. Are we, then, falling into a vicious circle? If yes, how to break it? Then, where should we begin to achieve such noble goals?

Some approaches to the impasses

Freire, who is based on Zevedei Barbu, clarifies the following observation regarding the concept of democracy:

For this reason, even if democracy is not specifically an ‘idea’ or a ‘theory,’ but a ‘cultural climate,’ it will not be possible to carry out a real democratic educational work that lacks the conditions that constitute that climate [...] Without this climate, in which educational action is allowed to be involved, it will become inauthentic, its industriousness will disappear, because it is inorganic. (Freire, 2001, p. 60)

Dewey also sees democracy in this direction as a very particular “way of life.” In *Democracy and education*, the author states: “A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (Dewey, 1952, p. 126).

We often get distracted when we deal with the topic of “education,” reducing it to schooling. It is evident that, in modern societies, schools were gradually asked to carry out the training work of the people of the nation, not only in terms of their professionals but also of their citizens or ordinary people. In the first case, the objective would have been to develop in the students the qualities necessary for the occupational exercise of each one in the collectivity, assuming to do it in consonance with the common good, according to the dictates of democratic societies. In the second case, it would have been to privilege freedom and the intrinsic qualities of individuals, guaranteeing them maximum fulfillment, improvement, and participation in social instances. A Herculean task, indeed, that requires apprehension and

deep conceptual mastery! However, we perceive a certain exaggeration in the school's attributions and the need for involving other institutions that contribute to the development of the youngest, such as the family, the community, the state, etc. Hence, we understand that democracy would be a way of life that sustains the ideal of ordinary life, conducive to joint development, and on whose basis educational actions, committed to all citizens, are rooted, constituting the structure and minimum conditions for cooperative work and the thriving of a promising social life, surrounded by the will for responsible freedom and autonomy.

Freire became a recognized author from the ideas generated in the 1950s, a time that allowed him to elaborate on in-depth analyses of the Brazilian and South American situations. For him, the nations of South America were organized in conditions typical of *closed societies*, in which “[...] the economic decision point of this society is outside it. This means that this point is within another society [...], the parent society [...] This is the one that has options; in exchange, the other societies receive orders” (Freire, 1983, p. 33). Over a few decades, according to him, an “opening” for a positive transition began in some of these societies, as new values appeared, and claims for greater popular participation and demands by the “excluded” population with greater voice and vote in the process of change, which allowed a growing emergence of the masses. From this process, there is a strong manifestation of a greater appetite for education, which was absent before. However, Freire (1983, p. 38) warns:

Latin American societies are beginning to be part of this opening process, some more than others, but education remains vertical. The teacher is still a superior being who teaches the ignorant. This forms a banking conscience. The learner passively receives knowledge, becoming a repository for the educator. Educate to file what is deposited. However, the curious thing is that what is archived is man himself, who thus loses his power to create, becomes less of a man, is a part. Man's destiny must be to create and transform the world, being the subject of his action.

However, many of these ideas are ignored in a robust dictatorial regime concerning both mentioned Brazilian authors. We know about the consequences of advocating for equal rights and justice for all in a society marked by differences. For Freire (1983), the implications of this would not be unexpected because: “They begin to demand and create problems for the elites. These act clumsily, crushing the masses and accusing them of communism. The masses want to participate more in society. The elites think this is absurd and create social assistance institutions to domesticate them” (Freire, 1983, p. 37). Therefore, it is not surprising that Freire suffered the determinations of exile – he was exiled from 1964 to 1980 – and Teixeira,

in 1964, was removed from the post of dean of the University of Brasília (UnB), created in 1961, of which he was one of the creators, being compulsorily retired and dying in 1971 tragically and mysteriously. Interestingly, both took on the role of visiting scholars at US universities during the nascent Brazilian military dictatorship and were called by UNESCO to perform essential roles in education and culture. Although politically less tragic, Dewey's life was also marked by criticism from some American conservatives, who called him a "red" or a "Bolshevik" when he returned from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in the 1920s. Dewey wrote analyzing and highlights many positive aspects extracted from this trip and his experience, which caused some discomfort among the most radical (Cunha, 1994).

