

EDUCATION AND THE PUBLIC IN LIBERAL PEDAGOGY AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY¹

La educación y lo público en la Pedagogía liberal y en la Pedagogía crítica

Noelia FERNÁNDEZ GONZÁLEZ & Miriam PRIETO EGIDO

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. España.

noelia.fernandezg@uam.es; miriam.prieto@uam.es

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2883-2207>; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5396-2404>

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, privatizing and individualizing understandings of education have surged due to neoliberal discourses and policies. In response to them, educational research has explored the different meanings of "the public" in relation to education

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that those neoliberal policies would erode. This paper aims to contribute to this debate by exploring the relationship between education and "the public" through a dialogue between two traditions, usually understood as incompatible, in the field of educational theory: the liberal theory of education as initiation formulated by Peters and that of Latin American critical pedagogy developed by Paulo Freire. This paper is based on a review of the central works that synthesize both approaches, tracing the marks of "the public", understood both as the educational aims oriented towards the common good as well as the shared spaces where the common good is built. This review has allowed us to identify four *points of distance-encounter* between both proposals, i.e., argumentative spaces that, within the distance between their postulates, share certain common ground where the traces of "the public" crystallize. First, through their attention to the categories *tradition/culture*, both authors frame education in public languages shared by society. Second, we identify a parallelism in the notions of *dialogue/conversation* with those shared languages that both theories postulate as defining the educational process. Thirdly, both approaches understand *the critique* as a form of participation in those common languages that are constructed. Fourthly and finally, to build free subjects, they share the rejection of spontaneist pedagogies that understand educational freedom as a mere "letting the learner do".

Keywords: educational theory; education; freedom; critical thinking; critical theory; liberalism.

RESUMEN

En las últimas décadas, las comprensiones privatizadoras e individualizadoras de la educación se han extendido con fuerza de la mano de discursos y políticas neoliberales. En respuesta a ellas, la investigación educativa viene explorando en los últimos años los distintos sentidos de "lo público" en relación con la educación que estas políticas vendrían a erosionar. Este trabajo pretende ofrecer un aporte dentro de este debate que indaga sobre la relación entre la educación y "lo público" a partir de un diálogo entre dos tradiciones, frecuentemente consideradas opuestas, en el campo de la Teoría de la educación: la propuesta liberal de la educación como iniciación formulada por Peters y la de la pedagogía crítica latinoamericana desarrollada por Paulo Freire. Este trabajo se apoya en una revisión de los trabajos centrales que sintetizan ambas propuestas, rastreando las huellas de "lo público", entendido como los propósitos educativos dirigidos hacia el bien común y también como los espacios compartidos de construcción del bien común. Esta revisión nos ha permitido identificar cuatro *puntos de distancia-encuentro* entre ambas propuestas, es decir, espacios argumentales que, dentro de lo alejado de sus postulados, comparten cierto suelo común en el que cristalizan huellas comunes de "lo público". En primer lugar, a través de su atención a las categorías *tradición/cultura*, ambos autores enmarcan la educación en lenguajes públicos compartidos por la sociedad. En segundo lugar, identificamos un paralelismo en las nociones de *diálogo/conversación* con esos lenguajes compartidos que ambas propuestas postulan como definitorias del proceso educativo. En tercer

lugar, ambas propuestas entienden la *crítica* como una forma de participación en los lenguajes comunes que se construyen. En cuarto y último lugar, con el fin de construir sujetos libres, comparten el rechazo a las pedagogías espontaneístas que entienden la libertad educativa como un mero “dejar hacer” al educando/a.

