

REVIEW ARTICLE

School and Educational Psychology

Editor

Vera Lucia Trevisan de Souza

Support

Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento
de Pessoal de Nível Superior (Nº
88887.701474/ 2022-00).

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no
conflicts of interest.

Data availability

The research data are openly available
in the *Repositório Institucional da
UFDP* at [https://dspace.ufdpar.edu.
br/jspui/handle/prefix/738](https://dspace.ufdpar.edu.br/jspui/handle/prefix/738).

Received

January 15, 2024

Approved

May 8, 2025

School Psychology and Political Action: theoretical articulations with Paulo Freire's thought

Psicologia Escolar e Ação Política: articulações teóricas com o pensamento de Paulo Freire

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Article based on the dissertation by R.S. DAMASCENO, entitled "*Crítica e Política em Paulo Freire: investigação para uma práxis da libertação em Psicologia Escolar e Educacional*". Universidade Federal do Delta do Parnaíba, 2024.

How to cite this article: Damasceno, R. S., & Negreiros, F. (2026). School Psychology and Political Action: theoretical articulations with Paulo Freire's thought. *Estudos de Psicologia* (Campinas), 43, e10690. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-0275202643e10690>

Abstract

This article discusses the political implications of psychological practice in public schools, dialectically mediated by theoretical elements of Freirean thought. Throughout the discussion, the political action of psychologists within the school context is presented as a continuous and dialectical movement, materially constituted by critical engagement, dialogical openness, and an ethic of love. These theoretical elements offer psychology new modes of engagement in everyday school life and demonstrate that a liberating political action must carefully consider the institutional and historical constraints of its time as it advances. Moreover, in overcoming processes of alienation and reification, such action must embrace the radical nature of human existence as a praxis that is both transformative and authentically humanizing. Finally, the importance of school psychologists bringing their daily praxis closer to Freirean theoretical frameworks is emphasized, drawing from them new ways of thinking and acting within the human and social materiality of schools.

Keywords: Critical School Psychology; Dialogue; Freirean Thought; Love.

Resumo

Este artigo discute as implicações políticas da prática psicológica nas escolas públicas, mediada dialeticamente por elementos teóricos do pensamento freireano. Ao decorrer da discussão, apresentamos a ação política das(os) psicólogas(os) na realidade das escolas como um movimento contínuo e dialético que se constitui materialmente pelo engajamento crítico, pela abertura dialógica e pela ética amorosa. Esses elementos teóricos revelam à psicologia novas formas de atuação no cotidiano escolar e mostram que uma ação política da libertação precisa avançar de forma atenta aos limites institucionais e históricos do seu tempo e, superando processos de alienação e reificação, precisa assumir a radicalidade da existência humana como práxis transformadora e autenticamente humanizadora. Por fim, ressaltamos a importância das(os)

psicólogas(os) escolares aproximarem sua práxis cotidiana do referencial teórico freireano, extraindo dele novas formas de pensar e agir na materialidade humana e social das escolas.

Palavras-chave: Psicologia Escolar Crítica; Diálogo; Pensamento Freireano; Amor.

This theoretical and bibliographic article is grounded in the articulation between the critical perspective in School and Educational Psychology and the practical-theoretical foundations of an education for liberation, through a theoretical-creative dialogue with the writings of educator Paulo Freire. As part of a reflexive and propositional approach to action, the role of psychologists in the daily life of Brazilian public schools is discussed, guided by the following central question: what are the political responsibilities of psychology within public schools? This question is addressed within the theoretical framework of Freirean thought, through the identification of theoretical elements that may support the political-educational role of psychology in school institutions.

The discussion is guided by the problematization of the contradictions and the need to advance a critical stance among psychology professionals in relation to the concreteness of daily school life within an unequal, colonized, and conservative society such as Brazil. Within this context, a reflection is proposed on how such a critical stance – historically upheld by school and educational psychologists – may become mistakenly disconnected from the dialectical process of action and reflection (Freire, 1959/2003, 1974/2021, 1967/2022a), or from the theory-practice unity, that is, concrete praxis. Such disconnection may result in actions that are detached from the realities of public education institutions as well as from the ethical-political commitment to local subjects.

With the risk of becoming dissertational and mystifying, a further inquiry is made into the bureaucratization – through institutionalization – of critique within the training and practice of school psychology. Stripped of its permanent self-critical exercise and historical dynamism, such critique may become rigid, turning into a kind of recipe book or protocol guide – a checklist of predetermined attitudes and behaviors – thus representing yet another form of domestication. This raises the question of the extent to which the critical action of school psychologists is engaged in the struggle for social and educational transformation, and in the construction of political practices aligned with the material conditions of everyday life in Brazilian public schools (Freire, 1976/2022b; Guzzo & Ribeiro, 2019; Souza, 2022).