Furthermore, we can add that the authors here under the spotlight were members of organizations linked to interests in the field of human rights. Considered a secular humanist, Dewey participated in humanist movements between the 1930s and 1950s, including his position as advisor to associations such as the Charles Francis Potter's First Humanist Society of New York in 1929. He was also one of the 34 first subscribers to the Humanist Manifesto from 1933 and was elected an honorary member of the Humanist Press Association in 1936. Although criticized by some interpreters for his work on American racism issues, there are records of his affiliation with what was configured to be an organization called the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Teixeira was persecuted throughout most of his professional career, having been fought in the central positions he had held and accused of being a communist, especially by the more conservative Catholic sectors, for his insistent defense of a strong, expanded, and well-qualified public school. He was confronted by Vargas' policy mainly because he insisted on the thesis of decentralization, among other ideas, staying on the sidelines of political decisions for an extensive period still in the 1940s and 1950s. Paradoxically, after his death, his work was interpreted mainly with suspicion by authors critical of capitalism, seeing him as one of its most able allies and someone who followed the teachings of an American – Dewey –, who, on the other hand, in the United States had also suffered retaliation, but for being excessively progressive.

With the military dictatorship, distrust due to different political-ideological views led to persecution and the stigma of an undesirable revolutionary to Freire, which led him to exile. However, convinced of his pedagogical purposes, he advised the Brazilian Network of

Education and Human Rights. He gave lectures on the subject when he returned to the country, benefited from Amnesty International, and assumed the position of secretary of education of São Paulo from 1989 to 1991.

It is, therefore, a trio of intellectuals who present very similar facets regarding the interrelationships of democracy, education, and human rights, whose elaborations they produced are associated with a profile of uncomfortable personalities, given their extensive works, chaining of ideas, and actions fostered by a remarkable analytical, observant, and critical spirit. Although they suffered hard for the causes they took for themselves, these thinkers were notable for the essential interpretative reflections they made on the possible nexuses between the terms of interest in this exhibition, whose study proposal on these links continues, in our view, deserving further study, since such ideas persist on the horizon of today's society, often presenting themselves with imprecision.

Attempt to deepen the issues

Based on the above, we believe that we have argued in defense of linking democracy to education, which is recognized as one of the most basic human rights by those who wish to guarantee what is most fundamental in humanity, which is its ability to grow not simply in its physical, material, and even cognitive life, but also in what preserves and enriches its personal, community, and social existence, constituting collectivities with an increasingly global reach and linked by the idea of cooperation and sharing.

First, we must emphasize that when we refer to education in the context of human rights, we are not talking about any type of education. Hence the requirement for special efforts made by the intellectuals involved with the theme. Secondly, there must be a democratic space to sustain this link. In this case, the three notions, education, democracy, and human rights, are closely intertwined terms. Therefore, it is a highly complex issue that requires a serious, incisive confrontation promoted by actions undertaken by professionals from different spheres expressing the same interest and by the group of subjects entangled in political-social human formation.

Advocating for education as an event supported by the associative fact and imbricated by social ties necessary for the elucidation and strengthening of consensus, of common

interests, of stimulating the creation and sharing of ideas among men, Dewey, however, emphasizes that:

We are thus compelled to recognize that within even the most social group there are many relations which are not as yet social. A large number of human relationships in any social group are still upon the machine-like plane. Individuals use one another so as to get desired results, without reference to the emotional and intellectual disposition and consent of those used. Such uses express physical superiority, or superiority of position, skill, technical ability, and command of tools, mechanical or fiscal. So far as the relations of parent and child, teacher and pupil, employer and employee, governor and governed, remain upon this level, they form no true social group, no matter how closely their respective activities touch one another. Giving and taking of orders modifies action and results, but does not of itself effect a sharing of purposes, a communication of interests. (Dewey, 1952, p. 24)

For an institution to be recognized as *truly human* – and here I am mainly addressing educational institutions –, it needs to have beneficial consequences on the conscious experience of subjects, expanding their mental and social attitude, preventing the focus of training from being selfish specialists, or even the scholars, when they become oblivious to the others around them. Still, it needs to reduce spaces for authoritarianism and the distance between life and experience, inflated by teachings planned in a merely formal and artificial way. If there is no *communication*, there will be no guarantee of the preservation of social life, nor will the participation of each one be viable in the process of the experience built-in society or the collectivity so that such experience effectively expresses the common interest. Democratic education acts to facilitate this intricate task, but, on the other hand, it needs to be democratically instituted to correspond to democratic ideals and conditions.

