

## DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION: lessons for educators who dare to educate for freedom

EDUCAÇÃO DEMOCRÁTICA: ensinamentos para educadores(as) que ousam educar para a liberdade

EDUCACIÓN DEMOCRÁTICA: lecciones para educadores que se atreven a educar para la libertad

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Received: 04/01/2024

Accepted: 09/01/2024

Published: 11/30/2024

### ABSTRACT:

The reflections included in this article, guided by a qualitative study, articulate Hooks and Freire's thoughts that provoke the American and Brazilian educational systems in the creative weaving of a democratic education. The question: How can educators transform authoritarian and inhumane practices, promoted and encouraged by many educational institutions, into a democratic educational praxis? It seeks to understand how the concepts of democratic education and democratic educator, present in the teachings of Hooks and Paulo Freire, announce the possibility of transforming authoritarian practices into democratic practices in teaching.

**KEYWORDS:** Democratic education; Bell Hooks; Paulo Freire.

## Introduction

...When a politician says in his speeches that he is on the side of the people, that he aims to be included in politics to improve our living conditions, asking for our vote and promising to freeze prices, he is already aware that by addressing this serious problem he wins at the polls. Then he divorces himself from the people. He looks at the people with half-closed eyes. With a pride that hurts our sensitivity.

...When I arrived from the palace that is the city, my children came to tell me that they had found pasta in the trash. There was little food, I made some pasta and beans. And my son João José said to me:

—So it is. You told me you weren't going to eat trash anymore.

It was the first time I had seen my word fail.

I said: —It's just that I had faith in Kubstchek.

—You had faith and now you no longer have it?

—No, my kid. Democracy is losing its supporters. In our country everything is weakening. Money is weak. Democracy is weak and politicians are very weak. And everything that is weak dies one day.

(Carolina Maria de Jesus in "Quarto de despejo: diário de uma favelada", 2014).

We begin this text with an excerpt from Brazilian author Carolina Maria de Jesus, from her book based on her diaries, which was first published in 1960, during the

government of President Juscelino Kubistchek. It is a writing from the margins, a vision from the slums, a writing of the living of a black woman, a single mother and resident of the first large slum in São Paulo, Canindé, which was vacated in the mid-1960s for the construction of Marginal do Tietê (Jesus, 2014). From the dialogue between mother and son, a timeless issue arises that is very dear to us, Brazilian men and women: the question of democracy. The very recent, fragile and weakened Brazilian democracy, debased not long ago, through a coup movement against democratic institutions and begs for the return of the dictatorship and authoritarian regime. Fortunately, the Brazilian people managed to show through voting that it is no longer possible to return to the colonial, slave-owning policies of the past, nor to maintain modern structures that continue to worsen social inequalities in the country. It is necessary to teach and build democracy, to restore humanity, guarantee rights, found communities of resistance and be involved in the construction of a less unequal and more just country.

Both Carolina Maria de Jesus and Paulo Freire lived through the Brazilian military regime. Because they were born in a country founded on colonization, domination, exploitation and exclusion, according to the logic of the Imperialist Capitalist White Supremacist Patriarchal System, the discomfort caused by the pedagogy of the white male educator caused more discomfort and concern than the pedagogy of the black woman slum resident who dared to record what she learned from violence, hunger, misery and exclusion. The voice of the white man who spoke about exclusion and oppression of the people and proposed to educate for liberation was abruptly silenced by the military regime, resulting in his exile in 1964, the year in which the military dictatorship was established in the country. To Carolina was left with the writing of the living of the margin, of the black feminine, not a regular in the Brazilian academic canon, always dead, white and masculine. The absence of democracy and rights for Carolina contained the weight of class, skin color and sex. Currently, the book "Quarto de Evicto: diário de uma favelada" is an important reference for cultural and social studies, both in Brazil and abroad.

Like Carolina, writer and educator Bell Hooks (2021) raises her voice from the margins, in a country that, despite being announced as democratic, has a long and persistent history of colonization, violence, domination, exclusion and violation of rights humans. It is from life in the segregated black community in the south of the United States of America that Hooks tells us about democracy, about feminist and anti-racist education, about the importance of class, sex and race position for the liberation struggle. Born in Hopkinsville, in the south of the United States of America, on

September 25, 1952, the author lived through the racial *apartheid* regime, in which terrorist racism sanctioned by the State kept the black population in a condition of subalternity.

