



# Education in Brazil: A Discussion of Current Problems and a Call to Action<sup>1</sup>

## *Educação no Brasil: uma discussão sobre problemas atuais e um chamado à ação*

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**ABSTRACT:** In this text, we try to address several issues that have been long hindering Brazilian Education. Since the promulgation of the so-called *Citizen Constitution* (BRAZIL, 1988), the Brazilian government hasn't yet been able to provide free and quality education for all Brazilians, and a big portion of Brazilian citizens are still illiterate, especially those who belong to lower classes and black communities. We will focus on the vicious cycle that is created when, in having education denied, the population is also automatically denied the right to perceive their neglected and violated rights. What consequences may this vicious cycle generate for the Brazilian population? In what ways can we overcome the limits it imposes on us? What Brazil would we have if we could get rid of this cycle? And how does this relate to the daily lives of each of us?

**KEYWORDS:** right to education; current problems; ethics and possibilities.

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**RESUMO:** Neste texto, procuramos abordar várias questões que há muito tempo atrapalham a educação brasileira. Desde a promulgação da chamada *Constituição Cidadã* (BRASIL, 1988), o governo brasileiro ainda não conseguiu oferecer educação gratuita e de qualidade para todos os brasileiros, e grande parte desses brasileiros ainda é analfabeta, principalmente aqueles que pertencem às classes mais baixas e comunidades negras. Vamos nos concentrar no ciclo vicioso que se cria quando, ao ter a educação negada, também é automaticamente negado à população o direito de perceber seus direitos negligenciados e violados. Que consequências esse ciclo vicioso pode gerar para a população brasileira? De que forma podemos superar os limites que ele nos impõe? Que Brasil teríamos se pudéssemos nos livrar desse ciclo? E como isso se relaciona com o dia a dia de cada um de nós?

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** direito à educação; problemas atuais; ética e possibilidades.

## Introduction

In Brazil, education occupies several – concrete and abstract – spaces in people’s lives. There are those who, in education, see the school as a space for life: that’s where friendships and meals are made, that’s where one feels protected. There are those who, in education, pursue the diploma as a way of improving their qualification for work and, therefore, improving their own living conditions. There are those who, in education, understand knowledge as the only viable possibility of dignified existence, of autonomous thought and action. There are those who, in education, find a profession and ideals, a future and hope. There are also those who, in education, perceive freedom or the lack of it, and in this case, danger. There are those who, in education, see rights and, with them, also duties. There are those who use it to do justice ... and there are those who do not. There are those who talk about it ... in the living room, at the bar, at the Plenary. Brazil ... the Brazilian craves for education!

The right of all Brazilians to quality education is established in the Federal Constitution (BRASIL, 1988), which also establishes who is responsible for guaranteeing it – in this case, the State and the family – and its objectives: the “full development of the person, their preparation for the exercise of citizenship and their qualification for work”<sup>2</sup> (p. 123).<sup>3</sup> However,

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<sup>2</sup> Our translation, as well as in all other citations of texts originally published in Portuguese referenced in this paper.

<sup>3</sup> In the original: “pleno desenvolvimento da pessoa, seu preparo para o exercício da cidadania e sua qualificação para o trabalho.”

the vast majority of Brazilians know based on personal experience how far we are from an education that is indeed for everyone and promotes the exercise of political and economic freedom, and citizenship. After more than thirty years since the country's re-democratization and the promulgation of the Federal Constitution, the historic debt of the Brazilian State to the population in terms of guaranteeing everyone's right to education has not yet been resolved and, more seriously, it seems each day farther away from being so.

Although our Federal Constitution is still very recent in historical terms, which could justify, even if not completely, the non-fulfillment or partial fulfillment of the duties of the State regarding the right of all to education, many other reasons for this failure may also be pointed out. The interests of the dominant class, for example, which were put into practice through the economic policies adopted in the country, ended up limiting the necessary investments in education, thus denying the constitutionally guaranteed rights to the population. In addition to the many consequences that this may have for Brazilians, here we are interested in dealing with the vicious cycle that is created when, having their rights to exercise political freedom, economic freedom and citizenship denied, the population is also automatically denied the right to perceive their neglected and violated rights and, consequently, the right to demand the possibility of exercising their rights is stolen. Citizens who do not recognize themselves as citizens or who do not understand what *citizenship* might mean will be subjects without political or economic freedom and, therefore, with no power to claim over anything; subjects at the mercy of State policies, especially economic policies that, in order to allow them to survive, impose duties and deny their rights. These will be exploited subjects because they are uneducated and uneducated because they are exploited! What consequences may this vicious cycle generate for the Brazilian population? In what ways can we overcome the limits it imposes on us? What Brazil would we have if we could get rid of this vice? And how does this relate to the daily lives of each of us? This text tries to address such issues.