Palabras clave: teoría de la educación; educación; libertad; pensamiento crítico; teoría crítica; liberalismo.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the field of the Theory of Education, Stanley Richard Peters and Paulo Freire are proponents of traditions widely considered as clashing: education as initiation and critical pedagogy. While Peters's contribution falls within the spectrum of liberalism-particularly in what Degenhardt (2010, p. 126) calls "non-elitist" because of its concern about inequality, Freire is a proponent of the Latin American version of the critical tradition, Popular Education, marked by Marxist thought. The purpose of this article is to lay out a set of *points of distance-encounter* between the two writers that reflect a key aspect for thinking about the relationship between education and politics: the core role of the public world in education. Aware that the two authors allude to that relationship from different meanings of "the public", we use the expression "distance-encounter points" to refer to arguments on education that are formulated from opposing ideological positions and concerns (the distance) but nevertheless share some common ground in terms of the relational and social nature of education (the encounter). In a context of increasingly privatizing and individualizing conceptions on one hand and of questioning and the need to redefine the public nature of education on the other, these two authors' conceptions of education may help guide the badly needed debate to redevelop the public condition of education.

In the shift from a welfare state model to a neoliberal state model (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2019), the politics and policies of privatizing education have expanded with the introduction of models of management from the business world and ways of funding and provision based on the participation of private sector agents (Ball & Youdell, 2007; Rizvi, 2016; Verger et al., 2016). Added to this is an increasingly common understanding of education as a process of self-capitalization (Rizvi & Lingard, 2013), which also consists of the surge of logics of individualization fostered by educational currents that place the aim of education at the development of atomized individuals centered on themselves and separate from any social, political, or economic context (Cabanas & Illouz, 2019; Díez-Gutiérrez & Bernabé Martínez, 2022; Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009; Prieto, 2018).

In the wake of a surge in studies aimed at these two dynamics, research has also explored what is meant by that "public" that privatization is claimed to be

threatening (see Clarke et al., 2021; Higgins & Abowitz, 2011). One clear idea at the forefront is that, far from having a single accepted definition, "public" is a discourse construct "strategically mobilized in the service of various political and ideological projects" (Clarke et al., 2021, p. 5). In the framework of liberalism, public is configured as the state sphere in contrast to the market, which would be "private": thorough studies by Foucault (2007) and Polanyi (2019) reveal that this dichotomy is the basis for the construction of the modern liberal state. In the switch from a welfare state-managed capitalism to neoliberal capitalism (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2019), the boundary between public-state and private-mercantile becomes blurred because of a wide range of policies of privatization and mercantilization of state social services, which also broadly enter the field of education (and have been extensively studied in recent decades).

Beyond liberalism and the modern State, Castoriadis (1996), a theoretical autonomist, proposes a trans-historical triad of three spheres: the public, which is the sphere of explicit power and where politics are done (democratic or not); the private, which is the sphere of home; and the public-private, which includes spaces such as the marketplace and schools, where the other two intersect. He adds one more sphere to these other three: "the political", which denotes the power relationships that run through societies in all their spheres. This idea of "the political" sheds light, for example on the feminist outcry that "the personal is political", aimed at moving the situation of women into the public sphere. "The political" takes the limelight in radical theories of democracy interested in revealing the social exclusions that make up every social order and model the limits of the public sphere (Mouffe, 2007; Rancière, 2012).

To complete this brief review of some meanings of what is "public", mention must be made of the works of a number of different neo-Marxist scholars who have been seeking to overcome the liberal dichotomy between the public-state versus the private-mercantile from the suggestion that there is a historical alliance between the State and the capital that, in the neoliberal stage, keeps mercantilizing more areas of life. From the common, they explore underlying democratic formulas that defy mercantile and state logic alike (for an overview, see Pérez Fernández & Zamora García, 2023). Similarly, some initiatives in popular education define themselves as being "non-state public" (Fernández González, s/f).

These brief notes amid the broader debate on "the public" show that the expression "public education", rather than describing, announces a political and ideological debate that links education to other equally contentious notions such as "democracy", "equality", "politics", and "commonality". Faced with the diversity of paths for exploring the public in education, this article explores one of the many listed by Clarke (2021) and his colleagues: "the *purposes* of education and whether it is conceived as a societal or an individual good" (p. 5). Therefore, the purpose of this article is to lay out how "the public" takes form in both authors, Peters and

Freire, as a dimension that defines education. This dialog starts with an analysis of some of the key works by the two authors, noting four points of distance-encounter around the four following categories: (1) tradition/culture; (2) conversation/dialog; (3) freedom and (4) critique. The two authors' theoretical-political and contextual anchors are expressed in very different languages, which makes the present work of dialog between them also an endeavor of mutual translation to uncover the designs of what is "public".