As already noted, we are at an impasse, for which Dewey offers some solutions. Faced with the question of when a society favors spaces that foster democracy, Dewey (1952, p. 122) reaffirms that this can only occur when the members of the social group manifest “[...] many interests consciously communicated and shared,” allowing contact with various associations and avoiding the strengthening of unilateral positions. However, all must have equal opportunities to expose different endeavors, values, and experiences. “Otherwise,” says the author, “the influences which educate some into masters, educate others into slaves” (Dewey, 1952, p. 122). The contact of one class with another and an experience intertwined with the various life activities avoid artificialism, sterile culture, and specialisms, on the one hand, and, on the other, passivity, massification, and routine. Thus, Dewey (1952) emphasizes the

reciprocity of interests to combat the pernicious isolation of individuals from one another and the deprivation of contacts and exchange of experiences. Change of perspectives, expansion of relationships, and educational modes of training should be encouraged for the development of *voluntary acceptance*, nourished by “[...] free intercourse and communication of experience” (Dewey, 1952, p. 141) *versus* the imposition of external authority. In this sense, it is worth noting that:

The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, *is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity*. These more numerous and more varied points of contact denote a greater diversity of stimuli to which an individual has to respond; they consequently put a premium on variation in his action. *They secure a liberation of powers* which remain suppressed as long as the incitations to action are partial, as they must be in a group which in its exclusiveness shuts out many interests. (Dewey, 1952, pp. 126-127, emphasis added)

Based on the traits of the democracy he wanted, Dewey points to industry, commerce, intercommunication, science, among others, as factors that allowed the launch of concrete changes that required new training with “[...] intellectual opportunities [...] accessible to all on equable and easy terms [...] educated to personal initiative and adaptability” (Dewey, 1952, p. 127).

In addition to these aspects, the author shows other indispensable factors reachable by a democratic way of life. He also shows how much school education can help through its activities extended to all and with the desirable quality. The development of thinking aimed at reflective thinking enables us to emancipate ourselves from purely impulsive and routine actions, converting them into intelligent actions that allow the apprehension of the consequences and results of what we practice. This leads to the control of action and handling of things around us. Thus, something intended results in a sense emanating from the distinct elements in connection. These properties of thought reveal the overcoming of the most elementary and naive levels of thinking and the achievement of greater autonomy, i.e., the subject becomes able to use what nature offers him in his favor and to reveal what is hidden by the pollutants elements, harmful to our understanding of reality.

None of this is possible without the intervention of education and its precious guidance and conduction regarding its teaching. Dewey draws attention to the dangers of

mistakes and false beliefs that can invade the thinking of those who are far from an environment effectively based on educational experiences. In his *How we think* (1959) and other writings, the author deals with several problems that can surround the construction of thought. We know that long before, Francis Bacon (1973), for example, proposed the theory of idols or the theory of false and misleading interferences that invade the spirit and that can dominate it and block the human mind. In other words, errors can occur in the education process, primarily produced by human nature itself – idols of the tribe –, and errors resulting from the peculiarities of the individual, formed by education, by his contact with others, the reading, or by the influence of authorities – idols of the cave. Still, there are errors produced by communication and language, resulting from human grouping and consortium – idols of the marketplace – and those arising from the spirit of a particular time, such as explanations elaborated by tradition and adhered to by credulity, produced, sometimes, by carelessness, but coated with philosophical or scientific truth– idols of the theater (Bacon, 1973).

In the same tradition of English empiricism, we find John Locke (1973, pp. 139-350), who was also concerned with intrusive elements harmful to thought in terms of its clarity, such as the excessive influence of people chosen as objects of faith in place of personal efforts in the search for foundations, often resulting in the faithful and blind adherence of the subject to the authority and the established as an unquestionable model. Another element would be the excessive use of passion instead of the reason for elaborating arguments and actions and with attitudes and partial analyses in the face of a phenomenon or fact. Noting the English author's concerns, Dewey warns:

[...] While the power of thought frees us from servile subjection to instinct, appetite, and routine, it also brings with it the occasion and possibility of error and mistake. In elevating us above the brute, it opens to us the possibility of failures to which the animal, limited to instinct, cannot sink. (Dewey, 1959, pp. 31-32)

The links between Deweyan pragmatism and English empiricism are interesting. Concerning the latter, Dewey's ideas take advantage of the appreciation of experience, for example, distancing themselves in some aspects as in the case of the emphasis that Dewey directs to the reaction of the subject in his participation in the chain of activities that he develops together with other organisms that make up the universe.