### **A Brazil without education**

The re-democratization of Brazil, after the end of the military dictatorship (1964-1985), enabled the promulgation of the *Constitution*

of the Federative Republic of Brazil currently in force. Known as the *Citizen Constitution*, the 1988 Constitution was written in favor of the establishment and consolidation of democracy and the notion of citizenship, in order to guarantee citizens' rights and establish duties to the State and, thus, build a society in which equality and social justice could rule.

In this sense, the Federal Constitution presents, in its article 6, fundamental rights of a social nature, stating that “social rights are education, health, food, work, housing, transportation, leisure, security, social security, maternity and childhood protection, assistance to the helpless ones, in the form of this Constitution” (BRASIL, 1988, p. 18).<sup>4</sup> The establishment and consolidation, therefore, of a democratic and socially just State seems to depend, among other issues, on the establishment of education as a right for every citizen.

In its Chapter III, Section I, Article 205, the Constitution states that “education, the right of all and the duty of the State and the family, will be promoted and encouraged with the collaboration of society, aiming at the full development of the person, their preparation for the exercise of citizenship and their qualification for work.”<sup>5</sup> Article 206 lists the principles on which education should be provided, including, among these, “equal conditions for access and permanence in school”, “free public education in official establishments” and “guaranteed quality standards” (BRASIL, 1988, p. 123).<sup>6</sup> Ensuring access to free and quality education for all citizens is thus a *sine qua non* condition for the establishment and maintenance of the democratic State, since it will be through education that the individual will have access to other social rights, enabling full participation in society, in politics and in the economy. In this sense, the importance of the Directives and Bases of National Education Law (Lei de Diretrizes e Bases

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<sup>4</sup> In the original: “[s]ão direitos sociais a educação, a saúde, a alimentação, o trabalho, a moradia, o transporte, o lazer, a segurança, a previdência social, a proteção à maternidade e à infância, a assistência aos desamparados, na forma desta Constituição.”

<sup>5</sup> In the original: “a educação, direito de todos e dever do estado e da família, será promovida e incentivada com a colaboração da sociedade, visando ao pleno desenvolvimento da pessoa, seu preparo para o exercício da cidadania e sua qualificação para o trabalho.”

<sup>6</sup> In the original: “igualdade de condições para o acesso e permanência na escola”, a “gratuidade do ensino público em estabelecimentos oficiais” e a “garantia de padrão de qualidade.”

da Educação Nacional – LDB) (BRASIL, 1996) was reinforced. Created in 1961, LDB has undergone changes over time, having its most recent version enacted in 1996 (Law 9.394/96). The objectives of the LDB are to regulate and organize Brazilian education based on the principles established in the Federal Constitution, in addition to seeking ways to consolidate measures capable of improving the access and financing of national education.

However, despite the efforts made to guarantee and reiterate, through the Federal Constitution and the LDB, access to education as the right of every citizen and the duty of the state, recent research conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística – IBGE, 2017) point to deep inequalities in access to education in Brazil. There are still, according to the data collected by IBGE, more than 16 million illiterate people in the country. Moreover, illiteracy rates vary according to criteria such as region, income, age, color or race. Thus, of the more than 16 million illiterate people accounted for, 11.46 million are 15 years of age or older, of which 26% are white and 73% are black or brown. Illiterates over 60 years old total 5.87 million, of which 29% are white and 70% are black or brown. Still according to IBGE, the average years of study among people aged 15 and over is 10.3 years among whites and 8.7 years among blacks or browns. The survey also shows that among people aged 25 or over, 66.3 million (51%) had completed only elementary school, in 2016 when the data were last collected, and just under 20 million people of that age (15.3%) had completed higher education, of which 16.9% were women and 13.5%, men. Therefore, there is still a huge Brazil without education.

