

# Paulo Freire and socio-emotional education

## Abstract

The National Common Core Curriculum (BNCC) was approved by the Ministry of Education on December 20, 2017 for the Early Childhood Education and Primary Education stages, and on December 14, 2018 for the Secondary Education stage. With its promulgation, states and municipalities are obliged to re/organize their curricular references, harmonizing them with the objectives established for basic education. The Base emphasizes the need to develop cognitive skills alongside socio-emotional skills, underpinned by curricular content. From this context, this chapter aimed to defend the thesis that many concepts related to socio-emotional skills - such as those highlighted in the BNCC's ten general competences: empathy, dialogue, cooperation, autonomy, responsibility, ethics, solidarity, among others, were cited and discussed by Paulo Freire in his works, especially in the book *"Pedagogy of autonomy: knowledge necessary for educational practice"* (1996).

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## Leandro Ferreira de Melo

Specialist in Educational Management (UBC) and Curriculum Management (USP), School director in the Integral Education Program (São Paulo State Department of Education), Brazil

**Correspondence:** Leandro Ferreira de Melo, Graduated in Geography and Pedagogy, Specialist in Educational Management (UBC) and Curriculum Management (USP), Master of Science from the Postgraduate Program in Social Change and Political Participation at the University of São Paulo (USP), PhD in Education and Health from the Postgraduate Program in Education and Health in Childhood and Adolescence - Federal University of São Paulo (UNIFESP), School director in the Integral Education Program (São Paulo State Department of Education), Brazil, Email melo.leo7@gmail.com

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## Introduction

"Democracy and freedom [...] do not come about without struggle."<sup>1</sup>

Psychology has made a significant contribution to educational development. Discussions about the benefits of socio-emotional skills for education have long been a reality. It's no coincidence that this topic has been given prominence in training courses, teacher qualifications, specializations, etc. Even in the organization of the BNCC's ten general competences. Socio-emotional skills are present in the BNCC mainly to guide learning beyond the cognitive field. Proponents of the development of socio-emotional skills (non-mental skills), based on school curricula,<sup>2</sup> say that in addition to cognitive skills, they are essential to enhance the teaching-learning process, as well as the quality of life of teachers and students, in addition to other benefits related to behavior and learning. It is important to clarify that emotions are not learned, in fact, they are learned to determine when these natural devices will be used and developed. According to Damasio,<sup>3</sup> emotion is already part of our natural system. In this way, we learn to determine what and how much a situation can affect us. In the words of António Damásio:

The genome ensures that all these devices are active at or shortly after birth, with little or no dependence on learning, although learning will play an important role in determining when these devices will be used.<sup>3</sup>

According to Damasio<sup>3</sup> "[...] reactions such as crying and sobbing are ready-made at birth, but the reasons why we cry or sob throughout our lives vary with our experience". In these terms, emotions can be stimulated and enhanced throughout the development of the curriculum.

But how can socio-emotional skills contribute to teacher and student performance in the teaching-learning process? A simple and objective answer would be that schools are made up of people, human beings who have and feel emotions! In this case, socio-emotional skills can help people to educate their emotions and master them, so that they can face life with more confidence, without, for example, letting anxiety get in the way of their plans and objectives, given

that anxiety, stress, insecurity, difficulty concentrating and lack of emotional intelligence are situations that don't go well with the teaching-learning process.<sup>4</sup>

According to Marin et al.,<sup>5</sup> since the dualistic idea between emotion and reason has been broken down, emotion has received more attention in terms of the construction of cognitive processes, thus contradicting the theories that propose the separation of reason and emotion:

The theory of Multiple Intelligences<sup>6</sup> pointed out that human cognition is made up of various independent facets, between which there is a relationship of interdependence between two or more of them. Veenema and Gardner (1996) argued that intelligence is linked to the ability to solve problems, since individuals can receive and modify information based on their level of understanding of themselves and others. Emotions have thus come to be recognized and valued, since they can increase effectiveness in decisions and behaviour (BRANCO, 2004).

Gardner<sup>6</sup> and Salovey & Mayer<sup>7</sup> developed a theoretical system that demonstrated the strong link between human emotion and intelligence or reason. In addition to these, there are numerous other authors who have even developed scientific experiments that have confirmed the effectiveness of socio-emotional skills for mental health, self-efficacy, pedagogical performance, attention, concentration, etc.