While Brazil's false racial and social democracy collapsed in 1964 (Rattis and Rios, 2010), with the installation of a military regime that forced Carolina and the majority of the Brazilian population to experience 21 years of deepening social inequalities and suppression of rights civil rights, Bell began to experience the end of racial segregation in the United States of America, through legal and legislative actions, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It is important to emphasize that the "end of segregation did not bring racial integration. Mixing, crossing racial boundaries, was still a matter of individual choice. Most white people continued to believe in white supremacy and live in accordance with it" (Hooks, 2021, p. 109). Although she suffered from the desegregated education that increasingly distanced itself from the anti-racist struggle and taught to believe in domination as something natural, cultivating the idea that black men and women are genetically determined to slavery and incapable of learning, Bell Hooks (2017) enters the academia in the wake of the fight for civil rights in the USA. For feminist and anti-racist activism, for academic life and later for her teaching career, the author brought the teachings of black communities in the South of the United States of America:

the notion that we are all one, that the objective of ending racial domination went beyond just conquering civil rights, of ending discrimination; it was also the vision of a diverse people living together, in peace (Hooks, 2021, p. 105).

Even though she was born and lived in a time when democracy and civil rights only existed for the white population, Bell Hooks (2021) always believed in the transformation of white people, refuting the idea of patriarchal black militancy, based in the North and on the West Coast, that white people were always and only the enemy. She recognized the courage of white people who crossed borders and sacrificed power, *status* and privilege to be anti-racist. In these communities of resistance, white and black people fought for democracy and equal rights and expressed their beliefs in justice.

Thus, for Hooks (2017), being racist, sexist, homophobic are choices, which can be changed through critical and democratic education. A recurring example in the author's books, which tells us what happens when white people transform, concerns the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. The author repeatedly recalls the meeting she had with Paulo at the University of Santa Cruz, where she would study and teach. In this meeting,



she questioned the educator about the sexism present in his work, despite recognizing that Freire's thinking made her think deeply about the construction of an identity in resistance, fueling her personal fight against the colonization process. About the learning provided by Freire's work and presence, the author wrote:

The lesson I learned from watching Paulo embody in practice what he describes in theory was profound. He entered me, touched me in a way no writing could and gave me courage. It hasn't been easy for me to do the work I do and find my place in academia (lately I feel like it's become almost impossible), but we are inspired to persevere by seeing the example of others. Freire's presence inspired me. Not that I didn't see sexist behavior on his part; but these contradictions are embraced as part of the learning process, part of what the person struggles to change – and this struggle often takes time (Hooks, 2017, pp. 79-80).

In an article titled "Bell Hooks. Decolonizing education" Leal *et al.* (2022, p. 6) highlight that:

With and beyond Freire, Hooks outlines his educational perspective that involves the defense that theorizing is a critical process that can lead to change in a practical context, to a process of individual and collective "healing". Reflecting and developing critical thinking about our lived experiences is, according to Hooks, essential for understanding what crosses us, hurts us, situating the place from which we can begin processes of "rescuing" ourselves.

Inspired by the Freirean political pedagogical project, the feminist and anti-racist struggle and engaged Buddhism, Bell Hooks provokes us to think about how to practice democratic education inside and outside the classroom, even forged in an imperialist capitalist white supremacist patriarchal system. From this provocation, some questions emerge: How can we, educators, transform our authoritarian and inhumane practices, promoted and encouraged by many educational institutions, into a democratic educational praxis? How to transform classrooms into more diverse and inclusive learning spaces?; How to teach and learn democracy in diverse classrooms?

The objective of this article is to understand how the concepts of democratic education and democratic educator, present in the teachings of Hooks and Paulo Freire, announce the possibility of transforming authoritarian practices into democratic practices in teaching.

This article is constructed from teaching 2 of the book "Teaching critical thinking: practical wisdom" and teaching 4 of the books "Teaching community: a pedagogy of hope" written by Bell Hooks (2020 and 2021, respectively). Teachings that address the

issue of democratic education and that sharpen our reflections on how to find and maintain democratic relationships inside and outside the classroom in the context of higher education. However, other authors are brought into conversation with Hooks' provocations for the construction of a democratic education in a world that is not yet completely democratic, but is already incredibly diverse, including: Eurico and Passos (2022); Freire (2013, 2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b, 2021); Leal *et al.* (2022); Jesus (2014); Ratts and Rios (2010), as well as others.