The objectives of national education, that is, the “full development of the person, their preparation for the exercise of citizenship and their qualification for work”,<sup>7</sup> imply, according to Cara (2020), personal freedom, political freedom and freedom for a productive life. That means to say, it seems to us, that the objective is to educate so that the people may exercise their freedom of choice and decision in all fields that permeate their social life, which could include, for example, if and with whom to establish affective relationships, whether and which political party to support and why, and what labor activity to exercise. Therefore, having access to education means having the possibility to understand the notion of citizenship, to

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<sup>7</sup> In the original: “pleno desenvolvimento da pessoa, seu preparo para o exercício da cidadania e sua qualificação para o trabalho.”

perceive oneself as a citizen and to participate actively in society. A person without access to education will, therefore, be a person unable to exercise their rights, including the right to know their rights.

### **Education: duty of the State**

The *Citizen Constitution* became thus known for, unlike those that preceded it, allowing the incorporation of popular amendments, expanding and strengthening individual rights, guaranteeing “the inviolability of the right to life, freedom, security and property [...]. Voting is allowed and optional for illiterates and for those over 16 years old. Fundamental education is presented as mandatory, universal and free” (BRASIL, 2005, n/p).<sup>8</sup> In addition, in this Constitution, the preparation of a ten-year National Education Plan (Plano Nacional de Educação – PNE) was established, which the Federal Congress, through the Law 13.005/2014 (BRASIL, 2014), sanctioned for the first time in 2014.

With the main objective of improving the quality of national education by increasing investments, the PNE established twenty goals for education to be carried out between the years 2014 and 2024. These goals include all levels of education – from early childhood education to higher education –, including focusing on more fragile areas such as inclusive education, the schooling rate of Brazilians, and teacher development and careers, as well as issues related to educational funding, seeking to expand the Federal investments in public education. The target, in the latter case, was established in terms of the percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to be invested in education: 7% until 2019 with a gradual increase to what could be equivalent to 10% of GDP up to 2024, the last year of the PNE.

However, even though many efforts have been made to promote national education to a better situation, government officials have been heavily debating over those that should be the priority investments to be made in the country. In view of the increase in public debt – due, for example, to the payment of interest on that debt and to the drop in

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<sup>8</sup> In the original: “a inviolabilidade do direito à vida, à liberdade, à segurança e à propriedade [...]. O voto se torna permitido e facultativo a analfabetos e maiores de 16 anos. A educação fundamental é apresentada como obrigatória, universal e gratuita.”

tax collection caused by the recession –, the Brazilian government has decided to impose drastic limits on public spending through Constitutional Amendment 95, which has changed the Federal Constitution of 1988.

### **Education: a duty of the State yet to be fulfilled**

Authored by the Federal Government, the then Proposed Amendment to the Constitution (Proposta de Emenda Constitucional – PEC 55) was approved on December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016, in the last of its voting rounds, by the Federal Senate, when it became legally effective, becoming the Constitutional Amendment 95 (BRASIL, 2016). With its entry into force at the beginning of 2017, this amendment aimed to establish the

New Tax Regime within the scope of the Federal Budget and Social Security Budget, which will be in force for 20 financial years, with individual limits for the primary expenses of each of the three Powers, the Federal Public Ministry and the Public Defender's Office of the Union.<sup>9</sup>

Because it is a very complex proposal, it is important to clarify that, although defended by the leaders of the federal government on duty at the time as a necessary policy to curb the growth of public spending and to balance public accounts, the proposal received harsh criticism both at national and international levels, mainly due to its objective of fixing, for up to 20 years – until 2036 – a limit (a ‘ceiling’) for expenses, to be corrected by the inflation rate, which, for many, means the *freezing* of the amounts destined to these expenses, including the minimum wage. Named, therefore, as *PEC of the Ceiling of Public Spending* by the government and the media – and as *PEC of the End of the World* by a parliamentary group opposed to the project, as well as by a portion of the population – the proposal, throughout its procedure in the Chamber of Deputies and the Federal Senate, received numerous contrary manifestations, including one from the United Nations

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<sup>9</sup> In the original: Novo Regime Fiscal no Âmbito dos Orçamentos Fiscal e da Seguridade Social da União, que vigorará por 20 exercícios financeiros, existindo limites individualizados para as despesas primárias de cada um dos três Poderes, do Ministério Público da União e da Defensoria Pública da União.” Available from <https://www12.senado.leg.br/ecidadania/visualizacaomateria?id=127337>. Access on: Nov. 23, 2016.