2. EDUCATION, TRADITION / CULTURE: CONVERSATION / DIALOG

As Freire (1970) rightly stated, "all educational practice implies a theoretical stance on the educator's part. This stance in turn implies —sometimes more, sometimes less explicitly— an interpretation of man and the world" (pp. 5-6). Along these lines, as mentioned above, Peters and Freire hold very different theoretical stances.

An English philosopher and university professor specialized in the Philosophy of Education, Peters set about revitalizing teacher training just as it was becoming a university-level degree program in the UK (in the 1960s and 1970s). His goal was to raise the intellectual content not only of teacher training but also at schools so as to consolidate pedagogical knowledge as scientific knowledge. To achieve that, he thought it necessary to raise the level of philosophical analysis of education. As a result of his influence, disciplines such as philosophy, history, and sociology gained prominence in teacher training in those years. The centrality of the intellectual dimension in Peters' conceptualization of education stems from that aim (Walks, 2013). Peters falls within what Degenhart (2010) calls non-elitist liberalism (p. 126), a current begun in the 1960s in the UK aimed at giving everyone access to the characteristic ways of thinking in the different areas of knowledge. From this perspective, he understands education to be a continuation with the public tradition, from which he postulates that education "implies that something worthwhile is being or has been intentionally transmitted in a morally acceptable manner" (1966, p. 25) and identifies that worthwhile something in the "public world" (1977b) into which the new generations must be initiated.

In a very different context, the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire, also a university professor specialized in the Philosophy of Education, gained international recognition for his work as a popular educator in the late 1950s in literacy programs for adult rural farmers. As a militant leftist with leanings toward liberation philosophy, he was committed to revolutionary struggles in the region, which joined his work as a teacher to his political commitment. Thus, his theoretical stance is underscored by Marxist (Torres, 1980) and decolonial (Fernández Mouján, 2018) criticism of capitalism. From there he draws up a crucial contribution to the Latin American tradition of Popular Education, which considers the people --"the poor" (Freire,

2015) or "the oppressed" (Freire, 2005)--as the main pedagogical subject. Through this prism, education constitutes an emancipatory political work: "a process of the learners' organization and struggle to transform the conditions of injustice that keep them oppressed and excluded" (Torres Carrillo, 2016, p. 10). The Marxist approach imbues Freire with a conflictual understanding of what is "public": the social order is riddle with different types of social conflict--class, gender, racist-colonial--that originate in capitalism.

Peters has a different understanding of education. He identifies the worthwhile for education to transmit in the public world, a world represented by language, structured by norms (1977b), that precedes the subject being taught and therefore is shared with everyone else (Martin, 2010). To Peters, the worthwhile has a clear social dimension. This public world should be read in keeping with the idea of tradition, also understood as a language, a constitutive way of making sense of the world, and thus also a tool for resolutions, beliefs, and feelings--since language is not a instrument for expressing the world but an exercise of construction (Peters, 1966). In this way, the initiation in the ways of thinking of a tradition that education develops is a condition that sets human beings free by enabling them to undertake their own decisions both as individuals and in the public space (Peters, 1977a). In other words, education is a condition for participating freely in the public sphere. Nevertheless, not all components of tradition or the public world are worthwhile, only the ones that attend to inherently human traits and are the one that characterize the learner (here lies the weight of the intellectual in Peters). These traits involve activities of a higher cognitive nature and demand mastery of a body of knowledge and a grasp of the principles on which such knowledge is built (Peters, 1977b). It also implies integrity of character and critical thinking. In synthesis, education develops the capabilities of rationality that make us imminently human, and reside in *the worthwhile* of tradition.