Therefore, the reflections made here are the result of a survey of primary bibliographic sources by Hooks (2017, 2018, 2020, 2021) and other authors. This text consists of bibliographical research, whose motto, according to Severino (2007, p. 122) involves the

available record, resulting from previous research, in printed documents, such as books, articles, theses, etc. Data from theoretical categories already worked on by other researchers and duly registered are used. The texts become sources of the topics to be researched. The researcher works from contributions from the authors of the analytical studies contained in the texts.

The article is structured into 4 sections: "Introduction"; "Bell Hooks and democratic education – for a democratic world with social justice", "Teachings for educators who dare to educate for freedom and democracy" and "Some considerations".

### **Bell Hooks and Democratic Education – for a democratic world with social justice**

The dream was to replace that culture of domination with a world of participatory economy based on communalism and social democracy, a world without discrimination based on race or gender, a world where the recognition of mutuality and interdependence would be the dominant ethos, a global ecological vision of how the planet can survive and how everyone on it can have access to peace and well-being (Hooks, 2018, p. 117).

The dream of living in a social democracy, with recognition of mutuality and interdependence was a constant desire and the utopia of educator Bell Hooks (2018, p. 117), told in her books. Born into racial *apartheid* that destined her to live in segregated spaces, the author always envisioned the possibility of a life in community, in which people would live together with ethics, otherness and social justice; a dialogical, loving, supportive and fraternal coexistence, maintaining hope and guaranteeing peace and well-being.

With the desire nourished by the anti-racist movement founded in the south of the USA, by engaged Buddhism, by Freirean critical pedagogy, by the anti-racist and feminist movement, she stated that “movements for social justice that cling to outdated forms of thought and action tend to fail” (Hooks, 2018, p. 157). Thus, in her wanderings as an academic, educator, activist and writer, she sought to foster ethical and political dialogues committed to uncovering ideological discourses that distort reality, in search of the truth, just like Paulo Freire (2020a).

In the spaces he frequented, academic or not, Hooks (2017, 2018, 2020, 2021) problematized the hopelessness of the patriarchal black movement, in the possibility of transforming white people. The institutional discourse that the classroom in the USA is a free zone, within which the desire to study and learn makes everyone equal; the seeded idea that racism could be changed through law and interaction; the insistence of the feminist movement on focusing only on the issue of gender, as well as on the socially determined roles of women. Her intention was to create space for critical intervention and possible transformation, as she was aware that there is no full democracy when individual rights and guarantees are denied or rejected in the name of a societal project, guided and organized by the capitalist white supremacist patriarchal system, imperialist, standardizer of male domination, racism, class exploitation, sexism, homophobia, ableism (Eurico and Passos, 2022).

As a left-wing dissident black feminist educator and intellectual, Hooks is close to Paulo Freire, seeking through his transgressions to find “unity in diversity”.

Regarding the construction of “unity in diversity”, a *sine qua non* condition for building a strong, supportive, ethical, fair and inclusive democracy, Freire (2021, p. 212) argues that:

the so-called minorities, for example, need to recognize that, deep down, they are the majority. The way to assume themselves as a majority is to work on the similarities between them, and not just the differences, and thus create unity in diversity, outside of which I do not see how to improve or even how to build a substantive democracy, radical.

From this perspective, in Freire’s view, there is a need for different oppressed groups to work together, in the fight to overcome different forms of social oppression, creating unity in diversity.

Furthermore, the promise and possibility of education as a practice of freedom by Freire (2019a, p. 100) gave rise to Hooks’ commitment to critical and democratic

education to eliminate all forms of exclusion. Education in which educators and students affirm “an authentic way of thinking and acting. Think about themselves and the world, simultaneously, without dichotomizing this thinking from action”. In other words, thinking about liberating education as something that also happens outside the classroom, in social movements that fight against domination, with a view to social transformation.