In this regard, Moreira and Guzzo (2016) contribute to this discussion by questioning the effectiveness of a critical stance in promoting change within capitalist sociability and in constructing practices that reflect and reveal its historical content. The authors further note that, when contextualized in this way, such a critical stance “does not allow us to retreat, much less to adopt the position of those who wait for the construction of a new society before offering their liberating actions” (Moreira & Guzzo (2016, p. 205).

In line with this perspective, we emphasize that merely recognizing critical thought does not guarantee that transformative outcomes will be achieved through the practices and interventions carried out by psychology in schools across the country. Meira (2012), for example, argues that since the 1980s, the so-called “critique movement” has shown signs of consolidation within psychology focused on educational issues. Among other concerns, this movement exposes the ideological commitment of psychology as a science and profession historically aligned with the aims of capitalism as a mode of social production and reproduction.

However, the author warns that merely unveiling the conservative – and, it may be added, colonial – structures of psychology does not ensure that critical thinking will evolve toward the changes required in Brazil’s current educational landscape. According to Meira (2012), for school

and educational psychology to become increasingly aligned with critical thought, it is not enough to adopt contextualized stances. While such stances are important, they are not sufficient in themselves, as it has become “fashionable” in recent times to emphasize the socio-historical dimension of subjects. This is not entirely negative, Meira (2012) notes, as the history of the critique movement itself demonstrates the contributions of this shift in perspective.

Nonetheless, the author strongly emphasizes that, in many cases, such a critical stance “is no more than a superficial adherence to a trend regarded as current or ‘modern’ ” (Meira, 2012, p. 15). In her view, it is urgent to advance the process of critique of/in/to school and educational psychology, engaging ethically and politically in the development of new theoretical assumptions. Through these, it may become possible to offer more honest and consistent responses to the actual problem of the relationship between individual and society, as well as the possibilities for human emancipation in contemporary society. In agreement with the author, it is also argued that the relationship between psychology and public education requires new theoretical formulations that are more in line with the dilemmas and innovations of the present historical moment.

With regard to the aforementioned “critique movement,” it is noted that it emerged from the self-critique of the theoretical-methodological choices made by a psychology historically embedded in the field of school education in ways that supported the interests of dominant social classes. This movement was also grounded in a critique that mobilized internal reflections, which made it possible to expose the fragile foundations of psychological practices and concepts as responses to the concrete issues of the Brazilian educational reality (Negreiros et al., 2020; Patto, 1984/2022; Viégas, 2023).

According to Souza (2018), this shift was made possible by the establishment of critical elements for the training and practice of psychology professionals across diverse educational contexts. These elements, as a starting point, underscore the urgency for psychologists to engage in an ethical-political exercise by assuming: (a) a political commitment to the struggle for the construction of a democratic public school system with social quality; (b) a theoretical-epistemological rupture with adaptationist conceptions of psychology and education, advancing increasingly critical conceptions; and, no less important, (c) the development of a psychologist’s praxis in response to school demands.

Over the years, the critical action of psychology in schools has been shaped as a professional practice aimed at overcoming theoretical models of intervention rooted in individualizing and medicalizing approaches to addressing school-related needs and concerns. In everyday school life, practices can be observed that seek to distance themselves from intervention models that place blame either on students and their families or on teachers for the recurring difficulties encountered within school institutions, whether in teaching-learning processes or in the daily conflicts inherent to their dynamic nature. Psychologists’ actions in schools have also been marked by the proposal of collective interventions aligned with the multiple institutional voices and the potentialities present in the school context (Damasceno, Pereira Neto, et al., 2023; Gomes et al., 2022; Leite et al., 2021; Magrin et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2021).

This article aims to theoretically delineate the emergence of a critical perspective in school psychology as a liberating political praxis, with the goal of creating new ways of grasping and sustaining critical thinking in the field through sensitivity to the urgent needs articulated by school institutions. In this pressing context, Freirean reflections emerge as a source of inventive potential for creating new practical-theoretical pathways, aimed at questioning the political implications of critical psychological practice within educational institutions.

In dialogue with Freirean propositions, this discussion questions the political nature of the content of criticism in psychologists' practice, particularly in terms of its grounding in the concrete realities of school institutions and in the needs of educational subjects as part of a transformative praxis. From the perspective of the Northeastern Brazilian educator, critical knowledge alone is not sufficient to bring about change in oppressive situations or to liberate individuals from them. Rather, such knowledge must be unveiled so that individuals can "take a step toward overcoming them by engaging in the political struggle to transform the concrete conditions in which oppression occurs" (Freire, 1992/2007, p. 32).