In Freire, similarly, education is what makes humans fully human. However, in the face of tradition and rationality, Freire turns to culture and historicity for elements in which humans realize their vocation of humanization. Firstly, he understands that humanization of human beings lies in their capability to *exist*, which goes beyond their ability to *live* (Freire, 2015). Existence is the ability to transcend the immanence of the biological, and this is what distinguishes human beings from all the other animals: "we manage to make our existence something more than merely living (...) we stood up, we freed our hands and our freed hands are largely responsible for who we are" (Freire, 2003, p. 20). *Historicity* and *culture* are the supports of *existence*. The capability of language is the main sign of culture, and it is in cultural production and creation, and not in reproduction-adaptation, where humans become cultural subjects. Secondly, humans are constituted as historical subjects because, being unfinished and temporal, they are aware of it, which also distinguishes them from other animals and feeds their will to "be more" (Freire,

2015, 2005). Colonized peoples and the dispossessed masses that make up Freire's pedagogical subject have been stripped not only of the material sustenance of their biological life, but also of the culture and historical capability that humanize human beings. Therefore, *true education* should develop both elements, allowing them to undertake their vocation of humanization and intervene in the flow of History (Freire, 2005).

Here, then, is the first point of distance-encounter. With different expressions- the public world in Peters and the capitalist social order in Freire, a sign of the distance in their stances and motivations, both begin their reflections by framing education in society. On the basis of that framework, they derive the worthwhile of education from their respective stances toward society. In Peters, the worthwhile of the public world and tradition becomes the rational and intellectual dimension of human beings; in Freire, the worthwhile of education lies in its potential for social transformation based on its critique of capitalism. Here then is the distance in the motivations each of them impresses on education: with the focus on the cultural and historical dimension of human beings, Freire turns the purpose of education toward social transformation by understanding that both notions as riddled with social strife. In contrast, Peters operates on a more conservative reasoning by which education transmits tradition, conferring a central role on the legacy and knowledge that societies go about constructing. Despite this distance, the common ground in their reflections is the social dimension of both categories, *tradition* and *culture*, with which they designate languages shared by society, therefore public languages, used to define the content of education, whether by transmission (in Peters) or by questioning (in Freire).

Peters uses the term "transmission" to define the educational act. Indeed, this idea of education as transmission was an object of criticism by Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2005). Coining the expression "the banking model of education", he criticizes the logic of transmission he sees at school, and defines it as "depositing facts, semi-dead information" (Freire, 1971, p. 24) in learners for the purpose of "mystifying reality" (p. 24) to *adapt them* to this order of domination. In this way, he understands education as being a tool for reproducing the capitalist order of inequality. This banking model is grounded on a hierarchical authoritative relationship between teacher and learner that Freire identifies as that of oppressor-oppressed inside the educational relationship (in a Hegelian dialectic explored later in this article). This banking model dehumanizes learners, who are deemed empty vessels that therefore are given no voice. In contrast, Freire (2005) proposes a dialogic learning model based on *problem-posing*. In this dialogic nature, respect for the learner is ensured. The crucial idea is that the teacher cannot reproduce the oppressing logic inside the pedagogical relationship, thereby having to call on the learner's word through a relationship of equality, listening, and communication. Thus, the culture of the popular classes of the silenced peoples enters into the

act of knowledge, which for Freire is "true education" (Freire, 2005). Within this dialogic model, problem-posing constitutes an exercise in critical reflection aimed at questioning the common sense, the dominant culture; it is a questioning of what is presented as given and unquestionable.

Although Peters' liberal proposal is articulated around the transmission of existing ways of thinking at the core of a discipline, it understands education as never being mere reproduction. Initiation does not mean rote repetition and indoctrination of tradition, but rather, reception of knowledge and skills needed to participate in a field of knowledge, also through critical analysis of the existing legitimated knowledge, which separates initiation from indoctrination (McDonough, 2011). Education develops human rationality, transmits bodies of knowledge and, as an essential feature of initiation, allows access to its underlying principles. To the extent that education addresses these purposes, it introduces the learners to reflective life, allowing them to construct their own reasons (Warnick, 2010), moving towards critical thinking, where the logic of transmission becomes a logic of conversation. In this regard, the reflections of Oakeshott (1991) complete the view of education as initiation with that of conversation. People already initiated can take part in the conversation on tradition, and therefore, on politics and *the public*.