(UN), which, in a note<sup>10</sup> published by the Special Rapporteur<sup>11</sup> for Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Philip Alston, also supported by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Koumbou Boly Barry, stated that

[...] Government plans to freeze social spending in Brazil for 20 years are entirely incompatible with the country's human rights obligations [...]. The principal and unavoidable effect of a proposed amendment to the Constitution designed to 'lock in' a budget freeze in order to show fiscal prudence will be to harm the poor for decades to come [...] If adopted, this amendment would lock in inadequate and rapidly dwindling expenditure on health care, education and social security, thus putting an entire generation at risk of social protection standards well below those currently in place. [...] It will hit the poorest and most vulnerable Brazilians the hardest, will increase inequality levels in an already very unequal society, and definitively signals that social rights are a very low priority for Brazil for the next 20 years.

The UN warnings found echo in Brazil, where many even offered alternatives to the government proposal, such as increased taxation on large fortunes, for example. The concern related to the effects of Amendment 95 was due to the possibility of a strong reduction in investments in education and health (areas that require changes in the Federal Constitution and, therefore, the *raison d'être* of the Amendment). The consequences that this could have on poorer Brazilians and the incentive, resulting from the

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<sup>10</sup> Available from: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21006&LangID=E>. Access on: Nov. 23, 2016.

<sup>11</sup>The Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. The Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council are independent human rights experts with mandates to report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective. The system of Special Procedures is a central element of the United Nations human rights machinery and covers all human rights: civil, cultural, economic, political, and social. The Special Rapporteurs are volunteer specialists in human rights who are completely independent from any government or organization. Information summarized from: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/Welcomepage.aspx><http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/Welcomepage.aspx><http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/Welcomepage.aspx><http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/Welcomepage.aspx>. Access on: Nov. 23, 2016.



Amendment, to offer private services in both areas would end up causing a strong impact and setback in public education and would, consequently, deconstruct the project of a just and egalitarian nation advocated by the *Citizen Constitution*.

After the first two years of Amendment 95, the impacts caused by it begin to be announced. Figueiredo (2019), for example, states that, although the PNE has been approved and has set goals for improving national education,

[w]ith the approval, in 2016, of Constitutional Amendment 95 (EC 95), however, the allocation of public funds to the social sectors was severely restricted, also affecting education. Since then, the area has been suffering cuts of funds, making it impossible to implement the PNE [...]. The conclusion is that there is a progressive noncompliance with Goal 1, with regard to early childhood education / daycare [...]. Elements of the current government's economic policy likewise prevent the achievement of the other goals of the PNE (FIGUEIREDO, 2019, p. 466-467).<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the expectations, promises and dreams generated by the promulgation of the *Citizen Constitution* suffer strong blows. In addition to Constitutional Amendment 95, it is important to mention that the dismantling of the public project of a just and egalitarian nation includes other measures, such as labor reform (Law 13.467/2017 – intermittent work) (BRASIL, 2017a), high school reform (Law 13.415/2017) (BRASIL, 2017b) and the launching of BNCC (Base Nacional Comum Curricular) – National Common Curricular Base (Resolution CNE/CP 2/2017) (BRASIL, 2017c), for example. As commented by Pino *et al.* (2018),

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<sup>12</sup> In the original: “[c]om a aprovação, em 2016, da Emenda Constitucional 95 (EC 95), entretanto, a destinação de verbas públicas para os setores sociais foi fortemente restringida, afetando também a educação. A partir daí a área vem sofrendo seguidos cortes de verbas, impossibilitando a implantação do PNE [...]. A conclusão é que há descumprimento progressivo da Meta 1, no tocante à educação infantil/creche [...]. Elementos da política econômica do atual Governo impedem da mesma forma a consecução das demais metas do PNE.”

public education, the right of all and the duty of the State, is abandoned and, as much as possible, privatized in the name of the lack of efficiency and resources that, otherwise, are not lacking in other sectors of greater economic interest. [...] The citizen subject ceases to be the reference entity of the educational model, placed entirely at the service of the economic system. [...] The notion of a public good that is accessible to all by law is lost; the concept of citizenship is dissolved; education / development is transformed into learning and training; the very national and social constitution is reduced, promoting new forms of integration of individuals and groups that are being modeled, in all spheres, private and social, without guarantees of social mobility and the right to equality (PINO; ALMEIDA; ZUIN *et al.*, 2018, p. 519-520).<sup>13</sup>

Victim of strong discourses that discredit it and actions that seek to immobilize it, Brazilian public education goes on – haltered, gagged and chained – towards privatization. Thus, the State exempts itself of its duties towards the citizens; the citizenship and liberating education project is abandoned; the consumption of education as a commodity is reinforced; the economic interests of the capitalist system are attended to; majorities are sacrificed; minority profits are guaranteed; the people are plundered, their future is stolen!