In the context of emerging concrete actions in school and educational psychology – based increasingly on critical conceptions and propositions, and thereby committed to a social engagement with quality school education and to a political praxis that contributes to more inclusive and fully developmental teaching-learning processes – this article seeks to discuss the political implications of psychological practice in Brazilian public schools, dialectically mediated by theoretical elements from Paulo Freire's critical-educational thought.

School and Educational Psychology in the Construction of a Political Praxis of Liberation

The critical-reflective and propositional approach presented here is grounded in the understanding that the practice of psychology in various educational and school contexts constitutes a political activity that cannot be grasped strictly as a technical or psychological dimension. As a concrete political act, whose stance is explicitly or implicitly defined, the educational action of school and educational psychology, in critical terms, cannot be apolitical, politically neutral, or disinterested.

The failure to recognize the "political nature" of psychology – particularly when education is taken as a field of practice and the public school as a key setting for professional engagement – coincides with the adoption of a political stance. This stance, when aligned with the interests of those who hold political, economic, and cultural power, manifests as a technical-scientific instrument that contributes to the maintenance of the prevailing social order.

Such a mode of action represents a reactionary and oppressive political choice, even if, in many cases, it operates subtly, through the implementation of practices that legitimize conditions of exploitation, social and educational inequality, and collusion with various forms of violence, such as racism and discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation within the school setting. In contrast, we emphasize an urgent need for an alternative political orientation for school and educational psychologists – one that represents a historical and theoretical-methodological task, mediated by the commitment of serious and engaged professionals and intellectuals to fostering dialogue with oppressed groups in their struggle for liberation.

In Paulo Freire, a humble and rigorous interlocutor is found – through his scholarly work – for deepening this urgent and pressing task. This Northeastern Brazilian educator, concerned with the political dimensions of educational action, engages in an act of hopeful resistance, developing political choices that are attuned to the socio-educational and school realities of Latin America.

The educator of the oppressed encourages reflection on how interrelations within educational and school spaces are shaped daily by power dynamics, which, on the one hand, produce specific ways of behaving and acting in the school environment and, on the other, through particular forms of knowledge, inform specific understandings of the educational phenomenon and the

schooling process. In this regard, Freirean theory does not deny education as a political act; rather, by assuming itself as a critical-popular practice of liberation, it undertakes the effort to construct a thought-action that affirms specific political choices for education, as well as for the daily actions enacted within the school setting.

In this direction, Kohan (2019b) explains that the dialogical master does not merely systematize a new model of teaching in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1974/2021), nor does he merely formulate a pedagogical method, as many scholars believe. This philosopher of education justifies this by emphasizing that the core of the book lies in the critique directed at the political principles of what Freire refers to as “banking concept of education,” as well as in the affirmation of a new politics for education in which educators and other education professionals become genuinely engaged in overcoming the contradictory oppressor-oppressed relationship that underpins the structure of the Brazilian school and socio-educational system.

According to the author, Freire’s political thought is not limited to teaching techniques and methods. While these are important elements of educational action, the author argues that it is necessary to broaden the relationship established between education and politics to encompass “a logic of the pedagogical relationship that is not solely about educational institutions, but about the power relations exercised across various spheres of the social field” (Kohan, 2019b, p. 20).

These considerations align with theoretical discussions regarding the political nature of psychological practice in education. In dialogue with Freirean thought, it is argued that the political engagement of school psychologists, as a political praxis of liberation, reveals new commitments for their educational action. The following are examples of such commitments:

- 1) the promotion of engaged and participatory actions within the school context, grounded in the autonomy of local actors;
- 2) the construction of affective networks willing to mobilize the institutional collective, encouraging individuals and groups to pursue changes that are both necessary and lovingly radical;
- 3) the political practice of psychology in schools must include the commitment to, through a permanent and socio-historical effort, mobilize dialogical spaces that operate with the voices of school actors, who, in speaking their word, may culturally signify their surrounding reality and thus create objective-subjective conditions for its transformation.

To this end, the definition of the term “politics” presented by philosopher-educator Kohan (2019b) – whose theoretical-philosophical proposal is inspired by Freirean ideas – is incorporated into the argument for constructing a new politics in school and educational psychology. This concept is not understood in its partisan sense, that is, in reference to systems of government or merely through the assumptions of representative democratic parties. In contrast, its Greek origin, polis, is recovered to ground it in a broader perspective – that is, “the exercise of power based on the relationships established with others in a social fabric, and more specifically, the ways of exercising power in teaching and learning” (Kohan, 2019b, p. 22).