Freire (2019a, p. 197) asserts that liberating education:

[...] it is one of the things we must do, along with other things, to transform reality. We must avoid being interpreted as thinking that we should first educate people to be free, so that we can then transform reality. No. We must, as much as possible, do both things simultaneously. Therefore, we must be engaged in political action against racism, against sexism, against capitalism, and against inhumane structures of production.

The premise that education is a political act of resistance, which leads human beings to resist injustice and unite in solidarity in order to realize the promise of a democratic society and education, fueled the educator's hope in the human vocation for *Being More*, which, according to Freire (2019b, p. 76), can be defined:

[...] as an expression of human nature in the process of being, grounds or our rebellion and not for our resignation in the face of the offenses that destroy our being. It is not in resignation but in rebellion in the face of injustices that we affirm ourselves.

In this way, it is in rebellion against social injustices and processes of dehumanization that we affirm our humanity. Furthermore, Freire (2019b, p. 119) highlights:

[...] the lack of humility, expressed in arrogance and the false superiority of one person over another, of one race over another, of one gender over another, of one class or one culture over another, is a transgression of the human vocation of *Being More*.

In this sense, the oppression of one social group over another consists of a transgression of the humanization process, whose vocation is *Being More*.

Based on Freire's humanizing principles, Hooks (2021) considers that we need to nurture social, political and cultural solidarity and tolerance, if we want to build a less ugly and less harsh society, in order to build a community of intercultural and inclusive resistance; a community that creates the feeling of a shared commitment and a common



good that unites us: the democracy. And this community with a view to overcoming domination and all forms of exclusion, in which there is an authentic and radical engagement of all human beings, and it is possible to dialogue and live differences, has in democratic formation a practice of real importance.

Thus, the political pedagogical project of Bell Hooks (2020, 2021) calls on educators and students to nurture a willingness to approach education from the point of view of an awareness of race, class, sex. An ethical, loving, committed and engaged education as a way to support the genuine democratic process and social justice; education in which educators and students learn in communion, to think critically, allowing everyone to come together in solidarity and fulfill the promise of democracy.

### **Teachings for educators who dare to educate for freedom and democracy**

Lately, I struggle to be a woman of my word. Black poet Mari Evans encourages us: "speak the truth to the people". The academic context, the academic discourse, in which I work, is not a place known for telling truths. It is not a place where the oppressed come together to talk about our way out of servitude, to write our way towards freedom, to publish articles and books that do more than inform, that bear witness, that bear witness to the importance of the struggle, of our collective effort to transform. However, this is our most urgent need, the most important of our work – the work of liberation (Hooks, 2019 p. 74).

As an academic and, later, as a teacher, bell hooks (2017, 2019, 2020) has always lived with exclusionary projects and emancipatory education projects. The criticisms she makes in her books about academic life and the entire American educational context show that being a democratic educator, especially in higher education, sometimes leads to persecution, frustration, exclusion and silencing, in the sense of empty and delegitimize progressive spaces in educational systems, in which freedom and democracy can be debated. The weakening of democratic education and the abandonment of educational practices that honor education as a practice of freedom are persistent themes of constant concern for Bell Hooks, which allows us from now on to focus on the author's teachings two and four.

### **Democratic education for critical thinking**

It is about this democratic education born of its willingness to cross borders, its search for integrating ways and habits of being and the listening from the other that Bell Hooks (2020) tells us in Teaching 2, entitled "Democratic Education", a teaching that makes up the book "Teaching critical thinking: practical wisdom".



At the beginning of the teaching, the author shares with us her impressions about life in the United States, where she grew up in the 1950s. According to her, in segregated schools and in conversations in public or private environments, people spoke openly about the meaning and value of democracy, silently spreading the seeds of the struggle for civil rights. She also recalls the disillusionment of black fighters upon returning from the Second World War, having to fight and die to keep the world safe for democracy, while the United States of America denied them civil rights. However, she showed that this disillusionment did not lead them to despair, as it served as a catalyst for struggles in the USA, with a view to making it a truly democratic nation, in which all citizens would need to take responsibility for protecting and maintaining democracy. At this juncture, she learned that one of the most important aspects of democracy is guaranteeing the right to education for all people, regardless of race, gender or social class.

Successively, the author presents her perception of youth today. For Hooks (2020, p. 40), young people have the impression that democracy is something innate to American society, without the need for engagement and work to maintain it. Thus, spaces for dialogue on the nature of democracy are empty. There is no reading on the subject and not even a search for the works of “past and present American thinkers” who teach the origin and meaning of democracy.