The second point of distance-meeting is as follows. The type of pedagogical subject they have in mind pushes them apart in their reflections: Freire anchors his notion of education to a collective pedagogical subject: the oppressed, which is consistent with his stance; Peters, however, constructs his concept of education out of an individual consideration of the subject, which is a common liberal approach. Despite this distance, both turn the purposes of education toward participation in public life by conversation and dialog, expressions that show a degree of parallelism. In Freire, dialogic education has the objective of enabling oppressed groups as historical subjects and therefore he insists that education is political (Freire & Illich, 1975, p. 6; Freire in Torres, 1985, p. 118; Freire in Freire & Shor, 2014, p. 46). In Peters, his individualistic grammar does not, however, erase the social aspect of education, which lies in its attention to tradition and the public world, understood as languages shared with others. The idea of education as a conversation with tradition completes the public character of education as initiation.

3. EDUCATION, FREEDOM, CRITIQUE

From their respective theoretical-political positions, both authors take interest in the notions of *freedom* and *critique*. Peters starts with what is known as *negative freedom*, typical of liberalism (Berlin, 1988), from which he postulates a balance between critical thinking and the transmission of knowledge in the course of learning. For his part, Freire relies on existentialism to establish a dialectic relationship

between *freedom* and *critique* in terms of *liberation*, thereby approaching an understanding of positive freedom. For both, criticism points toward questioning the public language (*tradition/culture*) and connects with an idea of freedom that transcends the individual dimension.

Peters (1984) develops his arguments about freedom on the basis of three distinctions he deems particularly useful to apply to school relationships. The first two of them are closely connected: the idea of an elector subject and the idea of autonomy. In the first place, he identifies freedom in the ability to choose one's own courses of action, which requires a plurality of choices or options, since having no options would mean murky scenarios that liberalism's individual rights are meant to deter. It is worth noting that this negative understanding of freedom starts from an individualist grammar, typical in liberalism, that defines freedom as the absence of restrictions, thereby allowing free individual action (Berlin, 1988). This negative freedom resides in the individual and, as Peters sees it, is based on the assumption of a human being with the *rational* capacity to choose. He therefore lists a series of mental pathologies as examples in which the individual cannot choose freely because his rationality is inhibited (1984, pp. 154-155). This once again places human rationality at the center of his arguments.

This focus on rationality leads to the second dimension: *autonomy*, which in turn leads to the need for critical thinking. Autonomy "suggests a critical appraisal of beliefs and practices and the development of independence of mind as a result" (Peters, 1977b, p. 80). It therefore becomes *not following the rules* if one does not agree with them; this requires having one's own criterion to justify such disagreement. Thus, the freedom to choose is only freedom to the extent that the individual can frame his actions in a code of conduct, that is, to the extent that he can state reasons for his choices (Cuypers, 2010). In this way, *choice* and *autonomy* are two sides of the same coin.

In close connection to this elector subject and to the autonomy in which his freedom is exercised, Peters takes note of critical thinking. To him, education is a balanced combination of knowledge and critical thinking. Within this combination, autonomy is situated at a point halfway between acritical reproduction of knowledge and the development of original theses. Thus, education moves away from mechanical repetition and indoctrination: it moves away from the reproduction function that some critical theorists from those years attribute to schools (Baudelet & Establet, 1987; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). However, Peters points out, not everything can be subject to constant criticism; firstly, because in the framework of education, criticism comes after acquisition of knowledge; and, secondly, because example, instruction, and influence -which do not necessarily imply falling into dogma- are, in Peters' (1977b) view, defining features of education, especially in the early stages of human life, when people learn by imitation and identification with authority figures.

Accordingly, Peters advocates the Socratic method as the way to develop critical thinking in the school context. In this methodology, the teacher presents knowledge through questions and answers, which forces learners to explain and argue their thinking. The teacher must guide, mediate and, above all, know the right questions that open the door to questioning and reflection to allow learners to "question their own assumptions, and to reformulate again and again what they think or propose to do, until they come up with something to which they can no longer object" (Peters, 1969). Thus, to Peters, both freedom and criticism involve giving reasons and presenting these reasons to others, i.e., making them public, putting them out in the public space, which lets them be discussed.