Regarding the theoretical-practical concerns addressed here, it is specified to readers that the exercise of psychological power assumes its political character through concrete actions undertaken in public educational institutions across different regions of Brazil, as school psychologists, upon entering various educational spaces, carry with them political bodies that are manifested in their ways of acting and relating to others. This means that the political dimension of the educational actions of psychologists does not negate the constituent-constitutive power of the relationship between teaching and learning, whether in the classroom or in reference to it – such a relationship being understood as foundational to the school structure and essential to the developmental processes that take place

within it. Likewise, by recognizing themselves as political subjects, psychologists do not renounce the political nature of their knowing-doing as dialectical agents of politics both within and beyond educational institutions.

Thus defined, the problematizing political role of psychology in schools is realized in the construction of a praxis (theoretical reflection and action) that aligns with the needs of oppressed school subjects, as well as with their emancipation inside and outside public educational institutions. In this way, the political action of school and educational psychologists within the context of public schools, in a continuous and dialectical movement aimed at becoming a political praxis of liberation inspired by the possible contributions of Freirean thought, takes as its point of departure the following concerns, which will be further developed throughout this article, namely:

a) Critical engagement; b) Dialogical openness; c) Loving ethics.

Together, these practical-theoretical elements unveil new modes of action for psychologists in everyday school life, while also demonstrating that, when understood in this way, a critical practice – as political praxis – must advance, on the one hand, with attentiveness to the institutional and historical limitations of its time. On the other hand, in overcoming processes of reification and alienation, it must embrace the radical nature of human existence as an authentically humanizing act of transformation.

Critical Engagement

The critical engagement of psychologists in a given educational and school context can only acquire political implications when it is grounded, dialogically, in the search for the particular ways of thinking and acting of the local subjects in relation to the world – that is, the reality in which they live on a daily basis. For this reason, the reasoning and actions of these historical subjects only acquire real meaning when they are connected to concrete reality through a process of critical inquiry.

What is politically asserted through critical action is that, upon entering school life, psychology professionals should seek to understand the meanings that subjects produce concerning the issues that emerge within their context. It is not a matter of seeking to know them individually, as isolated cases, as if the justifications for their actions in the world could be found within themselves; rather, it is in reference to the worldly reality and the collective to which they are connected that the subjective productions constituting such subjects can be investigated.

In this sense, critical engagement, as a necessary element of a liberating political action of psychology in the school context, is primarily concerned with “knowing the subject situated in their context, within the relationships they establish, recognizing them as an active being, a being of rights, a being of transformation” (Dias & Guzzo, 2018, p. 14). It is also emphasized that the practice of psychology in the educational-school context “cannot be disconnected from a perspective that understands the school as a space connected to its reality, its geographic and historical location” (Feldmann & Guzzo, 2021, p. 2).

A political-liberating praxis may emerge from the moment psychologists authentically open themselves to dialogue with students, teachers, families, and the technical-pedagogical team. Thus, through the formation of a collective of voices and bodies that are sensitive to the issues arising from the institutional materiality, such subjects may, together, grasp daily dilemmas, challenges, and conflicts as objects of their intervention, rather than seeing themselves as objects of those issues. From this critical perception, as active, dialogical subjects engaged with everyday matters, it becomes possible to create the objective-subjective conditions to act within their real context,

constituting the act of thinking about it through the process of conscientization, as well as acting within it through critical actions – that is, as

results of being with it and being in it, through acts of creation, recreation, and decision, they [the subjects] energize their world. They begin to master reality. They begin to humanize it. They begin to add to it something of which they [the subjects] themselves are the maker. (Freire, 1967/2022a, p. 60)

The construction of a critically engaged psychological practice must be guided by the belief that all people possess the knowledge required to reflect on their reality and transform it through the invention of actions that, being already critical, create new ways and forms of inhabiting that reality through the collective act of producing ideas that turn into critical actions (Freire, 1974/2021; Kohan, 2019a). In this regard, the educator of hope underscores that the mere proposition of a supposedly engaged critical action within a given reality becomes unviable, in a liberating political proposal, if it is carried out without the people, upon them, or even merely from them. According to Freire, ongoing dialogue with popular groups is necessary, and such groups must be read and interpreted as composed of subjects who perceive and understand themselves as agents in the process of seeking. These groupings of real subjects may thus produce ideas about their reality and, through the very act of thinking, can – when material and subjective possibilities are enabled – generate inventive conditions for its transformation (Freire, 1967/2022a, 1976/2022b, 1981/2023).

In line with this, it is important to emphasize that, for psychology professionals, the concern with a critical insertion into the school setting – as a necessary component of psychological work – does not lie in viewing individuals as objects of professional practice but, on the contrary, in recognizing them as subjects in relation, occupying active, dialogical, and concretely engaged positions. That is, as subjects capable of offering meaningful contributions to the consolidation of psychological praxis as a field grounded in popular engagement, thus constituting an explicit political stance that guides a field of practice and knowledge production committed to popular interests.