To exemplify the need for a resumption of the debate on democracy in the educational context, bell hooks (2020, p. 42) highlights in the text the statement by the American philosopher John Dewey, for whom “democracy must be reborn in each generation, and education is your midwife.” The author's concern with the preservation of civil rights achieved and with the maintenance of public policies that opened the doors of education to the entry of people without rights, such as affirmative actions, for example, is well known. The right to existence of diverse marginalized, subordinated, silenced and oppressed populations was daily at risk.

In fact, bell hooks (2020, p. 42) experienced the resurgence of the values and norms of the capitalist imperialist white supremacist patriarchal system, starting in the 1990s. In academia, “women's studies and cultural studies were reformulated to no longer be progressive spaces within educational systems, where freedom and democracy could be debated”. Spaces that were previously intended for dialogue and the unveiling of ideological discourses, in search of truth to build critical thinking, “have, for the most part, been de-radicalized. And spaces where there was no deradicalization became ghettos, considered a *playground* for students who wanted to assume a radical persona” (Hooks, 2020, p. 42).

Furthermore, during this period, the American educational system sustained the growth of private schools and the subsequent weakening of public schools, with cuts in funding for education. Public education gave way to corporate education, transforming education into a means of achieving material success, legitimizing the banking education discussed by Freire (2019a), which serves domination and which “makes the acquisition of information more important than the acquisition of knowledge or learning critical thinking” (Hooks, 2020, p. 43).

In relation to democratic education, Freire (2020a, p. 37) reminds us that “intercultural differences exist and present divisions of class, race, gender and, as an extension of these, of nations”, however,

It is impossible to think, therefore, about overcoming oppression, discrimination, passivity or pure rebellion that they engender, first, without a critical understanding of History, in which, finally, these intercultural relations occur in a dialectical way, therefore, contradictory and procedural. Second, without projects of a political pedagogical nature towards the transformation or reinvention of the world (Freire, 2020a, p. 38).

Democratic education is also involved in an ethical-liberating movement, based on Enrique Dussel's ethics of liberation, which generates possibility for all human life, with ethical recognition of human beings as equals, symmetrical participation of people in community and social decisions (respect for citizenship) and the concrete viability of this life – assuming an attitude of feasibility and criticality (Ramos and Oliveira, 2020).

In this way, Bell Hooks (2020, pp. 44-45) warns us, in her teaching 2, that we need to transform schools into spaces for the flourishing and establishment of democratic consciousness, as the classroom is still configured as “main space where freedom of expression, disagreements and plural opinions are valued in theory and practice”. Furthermore, it teaches us that “democratic education is based on the assumption that democracy works, that it is the basis of all genuine teaching and learning”. And it invites everyone who wishes to educate for democracy, to honor education as a practice of freedom, in order to reaffirm that the “ability to think is a mark of responsible citizenship, where freedom of expression and the desire to dissent are accepted and encouraged.”

Like Hooks, Paulo Freire also highlights the importance of a democratic society and school. In this way, the author explains that in order to live democracy, we must develop a pedagogical environment in which the person has the right to speak, to express their thoughts at the same time that their expression is welcomed and attentively listened to by the collective that this person is part of. According to Freire

(2006a, p. 88):

No one fully lives democracy nor helps it to grow, firstly, if their right to speak, to have a voice, to make their critical speech is prohibited; second, if it does not engage, in one way or another, in the fight in defense of this right, which, in essence, is also the right to act (Freire, 2006a, p. 88).

In this sense, the democratic educator has a responsibility: to create teaching-learning contexts from which the exercise of dialogue as the cornerstone of democracy is constantly forged, and this occurs through formative educational practice permanent in which we deal with real human beings, of flesh and blood, like Mrs. Carolina de Jesus, who lives from the margins like so many Brazilians and who have in their biopsychosocial and spiritual constitution markers of differences that are inherent to them, whether by genetic as well as social, economic and spiritual conditions.