Anyone who learns to deal with their emotions will face challenges, problems and difficulties throughout their lives, but they will be equipped with important subjective tools to analyze, plan and mobilize mental and material resources to overcome everyday difficulties. Therefore, as far as the educational field is concerned, the main focus of socio-emotional skills is to develop attitudes and behaviors in managers, teachers and students to favor the educational process. In a way that helps them to deal ethically, morally, resiliently, with self-control, etc., with the everyday problems of school life - in fact, in life.<sup>8,9</sup>

The BNCC highlights the need to develop socio-emotional skills alongside cognitive skills, underpinned by curricular content. From this context, this study aimed to defend the thesis that many concepts

related to socio-emotional skills - such as those highlighted in the BNCC's ten general competences: empathy, dialogue, cooperation, autonomy, responsibility, ethics, solidarity? were used by Paulo Freire in his works directly or indirectly.<sup>10</sup>

## Paulo Freire: socio-emotional concepts and categories

“This is an essential principle: literacy and awareness are never separated.”<sup>1</sup>

Paulo Freire (1921-1997), who was declared patron of Brazilian education in 2012 by law 12.612, sanctioned by President Dilma Rousseff, is a prominent figure in Brazil and abroad. His works, which dealt tirelessly with “liberating education”, directly influenced curriculum studies, training and teaching practices. His theory emphasized the importance of the teacher considering the context and cultural background of the student throughout the teaching-learning process, because the student, he said, was not a “blank slate”, where the teacher “deposits” knowledge based on an erroneous conception of “banking education”. He proposed the development of a dialogical education, with the aim of political and social awareness.<sup>1</sup>

It's important to highlight Freire's thoughts on the school and its human constitution. We can see this clearly in the poem “The School”, which, although many people think was written by Paulo Freire, according to his children, was not. In fact, it was written by an educator who, while attending a lecture by Freire, based on what she heard, wrote it using Freire's phrases and ideas. At the end of the lecture, she approached him and handed him the paper. Freire never published the poem, although his ideas about school were captured by the author and translated into the poem.<sup>2</sup>

The poem briefly summarizes the author's perceptions of the school, its constitution and specifically refers us to the book “Pedagogy of autonomy: knowledge necessary for educational practice” (1996), let's see:

### The school

School is...  
the place to make friends  
It's not just about buildings, rooms and paintings,  
programs, timetables, concepts...  
School is, above all, about people,  
people who work,  
who studies, who rejoices, who knows, who cherishes.  
The director is people,  
the coordinator is people,  
teachers are people,  
students are people,  
every employee is a person.  
And the school will be better and better  
to the extent that each  
behave like a colleague, a friend, a brother.  
No island surrounded by people everywhere.

No living with people and then finding out  
who has no friendship with anyone  
no need to be like the brick that forms the wall,  
indifferent, cold, alone.  
It's not just about studying,  
it's not just about working,  
is also to create bonds of friendship,  
is to create an atmosphere of camaraderie,  
is to live with it, and get stuck into it.  
Well, of course.  
in a school like this  
it will be easy to study, work and grow,  
make friends, educate yourself, be happy.

The terms used in the poem are related to the importance of human beings and their singularities in the school context. The poem is almost a cry for the need to value human manifestations (socio-emotional skills).<sup>11</sup>

## Pedagogy of autonomy: socio-emotional concepts/categories

The education of the masses is therefore something absolutely fundamental among us. Education that, stripped of its alienated and alienating garb, is a force for change and liberation. The choice, therefore, would also have to be between an “education” for “domestication”, for alienation, and an education for freedom. “Education” for the man-object or education for the man-subject (FREIRE, 1983, p. 36).

Paulo Freire, in his classic book “Pedagogia da Autonomia: saberes necessárias à prática educativa” (1996, p. 01), when discussing “the knowledge necessary for teaching practice”, emphasized that the teacher is an agent of conscientization, and should therefore focus on three guiding principles of teaching practice:

1. “There is no teaching without teaching”;
2. “Teaching is not transferring knowledge”;
3. “Teaching is a human specificity”.