Freire, however, has a different way of reflecting on the two notions. While Peters postulates a relationship of *balance* between critical thinking and autonomy as a requirement of the subject who chooses in freedom, Freire establishes a *dialectical* relationship between *critique* and *freedom*. From the existentialism that informs his work (Torres, 1980), he sees human *existence*--in the terms described in the section above--as a road full of decisions that requires historical commitment, which in some ways is not unlike seeing freedom as the ability to make responsible choices as Peters asserts. However, despite the similar formulation, Freire lades these decisions with the weight of history, whose construction is left to the hands of the people. This historical element crystallizes public part of education by turning its purposes toward transformation of the social order. From this point of view, freedom begins to be constructed when human beings "become a perceived social existence, when their awareness manages to grasp the historical determinants of their actions" (Torres, 1980, p. 9) or, more simply put, when learners "understand their position within their context" (Freire, 2015, p. 55), this context being understood in a Marxist perspective. Thus, *freedom* and *critique* are constructed in dialectical relation in terms of liberation (Fernández Mouján, 2018).

Methodologically, this path of criticism must fit in with the dialogic and problematization model, which means reflecting on "the depth in the interpretation of problems" (Freire, 2015). In other words, the dialogic model is guided by an exercise of problematization, where problem-posing "means critical analysis of a problematic reality" (Freire, 2005, p. 168): rethinking the social order as a problem-reality and not as a mere naturalized reality. This problem-posing understanding of reality, for example, is what can allow overcoming the meritocratic idea that poverty is the result of lazy popular classes:

Literacy in an area of abject poverty, for example, only makes sense in the human dimension if, with it, a kind of historical-political-social psychoanalysis is carried out of the extroversion of the undeserved blame. This corresponds to "expelling" the oppressor "inside" the oppressed, as an invasive shadow that, once expelled by the oppressed, must be replaced with his autonomy and responsibility. (Freire, 1997, p. 81)

Freire insists that going from oppressed to oppressor does not constitute a path to liberation, since it only perpetuates the oppressor-oppressed logic. He considers liberation from the Hegelian dialectic of the master and the slave, where the master-oppressor, despite his superior position, is not free, either, since his position and conscience depend on oppressing the slave, to whom, in a gesture of dehumanization, he denies the condition of historical-subject. Liberation entails overcoming this order and is a liberation led by the oppressed, but in communion with the oppressors (Freire, 2005). This idea of liberation is in keeping with Marxist postulates (Torres, 1980) and the reading of decolonial work by Fanon (Fernández Mouján, 2018).

Next comes the third point of distance-encounter. Though the two authors hold distant positions regarding the purpose they attribute to education, criticism is a defining point in both. Freire's pedagogical proposal is part of critical theory in the field of education. Peters also grants a key role to criticism. Here, then, is a space of encounter in the role they give to criticism through their dialogic (in Freire) and Socratic (in Peters) proposals. Both methodological formulas postulate a questioning role between teacher and learner that wipes away any dogmatic stance, thereby encouraging critical thinking. In this way, the idea Peters formulates of critical thinking involving recognition of the underlying principles of knowledge resembles Freire's problem-posing model. For both, criticism is a prerequisite for participating in the public sphere. In Peters, it is about sharing arguments with others through the Socratic method; whereas in Freire problem-posing dialog enables the voice of the oppressed, until then historically silenced. Thus, his attention to criticism can be connected to the desirable role they give to participation in the public sphere.

Lastly, to end this section, it should be pointed out that both authors conceive educational relationships through the notion of freedom. Despite the distance between their stances, a point both have in common is their criticism of certain progressive pedagogies that understand educational freedom as *letting* the learners do it. Here, Neill's (1979) proposal is perhaps the paradigmatic example of educational freedom understood in these terms. In the field of education, this debate is known as a discussion around "directivity". Directivity is generally a hallmark of pedagogies in which the teachers take on a more traditional role as leaders or directors. In contrast, active, spontaneist pedagogies highlight the children's "spontaneity" as core to the learning process. The debate is then whether the teaching activity should be more or less directed, or absent completely, as some pedagogies advocate. Both Peters and Freire reject stances that rely on the children's "spontaneity". Some of their arguments for doing so are as follows.