As Dewey was born in New England, in the United States, fertile soil for the philosophical, religious, and cultural thriving planted by its colonists, he took advantage of these influences to reflect. The epistemological perspective became a strong axis for his philosophy, connecting with his concerns about education since it constitutes, in his view, a promising field for learning the exercise of thought. Only with reflective thinking will we build a democratic society, provided by responsible citizens who recognize the consequences of their actions and refuse capricious postures that primarily serve their own desires or routine attitudes as products of their passivity before the world (Dewey, 1959). However, based on these considerations and other concepts elaborated by the author, his emblematic position is highlighted in the statement: “The mind is not a piece of blotting paper that absorbs and retains automatically. It is rather a living organism that has to search for its food, that selects and rejects [...]” (Dewey, 1959, pp. 258-259), which conserves what it retains, but transforms it in its favor. This means that life, already in its elementary level of occurrence, demands activity, reaction, and continuity of the connections established between organisms, not being configured, therefore, as the passivity of the spirit. This quality would be, on the contrary, the opposite of thought, a detriment to judgment, curiosity, and learning. Thus, we realize that Dewey approaches empiricism, on the one hand, but distances himself from it, on the other, advocating for empiricism or naturalistic humanism (Dewey, 1974).

It is unnecessary to assume the work that formal education can perform in the face of this problem. Committed to developing reflective thinking, the school must teach through systematic investigation, verification in the search for knowledge, and confronting crystallized truths, a suggestion named by Dewey (1959) as the method of intelligence. Contrary to the cultivation of prejudices, partisanship, indisposition, and cognitive indolence, it takes an open spirit to search for new problems and innovative ideas. In addition, individuals must throw themselves into the search for knowledge with unrestricted intellectual responsibility. The entire Deweyan proposal opposed to traditional education underlies a new pedagogy based on these principles. In Brazil, his pedagogical theory was well received by the so-called Pioneers of the New School. We highlight Teixeira, who perceives the structural obstacles to implementing the new theory in our country. In addition to the distinctive features of a traditional pedagogy prevailing here, Teixeira (1971) points out the great difficulties represented by some schools based on “privileges” and in providing greater facilities for

learning to a quantitatively small portion of the population, but mighty in the designs of their will to power. Education is a right, not a privilege, he argues.

Considering Freire's period of vitality concerning the changes he wanted to implement in Brazilian education when he was still young, the educator pays attention to Brazil's democratic inexperience (Freire, 2001, p. 26ss) and confesses the intellectual debt he contracted with Teixeira (Freire, 2001, pp. 12-13), who taught him a lot in this regard. In addition, the educator contributes to the subsequent discussion of how to make a school democratic, advocating for, among other factors, in favor of rights and the necessary respect that must be carried out in the school environment, not only concerning students but also its teachers, i.e., he advocates "[...] a rigorous ethical formation always alongside esthetics" (Freire, 1997, p. 36). For him:

To educate is substantively to form. Deifying or demonizing technology or science is a highly negative and dangerous form of wrong thinking [see Locke's quoted ideas]. Of witnessing to students, sometimes with the air of someone who has the truth, a resounding mistake [see Dewey when he advocates for humility in the face of truths and his endless search]. To think right, on the contrary, demands depth and not superficiality in the understanding and interpretation of facts [see Locke when he advocates for the necessary breadth of vision about a fact]. It presupposes the availability to review the findings; it recognizes the possibility of changing one's option, appreciation, and the right to do so [see Dewey, in advocating for openness of mind]. However, as there is no right-thinking apart from ethical principles, if the change is a possibility and a right, it is up to those who change – it requires correct thinking – to assume the change made [see the intellectual responsibility proclaimed by Dewey]. From the point of view of right thinking, it is impossible to change and pretend that it has not changed. It is that all right-thinking is radically coherent. (Freire, 1997, p. 37)

From the previous quote, it is possible to build several connections between the ideas exposed so far, which makes it possible to undo some difficulties engendered in the relationship between the right to education and democracy and to find some solutions for the realization of a democratic school in an environment of equal quality.