In summary, Freire<sup>1</sup> stated that the teaching process is a very difficult task, as it requires security, professionalism and extreme commitment on the part of the teacher. He also points out that “teaching requires research” (reflection), because by doing so, the teacher will be respecting them even before they have contact with the students, by preparing themselves for the educational practice in the classroom.

But what we want to discuss here is not Paulo Freire's legacy, as his importance to Brazilian and world education is already clear. The aim here was to defend the thesis that Paulo Freire in his works (theory) discussed various concepts related to socio-emotional skills (SANTOS, 2017).

The promulgation of the BNCC has highlighted the importance and need for socio-emotional skills to be added to curricula and encouraged, given that traditionally cognitive domains were taken

into account almost exclusively, but non-cognitive skills, which go beyond the accumulation of information, are just as important as skills linked to reason.

In these terms, Paulo Freire<sup>1</sup> demonstrated how far ahead of his time he was when it came to educational development, especially in teaching practice. Here are some concepts linked to socio-emotional competencies that are based on Freire's writings: critical thinking, flexibility, responsibility, communication, openness to new experiences, believing that you are capable of solving problems, etc.

Below, in Table 1, is a list of concepts/categories related to socio-emotional skills. On the right-hand side of the table, some concepts that are even included in the BNCC have been highlighted. On the left hand side, concepts/categories extracted mainly from the table of contents of the book "Pedagogy of autonomy: knowledge necessary for educational practice" by Paulo Freire<sup>1</sup> have been highlighted. Before that, the table of contents of the aforementioned book was reproduced verbatim. In it, concepts related to socio-emotional skills can be clearly seen:

### Chapter 1 - There is no teaching without learning

- I. - Teaching requires methodical rigor
- II. - Teaching requires research
- III. - Teaching requires respect for students' knowledge
- IV. - Teaching requires criticality
- V. - Teaching requires aesthetics and ethics
- VI. - Teaching requires embodying words by example
- VII. - Teaching requires risk, acceptance of the new and rejection of discrimination
- VIII. - Teaching requires critical reflection on practice
- IX. - Teaching requires the recognition and assumption of cultural identity.

### Chapter 2 - Teaching is not about transferring knowledge

- I. - Teaching requires awareness of the unfinished
- II. - Teaching requires the recognition of being conditioned
- III. - Teaching requires respect for the autonomy of the student's being
- IV. - Teaching requires common sense
- V. - Teaching requires humility, tolerance and the fight to defend educators' rights
- VI. - Teaching requires a grasp of reality
- VII. - Teaching requires joy and hope
- VIII. - Teaching requires the conviction that change is possible
- IX. - Teaching requires curiosity

### Chapter 3 - Teaching is a human specificity

- I. 3.1 - Teaching requires safety, professional competence and generosity
- II. 3.2 - Teaching requires commitment
- III. 3.3 - Teaching requires understanding that education is a form of intervention in the world
- IV. 3.4 - Teaching requires freedom from authority
- V. 3.5 - Teaching requires conscious decision-making
- VI. 3.6 - Teaching requires listening skills
- VII. 3.7 - Teaching requires recognizing that education is ideological
- VIII. 3.8 - Teaching requires a willingness to engage in dialog
- IX. 3.9 - Teaching requires wanting the students to do well.

It can be seen that some concepts stand out when reading the table of contents of the aforementioned work by Freire<sup>1</sup> as shown in Table 1, as well as others in his works:

**Table 1** Concepts and categories related to socio-emotional skills

Socio-emotional skills (general) 8, 9 and 10 of the BNCC	Concepts and categories generally related to socio-emotional skills	Freirean concepts and categories related to socio-emotional skills
"Knowing yourself, appreciating yourself and taking care of your physical and emotional health, understanding yourself in human diversity and recognizing your emotions and those of others, with self-criticism and the ability to deal with them." - "Exercising empathy, dialogue, conflict resolution and cooperation, showing respect for others and promoting respect for human rights, welcoming and valuing the diversity of individuals and social groups, their knowledge, identities, cultures and potential, without prejudice of any kind." - "Acting personally and collectively with autonomy, responsibility, flexibility, resilience and determination, making decisions based on ethical, democratic, inclusive, sustainable and supportive principles." <sup>12</sup>	openness to new things, kindness, altruism, assertiveness, self-confidence, self-knowledge, self-control, self-esteem, autonomy, commitment, cooperation, creativity, curiosity, discipline, empathy, enthusiasm, effort, emotional stability, experimentation, extroversion, imagination, organization, originality, optimism, critical thinking, persistence, resilience, responsibility, sensitivity, sociability, tolerance, love, commitment... (Terms taken from articles, books, websites).	"teaching, respect, rigor, criticality, ethics, aesthetics, love, loving, example, reflection, criticism, decriminalization, awareness, recognition, autonomy, common sense, humility, tolerance, struggle, human rights, apprehension, reality, joy, hope, conviction, change, possibilities, curiosity, security, competence, generosity, commitment, understanding, intervention in the world, freedom, authority, decisions, ideology education, knowing how to listen, availability, dialogue, dialogicity, wanting well..." <sup>1</sup>

Table adapted from reading the BNCC, curriculum references and websites such as "Nova Escola".

In Table 1, just above, in the left-hand column, some concepts suggested by experts have been highlighted, who say that they need to be developed in conjunction with curriculum content, as well as applied to teacher-student relations. There is no disagreement about this. What is surprising is how up-to-date Freire's ideas are, especially when comparing the first two columns with the last one, which contains some words (concepts and categories) that highlight the importance Freire gave to the emotional theme in teaching practice. Note that the column on the right-hand side shows Freirian concepts and categories, contrasted with concepts and categories that can be seen throughout the BNCC, in other words, in the general competences - especially in the last three general competences defined for education by the Base.<sup>12</sup> The Base states that these are competences that go beyond the **cognitive dimension**, as they involve the emotional sphere of the human being in a deeper way.<sup>13,9</sup> It is important to note that Freire paid attention not only to the cognitive (rational) needs of the students, but also to the emotional sphere, as he said: "It seems to me that there is still a fundamental element in the assumption I am talking about: **the emotional**. [...]" And, in this way, to develop an education that leads students to "Assume themselves as social and historical beings, as thinking, communicating, transforming, creating beings, fulfilling dreams, capable of being angry because they are capable of loving."<sup>1</sup> (FREIRE, 1996, p. 18 - emphasis added).<sup>1</sup> In other words, an education "beyond capital"<sup>14</sup> and for "conscientization" and humanization.<sup>15,16</sup>

## Final considerations

[...] To the extent that they leave in each man the shadow of the oppression that crushes him. Expelling this shadow through awareness is one of the fundamental tasks of a truly liberating education, and one that therefore respects man as a person (FREIRE, 1983, p. 36).

At the beginning of this reflection, it was said that we were trying to defend the thesis that many concepts related to socio-emotional skills - such as some that were highlighted in the ten general competences of the BNCC: empathy, dialogue, cooperation, autonomy, responsibility, ethics, solidarity, among others - were used by Paulo Freire in his works, especially in the book "Pedagogy of autonomy: knowledge necessary for educational practice" (1996). When I read this book again, I noticed that many of the concepts that relate to socio-emotional education stand out. Freire<sup>1</sup> in the very first chapter, makes clear his understanding of human beings, i.e. for him they are "historical and unfinished beings", "beings programmed to learn", and it is necessary to exercise "epistemological curiosity", "Curiosity with which we can defend ourselves against "irrationalisms" arising from or produced by a certain excess of "rationality" of our highly technologized time."<sup>11</sup> Note that Freire is talking about the need to find ways out of what he calls "irrationalisms" arising from the process of technologizing (or mechanizing) education. This shows that there was a clear concern with the direction and development of teaching practice.<sup>11,17</sup>

Freire<sup>1</sup> demonstrates that it is essential to take into account that the student is not treated as an object - but as a thinking subject - and that it is therefore essential to put into practice "problematizing" teaching, which is close to the student, dialogical, reflective... as opposed to "banking education".

Paulo Freire's concern about teaching practice and the need to apply tactics and strategies to implement teaching that takes into account the development of students' socio-emotional characteristics is undeniable, because in this way, he warns, teachers will exercise their humanizing role, respecting, above all, the being they are teaching.<sup>18-20</sup>

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## Conflicts of interest

The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

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