Markers of differences that were historically thought of by European colonizers as indicators that conferred inhumanity on those who crossed them, such as black and indigenous human groups and people with disabilities. Freire (2009) points out the challenge of, in the formative processes, the democratic educator to develop in the pedagogical scene the education of democratic taste, a “palate” necessary to be learned in training processes at all levels and modalities of teaching, especially in higher education courses that forge teachers, professionals whose central responsibilities include sharing and weaving knowledge with children, adolescents, young people, adults and the elderly. Regarding the education of democratic taste, Freire (2009, p. 89) states that

Another democratic taste, whose antagonistic opposite is ingrained in our authoritarian cultural traditions, is the taste of respect for others. The taste of tolerance that racism and sexism flee with the devil from the cross.

We realize that the training process of teachers in Brazil and the United States needs to add other pedagogical strategies that reflect on the being in the world of thousands of silenced people run over by a socioeconomic system that abruptly exacerbates disparities that curtail life, undermining survival marked by hunger and misery.

The formative process needs to articulate the reflections mentioned above, a practical dimension through which a democratic education involved with real human

beings materializes, therefore not those idealized in compendiums and/or manuals that psychologize human existence, but those humans who, like Carolina of Jesus, find themselves on the edges of this economic system that generates and manages the underprivileged on earth.

In this sense, the creation of pedagogical contexts in which democracy is learned implies its creation in everyday life, a demanding and difficult task that requires the non-dichotomization of reflection and practice, as illustrated by Freire (2006a, p. 91):

It's really difficult to have democracy. The thing is that democracy, like any dream, is not created with disembodied words, but with reflection and practice. It's not what I say that says I'm a Democrat, that I'm not racist or sexist, but what I do. What I say must not be contradicted by what I do. It's what I do that tells me whether or not I'm loyal to what I say (Freire, 2006a, p. 91).

The exercise of pronouncing the word, as well as listening to it, implies the ethical-existential recognition of those who pronounce it.

### **Democratic education – towards a pedagogy of hope**

Bell Hooks' political-pedagogical project is based above all on a critical pedagogy that nurtures hope and invites us to a constant examination of “the ways in which we support, whether consciously or unconsciously, existing structures of domination” (Hooks, 2021, p. 94). On this perspective, it is necessary to understand how democratic educators can and should share knowledge in order to cooperate in overcoming existing structures of domination, inside and outside the educational system; and it is in the book “Teaching community: a pedagogy of hope” (Hooks, 2021), and, more specifically, in “Teaching 4 – Democratic Education”, that we rest our concerns, seeking to identify how a democratic educator is constituted beyond the classroom of class.

It is necessary to point out that, like many students she encountered throughout her career as an educator, Bell Hooks always had an eye on the academic space, which she described as corrupt and moribund; a place of collective denial, where the majority of teachers without basic communication skills, perform rituals of control for domination, through the unfair exercise of power (Hooks, 2017). Beyond the academic space, it is necessary to identify that the American educational system, since the time of racial desegregation, remained, according to Hooks (2017), a tedious space, of no promise and possibility, with educational practices to reinforce domination, in which knowledge is presented “reinforcing existing oppressive hierarchies” (Hooks, 2021, p. 94). Following this logic, Paulo Freire observes:

US classrooms are like this, according to the Google report I mentioned earlier, which noted a huge lack of emotion in schools. Thirty years ago, Jerome Bruner complained of the same monotony as he traveled around the United States looking at schools. I think that this chronic monotony of school contributes to average students becoming anti-intellectual. Their life outside of school is fun, and comedy is one of the ways in which they live their own subjectivity. When learning has no humor or emotion, it is denying them two subjective values (Freire, 2013, p. 190).

Contrary to what she experienced as a student, from high school to higher education, Bell Hooks witnesses, through her educational practices, the possibility of building a pedagogical community, in which the diversity of knowledge and discourses, when valued, gives rise to subjugated knowledge, announcing the possibility of collective healing, through an education that affirms life. According to the author:

As democratic educators we must work to find ways to teach and share knowledge in ways that do not reinforce existing structures of domination (those hierarchies of race, gender, class, and religion). The diversity of speeches and presences can be highly valued as a resource that intensifies any learning experience (Hooks, 2021, p. 94).