Finalization

By proposing the title *Anísio Teixeira and the “right to education” – ideas that remember Dewey and inspire Freire*, or, in other words, putting Dewey in dialogue/discussion with two Brazilian intellectuals, the intention was to, with the help of these authors, to try to explain the links observed between the terms *democracy*, *education*, and *human rights*, which, in our view, provoke theoretical questions that are still very relevant and necessary. However, these relationships are not easy to establish, as we have seen. When trying to analyze them, we were led into a vicious circle in which the terms were mixed up in the interdependent relationships, not allowing us to clearly define the place of each one of them in the phenomenal context of analysis. However, despite efforts to face this problem, we recognize that such difficulties still aspire to further deepening and studies. It is, therefore, a challenge and a demonstration that we have not yet achieved the great democratic ideal dreamed of for centuries, although some measures have been carried out and pursued. Perhaps it is essential to ask about the actual participation of educators to answer which education, in fact, is the one most concerned with these ideals. Moreover, what can we take advantage of our great thinkers to generate the realization of what they wanted or a feasible counter-proposal from them?”

With Dewey – not by chance appointed as an outstanding *philosopher of democracy in America* – we perceive the proper and indispensable elements for democracy to materialize and improve, being the context in which education finds the organic climate to develop in the same way, benefiting from the constitutive elements of this differentiated way of life associated with individuals in cooperation, and contributing to the increasingly operative and constructive promotion of democracy itself.

Sixty-eight years after Dewey’s death, we witness beautiful arguments in favor of democracy, which has yet to materialize. If we consider the close and indissoluble links between democracy and human rights, one of which is the right to education, this issue, gradually incorporated into political agendas and, more recently, endorsed by law in many countries, has yet to be fully resolved and observed by a large part of human society, today global.

In Brazil, the discussion carried out in the governmental environment on the rights to education shows us that the topic has been surprisingly attacked, given the policies of

weakening public educational institutions, the promotion of research, and the little appreciation of studies that deal with philosophical-pedagogical theories, often taken as threats to the most conservative system, which tries to represent the values of the people. Based on the assumption that knowledge, research, science, and technology translate into today's world through power, productive force, and the ability to insert man into the various dimensions of reality, Marilena Chauí (Lima & Motta, 2019) condemns the measures of resource contention and limitation in the expansion of these factors. Is democracy collapsing? Are we returning to a policy of submission and privilege? Those are her concerns. Such questions worry us in the face of evidence that the principles of freedom of expression, participation, and choice are collapsing in authoritarian dictates or, what could be worse, implicit in schemes that are not in tune with democratic ideals. However, regarding the concerns with the current moment of Brazilian education, both Teixeira (1969) and Freire (2001) have already pointed to the problems of the neglect of the public power concerning public education for a long time and the course of crises that the area faces, offering us important lessons.

Faced with this reality, Anísio Teixeira must always be remembered for his efforts as the intellectual and politician who dedicated much of his life to showing the great distance between the needy segments of Brazilian society and those who direct them – a phenomenon present in the country's history for a long time –, arguing that *education is a right* (Teixeira, 1968) and not a privilege of the few. Furthermore, the author shows that we can create measures for this correction. In the 1990s, Freire's writings added other elements to Teixeira's analysis, who observed that education was becoming an effective tool for oppressive systems, changing the ways of manifesting itself and even its designations. He thus advocates for the investment in a type of education that includes everyone and frees them from the dehumanizing regime (Teixeira, 1968, 1971) and observes with great interest the issue of human rights, especially the right to education, which he sees, in a broader way, such as the right to be, the right to freedom, the right to speak, the right of the teacher in the training of professionals according to their research ability and according to the principles that foster an ethical posture together with the love that must always cement effectively educational relationships, among others.

It remains for us to ask, even in the early decades of the second millennium: based on the findings presented here, are we reasonably moving towards the ideals so well established and explained by the authors with whom we dialogue? What do we still lack? Perhaps what remains is to maintain such questions as an invitation to resist the authoritarianism that often

threatens the search for answers and construct a democratic scenario of dialogue, investigation, and intellectual seriousness. The authors exposed here are not exempt from criticism, like any author we address. However, without a doubt, they offer us their invaluable interpretive magnifying glasses so that we can point to our dramatic reality with them.

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