In this regard, it is neither accidental nor uncommon to encounter the denial of critical thinking as action within authoritarian educational political projects that seek to control the bodies of school subjects. Such denial also forms the foundation of rigid and conservative curricular proposals, intolerant practices, and historically exclusionary perspectives. Moreover, this rejection of criticism as action is also a significant element in the structuring of capitalist sociability, which, in contemporary times, takes on neoliberal tones by asserting a market-oriented, corporate, and technicist approach to school education (Arroyo, 2019; Damasceno, Sousa, et al., 2023; Haddad, 2019; Leite, 2022; Martins et al., 2021; Scocuglia, 2022).

What is seen here? “I see future repeat the past,” as masterfully sung by Cazuza (1988). It is the same banking model of education, under a different name and with different features, but still dehumanizing and alienating – above all, serving the purpose of affirming and maintaining the political relationship of oppressors and oppressed within educational spaces.

However, it should be stressed that the discussion here is not about the imprisonment of any form of thought through silencing policies. Denial and hierarchical authoritarianism are most forcefully directed at, and especially affect, thinking as a verb, the act of thinking. An act that is central to critical thinking that finds wonder in reading the world and aspires to transform it. A thinking action that, in the loving nature of its critical reading, becomes dissatisfied with the current state of affairs and is outraged by the concrete and political choices that dehumanize subjects.

In this regard, it is important to highlight that the revolutionary political role of psychologists aligns with the commitment to engage, as historical subjects, through concrete praxis – unity of theory and practice – in critical thinking as action and, it must be added, as loving action. Exercising oneself as a loving subject in thinking as a concrete act reveals, in fact, the immanent powers of enduring existence – that is, of a human existence made possible only by the thought that produced it, even under limiting historical conditions. With this perspective, it becomes imperative to build a psychological praxis within Brazilian public schools from a critical-popular standpoint.

In dialogue, Hooks (2020) emphasizes that critical thinking requires the engagement and participation of students and teachers, as it constitutes an interactive and dynamic process generated by the interrelations of involved and implicating subjects. According to her, critical thinking moves as “a way to approach ideas with the goal of understanding the underlying, core truths, rather than merely the superficial truth that may be the most obvious” (Hooks, 2020, p. 34). In this light, it is the role of psychology professionals who take education as a practice and school institutions as the stage for their professional activity to position themselves within this critical interrelation, as it is one of engagement and participation.

Aligned with engaged critique, psychology may break away from psychological and social practices that attempt to explain or lecture to popular groups about their everyday problems, or that attempt to guide their life choices, thereby silencing their voices. Furthermore, it is worth emphasizing that creating conditions for the critical engagement of the people with their concrete demands constitutes an important step in the invention of truly emancipatory psychological practices, rooted in a critical-popular perspective.

The critical and also dialogical choice is constructed with school subjects through an investigative action that reveals the potentialities of the school and educational reality, in which school psychologists may engage and with which they may design work of a collective nature. In this way, to critically understand the school is to pay attention, at the same time, to the objective-discursive implications that its actions and ideas generate within this concrete, materially social, and political reality. In other words, the preoccupation of school psychologists with critically understanding the totality of the school form only holds objective meaning if it is, first and foremost, occupied with the inclusion of the actions and ideas that psychology professionals produce daily with local subjects, because “each event is the effect of a complex field of forces, and our ideas not only speak of this field, they constitute it, they are forces” (Machado, 2014, p. 765).

In Freirean critical theory, the critical and dialectical process of change, in relation to the reading of the educational-school reality by real subjects, takes place when the concrete conditions of this reality are transformed through the very act of being critically inserted within it.

Dialogical Openness

As previously stated, a liberating political practice within the field of school/educational psychology – objectively articulated as critical action – requires school psychologists to create material and relational conditions that foster an understanding of the worldview embedded in the routine actions of local groups. This must be combined with the need to identify the subjectively grounded, yet objectively constituted, motivations by which individuals who routinely inhabit school institutions carry out their local actions. It is also necessary to examine, dialogically, the levels of understanding mobilized in these specific and contextualized forms of concrete action, in pursuit of their objective meanings.

According to Freire (1974/2021, 1967/2022a, 1976/2022b), critical action through which reality is transformed is dialogical from the outset, beginning with an investigative act that prompts the production of questions about what is to be discussed with popular subjects. This observation is relevant to psychological work in schools, as Freirean critical thinking – because it is dialogical and problem-posing – encourages recognition of local actors as the driving force behind transformation.