Through the third distinction regarding freedom --the other two have been outlined above: the elector subject and autonomy-- Peters (1984) considers freedom as a social principle. In accordance with the liberal political theories of the social

contract, Peters assumes a state of nature in which, in the absence of any type of restriction imposed by law or custom, the law of the strongest will prevail, which translates into unjustified restrictions on the weakest. From that assumption, he identifies the "paradox of freedom": law and custom-- which are part of the civil order in contrast to the natural state--must be used to make certain levelling restrictions between people. In his words, "Freedom will only prevail if there is a general regulatory system that protects these spheres from outside interference" (Peters, 1984, p. 151). These spheres to protect are everyone's individual rights. Extrapolating these arguments to educational relationships, Peters understands that this paradox arises especially in school contexts. Therefore, he defends the need to set limits to classroom behavior in order to prevent "the mischievous or groups of classmates" from being the ones to impose their restrictions on all the other students. Thus, he underscores the importance of teacher authority in imposing certain leveling rules.

In this line of thinking, Peters advocates, together with the Socratic method, formulas such as education by example and instruction, which imply dynamics of subjection of the learner to the teacher. This may seem to be a contradiction between the teaching objective of learning to think for oneself and the subjection to others that is involved in such formulas. However, this apparent contradiction, which is one way the paradox of freedom in education unfolds, simply underscores the social condition and intersubjective nature of both human beings and learning (Martin, 2010): we become aware of ourselves through our relationship with others and participation in the public language. Thus, the questions concerning the exercise of autonomy, decision-making on courses of action to take and the reasons for our choices are in fact public questions whose answer requires shared deliberation with others (Peters, 1977b). Even though Peters starts from a liberal notion of human beings and situates the individual as the ultimate objective of the educational process, he grants other people a major role in the initiation process, both in the figure of the teacher and in the form of the public sphere that has education as an object (English, 2010). Thus, the teacher's authority must help guide the educational process toward the worthwhile of tradition, offsetting other potential influences from beyond the educational space.

Freire, however has a different view of this matter. Firstly, he challenges the premises of the debate on "directivity" (in Freire & Shor, 2014): to the extent that education is never neutral - because it is oriented either towards reproduction-adaptation or towards social transformation- it is always marked by goals it is the teacher's duty to reach. This makes non-directive pedagogies ultimately impossible. Secondly, although dialogic education should call upon the voice of the learner, it does not imply a spontaneist stance, not only because such a stance is impossible for Freire, as noted above, but also because spontaneism constitutes for him an educational *laissez faire* in which learners are abandoned:

I cannot leave the students by themselves because I am trying to be a liberating educator. Laissez-faire! I cannot fall into laissez-faire. On the other hand, I cannot be authoritarian. I have to be radically democratic and responsible and directive. Not directive of the students, but directive of the process, in which the students are with me. As director of the process, the liberating teacher is not doing something to the students but with the *students*. (Freire & Shor, 2014, p. 46)

Thus, aware of the domination-alienation relationships that liberating education is meant to uncover, teachers cannot remain neutral. Rather, in their critical commitment they consciously imprint a specific direction to dialog, never succumbing to the authoritarianism of the banking model of education. Therefore, Freire insists that a dialogic education must start off from the learners' common sense in order to invoke their voice. In his own words, the starting point lies in "the common sense of the students rather than in the rigor of the educator" (Freire in Torres, 1985, p. 121). However, their common sense is indeed just a starting point, since it does not imply remaining at that common sense. This is where the teacher's role becomes key. Therefore, Freire understands that the relationship between teacher and learner is not one of peers, because "at the moment the teacher begins the dialogue, he or she knows a great deal, first in terms of knowledge and second in terms of the horizon that she or he wants to get to" (Freire in Freire & Shor, 2014, p. 103). Nevertheless, it should be articulated as a democratic relationship rather than authoritarian (p.107).