### **Brazil craves for education**

From what has been put on these pages up to this point, we see that there is quite a good number of laws, which determine the responsibilities and duties of the State with regard to access to free and quality education by every Brazilian citizen. We conclude, thus, that we do have laws! However,

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<sup>13</sup> In the original: “a educação pública, direito de todos e dever do Estado, é abandonada e, o quanto possível, privatizada em nome da falta de eficiência e de recursos que, no mais, não faltam a outros setores de maior interesse econômico. [...] O sujeito cidadão deixa de ser a entidade de referência do modelo educacional posto, por inteiro, a serviço do sistema econômico. [...] Perde-se a noção de bem público acessível a todos por direito; dissolve-se o conceito de cidadania; transforma-se a educação/formação em aprendizagem e treinamento; reduz-se a constituição própria do nacional e social, promovendo novas formações de integração dos indivíduos e grupos que passam a ser modelados, em todas as esferas, privadas e sociais, sem garantias de mobilidade social e direito à igualdade.”

in the practices of the daily life of that same citizen, the implementation of these laws is not concretely realized. That is, we have laws but they are not enforced. Hence the struggle of groups and social movements organized around claims for the right to education as a common good. People involved in this struggle realize the harmful consequences of non-compliance with these laws, especially in a country where there is huge inequality in the distribution of income, as it is the case in Brazil (IBGE, 2018). These people struggle because they know that the lack of education makes access to knowledge much more difficult, making it impossible to exercise citizenship and to interfere in the construction of society. These people also know that the lack of education produces subjects not suitable for qualified work, thus making it impossible to obtain better jobs, which require qualification. This, in turn, generates unemployment and encourages “slave” work or, in more recent terms, precariousness or “uberization” of work (ABÍLIO, 2019), which leads to low wages and low quality of life and ultimately causes exclusion, hunger, misery, violence, death, which lastly deepens social injustices. Thus, the vicious cycle that imprisons us is reiterated and it is understood, after all, that the struggle for the right to education is, therefore, a *sine qua non* condition for guaranteeing human life and dignity. So we fight! So, let’s fight ...

## **Who is interested in the ignorance of the Brazilian citizen?**

### **The capitalist system!**

As an economic system under which we are all organized, *capitalism* is based on *private property*, aiming at the *accumulation of wealth* and *profit*. Private property – land, factories, industries, machinery, commerce – secured by the State through, for example, the privatization of State goods, guarantees to the capitalist the possession of the means of production and its use for the generation of income and profit and for the accumulation of wealth. Workers, employed in the capitalist means of production, are paid, via wages, in return for the use of their work force. Their wages are also fundamental for maintaining the functioning of the capitalist system, since they guarantee the power for workers to consume the goods and services offered by the market, which is responsible for determining the prices of these goods and services through the law of supply and demand. Unlike slavery and servitude

that have characterized labor relations in the past, the capitalist system is based, thus, on wage labor. Salary values may vary enormously and this variation may depend on factors such as access to education, professional qualification and number of years of schooling, for example. The value of the salary may be a determining factor in the worker's quality of life and may favor social mobility or not. However, since wages make up production costs, it is in the interest of the owners of the means of production to pay low wages, as this contributes to obtaining greater profits and, consequently, to the accumulation of wealth (CARVALHO, 2018; CHUN, 2017). This results in the enrichment of a few – the owners of the means of production – and the impoverishment of many others – mainly those who sell their work force to produce goods and services, but who, without access or with restricted access to education, for example, are forced to sell it cheaply and thus are subject to precarious living conditions. It is from relationships like this that social inequality is born.

The capitalist system, however, is made up of people and, in this case, people who have access to education, perhaps not free of charge, by choice and possibility, but undoubtedly of quality – whatever that may mean, at this point! These people have access, therefore, to knowledge, to the exercise of citizenship, to possibilities of action for the construction / transformation of society, to professional qualification, to a qualitative and dignified life. If so, these people, while probably not fighting for the right to education as a common good, will certainly know the consequences of the lack of it. So, why do they allow and, in some cases, even encourage non-compliance with the law? Is capital – profit, the accumulation of wealth, the maintenance of privileges – the only justification? According to Chun (2020), Karl Marx has once stated that “there must be something wrong in the world, which increases its wealth without diminishing its misery”...