To honor education as a practice of freedom, according to the pedagogy of hope, Bell Hooks scrutinizes the attitudes and educational practices to be nurtured by those who dare to build themselves as democratic educators. Among the attitudes and practices for democratic educators, contained in Teaching 4, we highlight from Hooks (2021) the need to:

- Understand knowledge as an experience that fully enriches life;
- Create a pleasant atmosphere in classroom practice;
- Incorporate teaching practices that honor diversity;
- Value the diversity of language;
- Embrace an inclusive logic and recognize the limits of your knowledge;
- Use inclusive "both/and" logic in the classroom and outside it;
- Take on the task of opening the learning space so that it can be more inclusive;
- Experience learning as a complete process and not as a restricted practice that disconnects and alienates from the world;
- Talk to share information and exchange ideas, both inside and outside the school and/or academic environment;
- Make dialogue the central space of pedagogy;
- Work to find ways to teach and share knowledge in ways that do not reinforce

existing structures of domination;

- Value learning as an end in itself, and not as a means of achieving another objective, social mobility, power, status.

- Travel around the world sharing knowledge;
- Teach beyond the classroom;
- Do not engage in socially accepted forms of pathological splitting;
- Take on a vigilant practice;
- Teach and act ethically;
- See teaching and learning as constants;
- Develop critical thinking;
- Create a learning community.

We noticed that the democratic educational practice of Hooks (2021) is similar to that of Paulo Freire (2020a), with regard to the assumption of the politicality of education. Assuming a substantively democratic stance for both is abandoning the idea that there is a neutral education and assuming that “educational practice, human formation, implies options, ruptures, decisions, being with and being against, in favor of some dream and against someone” (Freire, 2020a, p. 45). Thus, embracing a democratic educational practice requires the ethicality of the educator, in the sense of “permanent vigilance towards coherence between discourse and practice” (Freire, 2020a, p. 45). Therefore:

The formative nature of teaching, which cannot be reduced to a pure technical and mechanical process of transferring knowledge, emphasizes the ethical-democratic requirement of respect for students' thoughts, tastes, fears, desires, and curiosity. I respect, however, that it cannot exempt the educator, as an authority, from exercising the right to have the duty to establish limits, to propose tasks, to demand the execution of them. Limits without which freedoms run the risk of being lost in licentiousness, in the same way that, without limits, authority goes astray and becomes authoritarianism (Freire, 2020a, p. 46).

The liberating praxis of the democratic educator, both for Freire and for Hooks, is one that assumes the right and duty of human beings to “choose, to decide, to fight to do politics” (Freire, 2019b, p. 38), therefore, being a practice that founds education as a permanent process, based on ethics, love, dialogue, joy and hope. According to the author, “all this brings us back to the radicality of hope”; hope that is part of human nature, that awakens, that encourages despite everything and that serves as “an indispensable condiment to the historical experience” (Freire, 2019b, p. 52). In view of

this, competent and coherent democratic educators testify:

their taste for life, their hope for a better world, which attests to their ability to fight, their respect for differences, they increasingly know the value they have in changing reality, the consistent way in which they live their presence in the world, of that your experience at school is just a moment, but an important moment that needs to be lived authentically (Freire, 2019b, p. 81).

As proposed by Bell Hooks throughout teaching 4, it is necessary to discuss democratic educational practices, which enable a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom, recognizing the democratic classroom as one of the few places “where people can find support to acquire critical consciousness, to commit to the end of domination” (Hooks, 2021, p. 95). Thus:

It must be part of our formation to discuss what these indispensable qualities are, even though we know that they need to be created by us, in our practice, whether our political-pedagogical option is democratic or progressive and whether we are coherent with it. We need to know that, without certain qualities or virtues such as love, respect for others, tolerance, humility, taste for joy, taste for life, openness to new things, willingness to change, persistence in the fight, refusal of fatalism, identification with hope, openness to justice, progressive pedagogical practice is not possible, which cannot be done only with science and technique (Freire, 2019b, p. 86).

Hooks (2021) teaches us that school and academia are important spaces to help build and maintain democracy, but they are not the only ones, therefore they should not be treated as salvation for all of humanity's problems; the formation of human beings for liberation and democracy takes place in all spaces that they encounter in everyday relationships, in social and cultural practices, in communities and small groups, in the encounters they establish with other people, other cultures, other imaginaries, other subjectivities and other alterities. In conclusion, democratic education leads us to processes that are always collective, loving, inclusive, dialogical, ethical and fair, which involve us in permanent struggles against all forms of domination and exclusion; processes that restore our humanity and enable the construction of unity in diversity, as proposed by educator Paulo Freire.