This approach opposes and transcends explanatory and expository practices – which, in their form, are understood as oppressive political strategies – that operate through unequal power-knowledge relations (Kohan, 2019a, 2019b), in which the silencing of local voices and the protagonism of their actors is justified by the reproduction of knowledge and practices that are largely unfamiliar with the idiosyncrasies of the reality upon which a given investigative proposal is imposed. The educator of hope warns that it is essential to recognize that the worldview of concrete subjects, “which manifests in the various forms of their action, reflects their situation in the world, in which they are constituted. Educational and political action cannot do without critical knowledge of this situation” (Freire, 1974/2021, p. 120).

Political praxis becomes meaningful when it enables subjects to establish a dialogical openness toward the reality in which they live and through which they collectively produce their know-how. Through this openness to dialogue, individuals are able to act upon the local reality in order to transform it, as critical engagement – mediated by dialogical action – within educational contexts allows them to develop new levels of awareness about themselves and the locality in which they live.

Through dialogical spaces, the critical-political action of psychology in schools can reveal the objective and discursive conditions through which, in a process of historical awareness, individuals are able to insert themselves into the school context in order to understand it, with the aim of transforming it. As a result, they no longer see themselves as adaptable individuals who merely respond to external and/or third-party demands, conforming to the position of being objects of others’ actions. On the contrary, mobilized through dialogue and operating through the inadaptability that characterizes their critical engagement, school subjects become unsettled and, through dialogical interventions, are able to “question reality, think critically about what is presented, and then act upon it” (Souza & Neves, 2019, p. 11).

The emergence of a psychology policy in school/educational contexts that affirms dialogue as a praxis of liberation calls upon school psychologists to engage in the daily task of thinking through and acting upon educational processes, by creating objective-subjective conditions through which oppressed women, men, and children may, dialogically, articulate their world from their own historical-social position. Dialectically articulated to the act of articulating this world, political tools must be made available – as authentic praxis – so that these individuals, in their concrete reality, may write this same world as a way of affirming their right to authorship, a right that is preceded by their right to speak their word. In this process of articulating and writing the world in which one lives, an authentic dialectical subject is revealed – one who creates oneself (subjectivity) in a real world (objectivity), not only knowing it, but also knowing that they possess the power to change it, thereby transforming themselves.

However, school psychologists may, despite this, adopt a hierarchical and silencing stance through practices that dichotomize popular speech and writing – practices in which depoliticizing and silencing logics operate, already anti-dialogical in nature, even when they claim to advocate for the liberation of oppressed groups and for a revolutionary politics. This represents a historical and dialectical mistake: proposing transformative actions without the involvement of the real individuals

who experience the everyday dilemmas of school institutions. Recognizing this grave contradiction is necessary for a school and educational psychology that seeks to become increasingly grounded in popular engagement. At the same time, it becomes urgent to resist this historical and dialectical mistake, for it is inauthentic to carry out politically critical actions/reflections without the voices of oppressed groups – that is, without dialoguing with them – thus requiring, in the same dialogical and creative act, a reconfiguration of praxis-theory (Freire, 1976/2022b, 1981/2023).

In light of this, it is necessary to affirm that a form of psychology whose social practice takes place within the specific context of school institutions cannot do without – at the risk of becoming merely expository and ideologically reproducing the voice of the oppressors – the continuous pursuit of dialogue with the local individuals and groups who shape the school territory. As part of a political effort toward dialogical openness, it is the psychologist's responsibility to listen to them – critically and lovingly – from the various institutional positions they occupy.

Without this, concrete attempts at transformative action may be reduced to mere bookish and verbalist discourse which, although well-articulated and softly resonant, merely reflect an uncritical maintenance of the material and subjective – fundamentally cultural – conditions of oppression, injustice, and the violation of the educational and political rights of students, teachers, administrators, support staff, and others. Such empty, politically superficial, and ostensibly transformative discourses continue to serve as effective instruments for the reproduction of oppressive relations that underpin the prevailing view of intellectuals and professionals as part of the petty bourgeoisie. This is due to the fact that training is still shaped by the hegemonic class, which controls economic power and political management tools, and by the “pseudoformation” of a curriculum in which the dominant ideology persists, rooted in a colonizing, individualistic, and competitive sociohistorical structure.

In the face of a dominant psychology – whose educational practices and theories are governed by techniques and methods that justify and sustain conditions of oppression, injustice, violence, and dehumanization – there is an urgent need to affirm another psychology. This alternative psychology must stand in opposition to the former, engaging in a critical and conflict-generating process, and be politically committed to the interests and aspirations of the popular classes. With regard to school/educational psychology, it is a political and historical task to redirect its course through an ongoing process of dialogical pursuit and openness, alongside students, educators, and other school workers, to construct new relationships with education and with the school territory. In a loving and dialectical cooperation, psychologists must develop new formats for the interrelations between teaching and learning, while simultaneously affirming the popular dimension in educational practices and in the human development process. In doing so, their educational action and theory are grounded in collective and political foundations aligned with these purposes.