## **What do they/we lack?**

### **Ethics!**

Yes, capitalism and the people who self-associate with it unconditionally lack *ethics*. The ethics they have been lacking is, we understand, that which Freire (1996) has called *the universal ethics of the human being*, something that is based on *solidarity as a commitment among people*. As Freire asserts, the ethics he talks about

is not the lesser, restricted ethics of the market, which bows obediently to the interests of profit. [...] I speak, on the contrary, of the universal ethics of the human being. Of the ethics that condemns [...] the exploitation of the human being's workforce, that condemns accusing for listening, [...] falsifying the truth, deceiving the unwary, striking the weak and helpless, burying the dream and utopia, promising knowing that one will not keep the promise [...] (FREIRE, 1996, p. 7).<sup>14</sup>

The *universal ethics of the human being* is, for Freire, something that belongs to human nature and, therefore, is indispensable to coexistence, that is, to live *with* people. As such, ethics establishes the *responsibility* that each of us has / should have with ourselves and with the other, since we are in the world together, that is, we coexist and *each of us is the other of the other*. For Freire, therefore,

[...] more than a being in the world, the human being has become a Presence in the world, with the world and with the others. Presence that, recognizing the other presence as a “non-self” recognizes itself as ‘itself’. Presence that reflects on itself, that recognizes itself as a presence, that intervenes, that transforms, that speaks of what it does but also of what it dreams, that finds, compares, evaluates, values, decides, that breaks. And it is in the domain of decision, evaluation, freedom, rupture, option, that the need for ethics is established and responsibility is imposed. Ethics becomes inevitable and its possible transgression is a devaluation, never a virtue (FREIRE, 1996, p. 9).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In the original: “não é a ética menor, restrita, do mercado, que se curva obediente aos interesses do lucro. [...] Falo, pelo contrário, da ética universal do ser humano. Da ética que condena [...] a exploração da força de trabalho do ser humano, que condena acusar por ouvir [...], falsear a verdade, iludir o incauto, golpear o fraco e indefeso, soterrar o sonho e a utopia, prometer sabendo que não cumprirá a promessa [...].”

<sup>15</sup> In the original: “[...] mais do que um ser no mundo, o ser humano se tornou uma Presença no mundo, com o mundo e com os outros. Presença que, reconhecendo a outra presença como um “não-eu” se reconhece como “si própria”. Presença que se pensa a si mesma, que se sabe presença, que intervém, que transforma, que fala do que faz mas também do que sonha, que constata, compara, avalia, valora, que decide, que rompe. E é no domínio da decisão, da avaliação, da liberdade, da ruptura, da opção, que se instaura a necessidade da ética e se impõe a responsabilidade. A ética se torna inevitável e sua transgressão possível é um desvalor, jamais uma virtude.”

We have, in the course of history and the trivialization of life, acted irresponsibly with each other and with the planet, in the lack of perception, often, of the evil that we infringe on the other and, certainly, of the evil that we infringe on ourselves when we do harm to another and thus transgress ethics. As humanity, we still have a lot to learn and we hope to be able to do so. Therefore, we walk hand in hand with hope, in active waiting, in action, in attitude, in intervention, in the expression of our voices and our ideas, in construction, in (re)invention, in dialogue, that is, we go on in the hope that we can transform the world and transform ourselves, never forgetting that hope is not “a folding of arms and waiting” (FREIRE, 1987, p. 97), but a movement in hope, because only the fight with hope allows, in fact, to hope.

## **A Call to Action**

### **We can change!**

Yes, what is set in terms of society, economy, politics, rights and duties, reality(ies), truth(s), was built by us, together, along historical times. We cannot avoid this responsibility, because, even if we have done nothing at all, inaction is, in itself, a way of acting ... and it has consequences!

In Brazil today, we are experiencing multiple simultaneous crises – the *health crisis*, caused by Covid-19 and the historical precariousness of our health system, of our politics and of our social participation; the *political crisis*, caused by our historical heritage and the precariousness of our educational system; the *economic crisis*, caused by several of the same factors already mentioned, plus the exploitation, by the savage capitalism of the globalized world, of our wealth and our productive force. We are also experiencing an *educational crisis*, as we have discussed so far.