### **Some considerations**

It is important to highlight that, just as in the United States of America, the education sector in Brazil continually suffers from policies that alternate projects of



domination and emancipatory projects, the latter serving an agenda of building and strengthening a democratic, fair and inclusive nation.

The fact is that, both in Brazil and in the United States of America, the defense of democracy and the fight for its deepening have become no less necessary. Currently, we are witnessing the return of ultra-conservative discourses and their policies of exclusion and domination in Brazil and around the world. Betting on life is no longer a collective concern. We need to resume ethical vigilance over our speech and actions if we truly want to build a democratic and fair society. It is necessary to reaffirm the politicality of the educational act for the transformation or reinvention of the world (Freire, 2020a).

It is necessary to take a critical position in the face of the imperialist capitalist white supremacist patriarchal system and propose the “ethics of otherness as a horizon for reading the surrounding reality” if we wish to educate for freedom and democracy (Rosa, 2011, p. 140).

The reflections made by Carolina de Jesus, at the beginning of this text, black woman, garbage collector, single mother, resident of the margins – the other side of the abyssal line (land without law), bring sensitive provocations about democracy to the context of this article, democratic education and the training of teachers in the context of relationships through which democracy can materialize. This context needs to be constantly monitored so that men and women from the popular classes are not neglected, re-victimized in their lives, as well as not being restricted from mobilizing their bodies for the heard and problematized pronouncement of the *worldlyword*<sup>1</sup>.

Carolina de Jesus denounces the hunger that she and her children feel in the flesh, a hunger that is shared at the table of many people who live in the context of Brazil and the world. Carolina de Jesus reveals the political game by which democracy can be deceived by the rules inscribed in the game of capitalism which, at its pleasure, always metamorphoses itself in defense of the powerful, to this end oppresses even more the “condemned of the earth” (Fanon, 2022). Carolina de Jesus denounces the bad behavior of politicians who usurp the term democracy to assume prominent positions and then discard their empty words in the trash, which are lost in the wind. Carolina de Jesus resents not having the slightest possibility of keeping her word (no longer eating food from the trash), as a result she feels the weight of guilt and succumbs to the weight of hunger.

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<sup>1</sup> Nota da Tradutora: Tradução livre da expressão “*palavramundo*”.

What do we intend with all these provocations and other possible ones based on the excerpt from Carolina de Jesus? Dialogue with Bell Hooks and Paulo Freire who teach us a lot about education as a practice of freedom. Education that is intentionally forged with the pulsating desire to exercise democracy. In this sense, this education and this educational project have dialogue as their articulating core, which requires constant vigilance so as not to be transgressed, hurting the human ethics that men and women come from contexts of profound socioeconomic disparities.

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**RESUMO:**

As reflexões inscritas neste artigo, orientado por um estudo qualitativo, articulam pensamentos de Hooks e Freire que provocam o sistema educacional estadunidense e brasileiro na tecitura criativa de uma educação democrática. A questão: Como educadoras(es) podem transformar práticas autoritárias e desumanas, promovidas e encorajadas por muitas instituições de ensino, em uma práxis educativa democrática? Busca compreender como os conceitos de educação democrática e de educador(a) democrático(a), presentes nos ensinamentos de Hooks e Paulo Freire, anunciam a possibilidade de transformação das práticas autoritárias em práticas democráticas no ensino.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Educação Democrática; Bell Hooks; Paulo Freire.

**RESUMEN:**

Las reflexiones incluidas en este artículo, guiadas por un estudio cualitativo, articulan los pensamientos de Hooks y Freire que incitan a los sistemas educativos estadounidense y brasileño en el tejido creativo de una educación democrática. La pregunta: ¿Cómo pueden los educadores transformar las prácticas autoritarias e inhumanas, promovidas y alentadas por muchas instituciones educativas, en una praxis educativa democrática? Se busca comprender cómo los conceptos de educación democrática y educador democrático, presentes en las enseñanzas de Hooks y Paulo Freire, anuncian la posibilidad de transformar prácticas autoritarias en prácticas democráticas en la enseñanza.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Educación democrática; Bell Hooks; Paulo Freire; Diálogo.