Loving Ethics

The authenticity of psychological practice in education is achieved when actions that unveil the school reality – already critical in themselves – form a dynamic and dialectical unity with concrete practices aimed at transforming that same reality, thus becoming genuinely political actions. Such authenticity is only possible when psychologists align the implementation of liberating practices with a theory of educational action that finds its true expression in a pedagogy through which oppressed subjects construct the material and historical conditions to, through reflection and action, recognize and assume themselves as men and women who guide their lives and historical destinies.

As stated by the educator from the Brazilian Northeast, this does not occur without struggle, without persistence, without hope, and without love (Fiori, 2021; Freire, 1976/2022b, 1981/2023; Kohan, 2019b; Scocuglia, 2022).

It is grounded in a humanist and liberating ethic that any struggle – when its aims are developed alongside oppressed individuals and groups – becomes a true expression of love; that is, it is realized as an authentic act of love. A loving ethic must guide concrete actions that stand in opposition to acts of lovelessness manifested in school practices carried out by psychology professionals who base their actions on the violence inflicted upon the oppressed. Through unloving conduct, such actions suppress difference, individualize bodies, psychologize the social, historical, and political into shallow subjectivism and deceptive techniques, silence the plurality and diversity of local voices, and impose norms and labels. In operating this way, oppression and brutality against certain forms of existence are justified, resulting in the dehumanization of lives.

The educator of the oppressed points out that those who instigate lovelessness are not the unloved, but rather those “who do not love, because they only love themselves” (Freire, 1974/2021, p. 58, emphasis in original). Our dialogical master argues that, regardless of how contradictory the actions of the oppressed – whether individuals or groups – may appear in response to the violence of the oppressors, such actions will ultimately reveal genuine gestures of love. He explains that, whether consciously or unconsciously, the emergence of acts of rebellion and disobedience by the oppressed – actions that may appear as violent or nearly as violent as the oppression from which they originate – can indeed ignite an ethic grounded in love. According to Freire (1974/2021, p. 59), the cruelty of the oppressive structure, enforced both by institutions and by individuals who implicitly or explicitly adopt certain political stances, “turns the oppressed into men [and women] who are forbidden to be; the responses of the oppressed to the violence of the oppressors are imbued with the yearning to claim the right to be”.

As we see it, an ethic grounded in love thus entails a humanist and liberating act rooted in the pursuit of “being more”. A political action in school/educational psychology, when grounded in an ethic of love, must embrace the liberation and humanization of individuals subjected to oppressive and degrading conditions as essential to the transformative process in which they are engaged as beings continually constructing themselves and their world. Hence, the urgency to overcome such conditions of oppression becomes evident. This entails, to a certain extent, a politics of love, one that involves critical apprehension and reveals the real and historical origins of these oppressive conditions. Through transformative action within the oppressive situation – action that is both critical and dialogical – another mode of existence is triggered, one that enables the pursuit of “being more.” As an act of love, it is not solitary; it becomes possible only when the other also possesses the conditions for liberation and, in congruence, can also move toward being more (Freire, 1967/2022a, 1974/2021, 1976/2022b, 1981/2023).

In this sense, a psychological praxis rooted in the school context is envisioned – one that is grounded in an ethic of love and constructed in dialogue with oppressed individuals and groups. From the Freirean theoretical-critical perspective, an ethic driven by love must constitute itself as both humanist and liberating theory and action, initiated by individuals and collectives. The establishment of a loving ethic is enacted through relationships with others, in collectivity, but also through the relationship one establishes with oneself, in individuality.

Dialectically correlated, individuality and collectivity must recognize – both critically and lovingly – liberation as a historical possibility, that is, one realized by concrete subjects. Only in this way can a political form of love be achieved – one that enables the pursuit of a future built

by individuals and collectives in the present, given that love is a task for both subjects and groups (Freire, 1981/2023). In agreement, Hooks (2021) notes that “the great movements for social justice in our society have strongly emphasized an ethic of love. However, young people [as well as adults] continue to be reluctant to embrace the idea of love as a transformative force” (p. 33, emphasis added).

According to Freire (1981/2023), it is an illusion to believe that love does not seek or expect reciprocity. For him, love constitutes an “intimate intercommunication between two consciences that respect one another. Each has the other subject of their love. Each has the other as the subject of their love. It is not about appropriating the other” (Freire, 1981/2023, p. 36).