The vast majority of us, ordinary Brazilians – because we do not belong to that minimum percentage of the population that concentrates most of the country’s income and wealth, and because we witness everyday life – know that we have lived very badly! It is true that many of us do not perceive the mechanisms through which these lives have been invented for us, and nor even what contributions we have made to cause them to be as they are ... but many do. Of these, some go on living as they can, trying to enjoy what they can, protecting themselves and their loved ones, in an attempt to walk through life unscathed. Others engage in struggles, associate

with groups and social movements, join political parties, adopt public service as a space for action, participate in real and virtual protests, knowing that surely we will not go through life unharmed. Certainly, there will be, among us, those who live a little of each of these realities, along with those who do not fit into any of them. The fact is that the struggle for the right to education is a struggle that every Brazilian should engage in, especially those, like you, our reader, and us, who have had the opportunity to have access to education and can, today, read, write and make meanings of texts like this. Our responsibility is enormous! It is impossible for people like us to exist without struggling, since

[at] the moment when human beings [...] started creating the world, inventing language, with which they started to name the things they made with their action in the world, as they were enabled to understand the world and consequently created the necessary communicability of that which they understood, it was no longer possible to exist unless they made themselves open to the radical and profound tension between good and evil, between dignity and indignity, decency and shamelessness, between beauty and the ugliness of the world [...] it was no longer possible to exist without assuming the right and the duty to choose, to decide, to fight, to make politics (FREIRE, 1996, p. 30).<sup>16</sup>

Observing the political-ideological scenario in Brazil nowadays, we are certainly in need of doing politics ... in and out of our classrooms. If we consider, however, that *educating is a political act*, as Freire taught us, as educators, we will all, thus, become political agents, assuming, therefore, in addition to our own rights and duties, the right and duty to educate for making choices, for decision-making, for struggling ... for political activity, in a nutshell. The current scenario forces us, however, to pause for a moment in face of the retrospective observation of our pedagogical practices in order to

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<sup>16</sup> In the original: “[n]o momento em que os seres humanos [...] foram criando o mundo, inventando a linguagem, com que passaram a dar nome às coisas que faziam com a ação sobre o mundo, na medida em que se foram habilitando a inteligir o mundo e criaram por consequência a necessária comunicabilidade do inteligido, já não foi possível existir a não ser disponível à tensão radical e profunda entre o bem e o mal, entre a dignidade e indignidade, decência e o despudor, entre boniteza e a feiura do mundo [...] já não foi possível existir sem assumir o direito e o dever de optar, de decidir, de lutar, de fazer política.”

question ourselves, as teachers and teacher educators, about what we mean by *educating* and by *doing politics*; whether, as educators, we perceive ourselves as political agents; and what kind of politics we have made throughout our teaching careers. In other words, we need to ask and answer ourselves *how we have been educating and for what purposes*.

As language teacher educators and researchers at the university level, we understand education in a broad sense, which encompasses the activities of teachers at all levels of schooling, including professors at the university. Therefore, we are also responsible for the *educational crisis* we find ourselves in and for thinking of possible solutions for the future. As language teacher educators and researchers, we also understand literacy and language teaching, including foreign language teaching, as one of the fields of education at large. Becoming critical in education and in literacy studies, in our view, is essential for understanding the purposes and means of our educational attitudes and pedagogic moves. For this reason, we have joined a group of several other teacher educators coming from almost every region in Brazil, with the objective of improving critical education, including critical teacher education, in our own contexts. Since 2009, the group, co-coordinated by Profs. Walkyria Monte Mór and Lynn Mario Trindade Menezes de Souza, both of them professors at the University of São Paulo (USP), has been working on a project called “National Project for Teacher Education”, which has conducted research and practices initially based, especially in its first years (called Phase 1), on the New Literacy Studies (STREET, 1984), Multiliteracies (COPE; KALANTZIS, 2000) and Critical Literacies (CERVETTI; PARDALES; DAMICO, 2001), theoretical perspectives that lately have been put under the umbrella term of “Critical Language Education”.

The National Project for Teacher Education is now over 10 years old and includes more than 20 Federal, State and private universities around Brazil and some from abroad. During the last 10 years or so, researchers participating in the National Project, as we now call it, have departed from these initial pioneering theoretical studies pointed out above to pursue many other critical venues, acknowledging the heterogeneity emerging from their various local realities where they have been conducting research on critical literacies and critical education, and reframing and expanding the



scope of theories and practices in the Project.<sup>17</sup> Working with this group has allowed us to reflect on the type of education we have been pursuing in the undergraduate and graduate courses we teach at our institutions and the purposes that we want to achieve.