This leads to the fourth point of distance-encounter. Both authors commence their reflection on very different conceptions of freedom: an individualistic idea of negative freedom in Peters, and a notion of freedom as dialectic oppressor-oppressed liberation in the case of Freire. Despite this distance, both converge at their rejection of the spontaneism in so-called non-directive pedagogies. Thus, they coincide in that freedom in educational relationships ought not be interpreted as "leaving it freely to the learner". They understand that not only does such a view fail to guide education toward freedom, it constitutes a dereliction of duty on the teacher's part. Thus, Peters, speaks of the need for a leveling authority and Freire calls on teachers to take charge of their position in the pedagogical relationship, which is not one of equals with the learners. To synthesize, both Freire and Peters find that to orient education toward freedom, a broader notion of that concept is needed than simply "letting them do it", which in educational relationships especially questions the teachers' task: they need to know how to guide the problem-posing (Freire) or Socratic (Peters) process.

4. UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTERS

Education as initiation places tradition and intellectual development front and center in education. A pedagogy that liberates highlights social justice and the liberation of oppressed social groups. This often involves taking a critical look at tradition,

which reveals a substantial tension between the two theories. Despite that tension, this article is not the first to relate both conceptions of education (see Beckett, 2017; Endres, 2002). In this case, however, reference to both theories is not intended to advocate a choice between one or the other, nor the need to integrate them both. The analysis of Peters' and Freire's philosophy that has occupied the preceding pages is based on the need to take back the public debate on education as well as to rethink the public nature of education, in a context of the rise of privatizing and individualizing conceptions of education. Given the multiple meanings attributed to it, this paper has taken "the public" to mean the educational purposes oriented towards a social good (Clarke et al., 2021) and the space for the construction of shared meanings about the common good (Higgins & Abowitz, 2011). From this understanding, this paper has scoured the works of both authors for traces of what is public. In light of their postulates, the following key concepts are proposed here as pivotal for the discussion on the nature of the public nature of education: *tradition/culture*; *conversation/dialog*; *critical thinking* and *freedom*. In these categories, four ambivalent spaces have been identified between the two proposals: spaces that are at the same time ones of distance and of encounter. They are points of distance because through them both authors draw up very different reflections regarding their respective theoretical and political stances. However, they also share a certain amount of common ground that crystallizes that social dimension that binds education to the public. The fact that each author conceives of these notions from different, even contrary, positions does not, in our opinion, detract from the legitimacy of the shared discussion and ideas. Rather, it underscores the plural nature that any public discussion must take on, and accounts for the complexity of the task even if it fails to cover it completely.

The first point of encounter identified here is the social framework from which they conceptualize education. From different expressions, i.e., the *public world* and *tradition* in Peters, and the capitalist social order and *culture* in Freire, both authors develop their stance toward society and derive from it what they find *worthwhile* of education. A clear parallelism is found between tradition and culture, since both point to shared public languages from which to derive the content of education. The second point of encounter is found in the parallelism between notions of *dialog*, crucial in Freire, and of *conversation*, which completes the proposal by Peters. Although the pedagogical subject is different in each proposal, through *dialog / conversation* the learner participates in the shared public language, whether this is thought of as *tradition* or as *culture*. Both authors' attention to the critical constitutes the third point of distance-encounter. It is a point of distance because critical thinking has a different key role in each author: Freire's pedagogy is part of the critical tradition, which entails questioning the capitalist social order, whereas Peters inscribes it within the spectrum of liberalism. Despite the distance, the two authors consider criticism to be a crucial moment in the educational act, definitive of the methods they propose: the dialogic method in Freire, and the Socratic method in Peters. Finally, the fourth

point is found in the category of freedom. From his liberal stance, Peters starts out from a negative understanding of freedom. In contrast, Freire establishes a dialectic relationship with criticism in terms of liberation. Despite their differences, both authors converge on their understanding of educational freedom as a more complex notion than that of merely "letting learners do it". In their shared rejection of spontaneist and non-directive theories, they understand that the construction of free subjects by means of education requires the teacher to take an active role, be it as a levelling authority (Peters) or a conscious commitment with a political stance (Freire).

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