In our capitalist, patriarchal, racist, and colonial society, practices that impose love as blackmail for the purpose of controlling others – thereby denying the other as a true other – are routinely observed. According to Freire (1981/2023, p. 36), this represents a fallacy of love, since “those who love do so by loving both the flaws and the virtues of the beloved. Love exists to the extent that one seeks communication, integration through communication with others”. Echoing this perspective, Hooks (2021) emphasizes that, in present times, it is complicated to raise love as a subject of discussion when, in fact, what is most often said about it highlights its absence rather than its presence in everyday life. This unfortunately reveals, in her view, “the fact that many of us are not sure what we are talking about when we speak of love or how to express it” (p. 41).

Inspired by Freire’s idea that education without love is unsustainable, we also understand that school and educational psychology cannot constitute a liberating and humanist political act without love. A loving psychology implies resistance to a selfish, manipulative psychology that individualizes and mystifies the historical-social nature of human existence, and that does not believe in the power of action and decision of marginalized subjects. A school psychologist who does not love the individuals with whom they build their educational practice will be unable to carry it out as an authentic praxis of liberation, as failing to love them also means failing to understand, respect, and meet them with hope. A psychology without hope is not psychology, nor can it find fertile ground for political action if it lacks faith in education and in public schooling. In the absence of such elements, school psychologists must seek work elsewhere.

According to Freire, those who love are willing to educate themselves in dialogue with unfinished beings because they also recognize themselves as such. Those who love reject education as mere dissertation or alienation, just as they reject educational practice as the imposition of knowledge by those who know more upon those who know less. Imposed education is unfeasible, just as imposed love is, according to this loving master. Loving education overcomes fear, violence, and embarrassment; there is no reason to fear an educational act when love is present (Freire, 1981/2023).

Final Considerations

The present article aimed to discuss the political implications of psychological practice in Brazilian public schools, dialectically mediated by theoretical elements inspired by the writings of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Initially, issues were raised regarding the critical perspective historically present in the field of school and educational psychology, by referencing the concrete reality of public educational institutions and the needs of school subjects. Furthermore, it was questioned how this content reveals a political stance, through choices – either implicitly or explicitly – made and assumed by psychologists in their everyday school contexts.

In a dialogue with Freire, theoretical elements were raised that may support the political-educational action of the numerous school psychologists working across various Brazilian regions, providing them with a theoretical framework that enables the consolidation of a political praxis contributing to more inclusive teaching and learning processes, capable of fostering comprehensive development. It was also emphasized that the political nature of psychology in public schools, as a critical political action, must strive toward the construction of a praxis (theoretical action and reflection) in dialogue with the aspirations of oppressed school subjects, as well as with their emancipation both within and beyond public educational institutions.

Accordingly, it is argued that the political action of school and educational psychologists within the material and subjective reality of public schools – through a continuous and collective movement – must, if it seeks to be realized as a political praxis of liberation, be grounded in a dialectically critical, dialogical, and loving action. These theoretical elements unveil to psychology professionals new modes of social and institutional action within the school context. Moreover, they suggest that, as thus conceived, a critical practice – constituting an authentic political praxis – must advance by remaining attentive, on the one hand, to the institutional and historical limitations of its time. On the other hand, through the overcoming of processes of reification and alienation, it must embrace the radical nature of human existence as a genuinely humanizing transformative action.

The theoretical argument presented here affirms the importance of school and educational psychologists engaging with Freirean thought, drawing from it new ways of thinking and acting within the concrete realities of Brazilian public schools. Freire offers a “social grounding” for what is theoretically conceived within psychological science, while also encouraging us to invent our psychological practice in education to respond to authentically popular concerns.

The Northeastern educator calls for the proclamation of a Politics of Liberation that seeks to understand the totality of school life through a “critical engagement” with school subjects, in a process of “dialogical openness” to the reality in which they live and through which they collectively produce their know-how. That is, it involves a political action that must be founded on an ethic driven by love – that is, a “loving ethic” emerging from a humanist and liberating theory and practice to be inaugurated by individuals and collectives.

Finally, it is important to note that due to the delimitation of the object of study, it was not possible to explore intrinsic aspects of the concrete practice of psychology in public schools, such as revealing the nuances of its day-to-day enactment. However, it is important to note that, as a reflective and propositional conception, this preliminary investigation was necessary in order to subsequently examine its reverberations within the human and social materiality of school institutions. This would make it possible to understand how these elements resonate in the psychological practices developed in such contexts – an aspect that highlights a methodological limitation of the present study. This does not negate the recommendation to include Paulo Freire as one of the essential theorists for the development of the critical perspective in school and educational psychology, both in the field of scientific research and in the training programs for psychologists working in, or with, Brazilian public schools. In line with this, it is also suggested that such inclusion be guided by the development of research that deepens the Freirean perspective, which is critical, dialogical, and grounded in love, within the practice and training of school psychologists. Drawing from the life and work of Freire, it is therefore understood that it is not criticism, but politics, that serves as the driving force of school and educational psychology as a praxis of liberation.

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