Our own individual or collective research projects have become more critical with the help of the input provided by the National Project group, as it is now commonly recognized. For example, Mattos (2012) discusses the use of critical literacy in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in order to educate students for active and participatory citizenship, and Mattos (2014), in a text that joins theory to practice, discusses possibilities for social justice teacher education and presents a series of activities involving critical literacies and multiliteracies that may be adapted and adopted by other critical teacher educators, so that other teachers in education may have the experience of being taught through critical literacy and may be prepared to use it in their own classrooms. Jucá (2017) proposes critical literacy as a path to teacher education so that future teachers have the opportunity to expand their critical reading of the world/text in order to unveil the socio-historically constructed mechanisms used to devalue Brazilian education, teaching and teachers, and Jucá (2020), based on the work done through critical literacy, proposes the design and use of locally situated activities in order to develop a local version of decolonial teaching of languages and language teacher education, so that the ones involved can perceive the forms of coloniality imposed by colonial processes. Finally, Mattos, Jucá and Jorge (2019) discuss issues related to critical teacher education and present three different examples of their own research in this area. These are only some of the research and practices we have been involved in, which are also among many other research papers, articles and books published by the National Project group.

These papers, articles and books form an ever-growing archive of theories and practices in Critical Language Education in Brazil, which serves as an example of how we, as a group, have been contributing to critical

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<sup>17</sup> We very much thank one of the anonymous reviewers for calling our attention to the development of the so many heterogeneous types of local research and research results inside the National Project, including new theoretical perspectives, such as Menezes de Souza's (2011) notion of "critical literacy as reading yourself" and Monte Mor's (2015) decolonial perspective on the three generations of literacy studies in Brazil.

teacher education. In Mattos (2015), a book resulting from her PhD research, one of the participants reports on the necessity of having gone through the experience of learning through critical literacy activities in order to be prepared to teach using the same perspective. Critical Language Education, in our view, may help to raise the education standards in Brazil, leading to what we have been calling *quality education*, as stated in the Constitution. For us, quality education means being able to contribute to the expansion of the students' capacity to critically read texts and the world (FREIRE, 1992). Such students will, then, be able to develop their own sense of participatory citizenship, contributing to the construction of society. Finally, we believe that it is in this critical co-construction of our society that we have the possibility of working towards reducing inequalities and creating a more just world for all. That's where hope lies.

### **In lieu of a conclusion**

Looking at the current scenario, it seems to us that, in addition to a rural party or an evangelical party in the Brazilian Congress, we need, in the daily exercise of our political activity, *an education party*... composed of researchers, teacher educators, general educators, teachers, ultimately, to take up spaces that are almost always occupied by others who, in fact, understand very little of what education means – although they propose and even implement projects, amendments and provisional measures in the name of national education! Many of them know the laws, it is true, but, for one reason or another, they are not interested in enforcing them in favor of citizenship and democracy, of a just and egalitarian society. We can *do politics* in several ways and this will certainly be one of them. We propose, therefore, that we join those who are not involved in this type of politics, so that we also occupy the spaces of politics and that, in and out of the Congress Plenary, we fight for the common good and engage in politics together, in order to ensure the concrete realization of the right to quality and free education, guaranteed to every Brazilian by the *Citizen Constitution*.

You, reader, teacher, citizen of this country: the future also depends on your actions in the world – or, for the matter, the lack of them. As formally educated participants in this society, fighting for education is a duty that also belongs to us. If we cannot carry it out within the constitutionally established dimension, then we must claim that the state fulfills its role. Let

us recognize, as Freire (1996, p. 9-10) teaches us, “that we are conditioned beings, but not determined. [...] that History is a time of possibility and not of determinism, that the future [...] is problematic and not inexorable.”<sup>18</sup> Only thus can we break the vicious cycle that imprisons and enslaves us, and imagine and build other possibilities for coexistence. May we, therefore, together, creators and creatures, pave the way for another possible future.

### Author's Contribution

The two authors worked together in the translation of the original text and both contributed to the writing of this extended version. They also worked together on the changes suggested by the anonymous reviewers.

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<sup>18</sup> In the original: “que somos seres condicionados, mas não determinados. [...] que a História é tempo de possibilidade e não de determinismo, que o futuro [...] é problemático e não inexorável.”

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