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## Alterity and Dialogical Education: A Path to Education in Strange Times

**Antonio Jose Müller, Walmir Marcolino Gomes, Taiani Vicentini**

### Abstract

In this second decade of the 21st century, discussions about Education and its objectives have become ever greater. We live in strange times, permeated by individualism, combating critical thinking and totalitarianism, which makes us reflect more and more on the need for an Education focused on the dialogue of these issues, on alterity, on the other. In this sense, we seek in this article to reflect on the concepts of otherness in Emmanuel Levinas and dialogic education in Paulo Freire. The aim of this article is to relate the concepts of otherness in Levinas and dialogical education in Paulo Freire and understand how this relationship can become a path for education in our days. This article is justified in that it provides reflections on Education and Alterity as a way to think about Education in the present day. Therefore, the methodology is bibliographical and qualitative. It is concluded that both, based on their particularities, discuss the need to look at the human person, share existences, recognize the Other as the Other and from that, also recognize oneself as I, be open to dialogue, to discourse. Welcoming experiences and respecting each other. Starting from the relationship of these concepts, it is then possible to rethink the relationships established in the field of education, in schools and in learning methods.

**Keywords:** Education, School, Alterity, Dialogic education.

### 1. Introduction

Education, especially in Brazil, has been the subject of numerous discussions. In recent years – 30 years, to be exact – Education has become a right for everyone with regard to access and permanence in accordance with the Federal Constitution of 1988 (Brasil, 1988). In this second decade of the 21st century, discussions about Education and its objectives have become increasingly greater in view of the implementation of a mandatory minimum curriculum and the contingency of funds in Education, mainly public, among other ills. In addition, we live in strange times, permeated by individualism, the fight against critical thinking and totalitarianism, which makes us reflect more and more on the need for an Education focused on the dialogue of these issues, on alterity, on the other. In order to enable the subjects present in the school environment to be and be aware of their own singularities, as well as the singularities of others.

In this sense, we seek in this article to reflect on the concepts of otherness in Emmanuel Levinas and dialogic education in Paulo Freire. Alterity is understood in the relationship I and the Other, an ethics of openness, dialogue, acceptance and responsibility. The Face, as understood by Levinas, plays an essential role, as it manifests the essence of the human being and calls for a new ethical look of respect for the human person and his differences. In dialogic education, the educational process takes place through dialogue, which creates and recreates. It establishes themes that generate and found an authentic education, opposing the traditional system of 'banking education' (Freire, 2011). That is, dialogic education welcomes everyday experiences and establishes mutual respect.

Dialogue is the central axis of Paulo Freire's work. Through dialogue, links are created in a movement of interaction and knowledge of the Other. It is an existential requirement, through which new knowledge and new thoughts are generated. In this sense, the school is the place of encounter and hope, as it is the place of otherness. Through dialogic education there is a turning to the Other, of openness and acceptance, critical thinking and an authentic

humanizing education, a path to education in our days. In view of this, the objective of this article is, initially, to relate the concepts of otherness in Levinas and dialogic education in Paulo Freire, and then to understand how this relationship can become a path for education in our days. Thus, this article is justified insofar as it provides reflections on Education and Alterity as a way to think about Education in the present day. It is worth mentioning that this article is the result of ongoing research and brings the main ideas of the theoretical contributions that underlie it, in an attempt to understand a path to education in our days.

## 2. Methodology

The research is bibliographical, that is, it makes use of material already written. This definition is necessary considering that it is from this prepared material that the necessary data for analysis in this article was generated. The approach is qualitative, as it refers to an analysis of the situational characteristics, that is, it understands that the analysis permeates the subjectivity of the object and the research subject. The data to be analyzed are excerpts from the authors already mentioned in relation to otherness and dialogic education.

### 2.1 Results and Discussion

This section aims to bring excerpts about otherness and dialogic education in order to relate them and understand how they can become a path for education in our days. Therefore, we deem it necessary, before elucidating these concepts, to discuss the role of the school, since the way in which schools are visualities reflects on the way in which education is also interpreted.

Authors Julia Varela and Fernando Alvarez-Uria (1992) question ‘what fundamentally characterizes this institution?’, and make a reading of the school in its different moments, understanding it as machinery at the service of the interests of its time. Paula Sibilía (2012) asks: ‘What is school for?’ and analyzes the incompatibility factors between the new ways of being and being in the world, and the school within this context with its rules and values. Michael Young (2007), in turn, asks ‘what are schools for?’ and emphasizes the existence of an emancipatory desire, but within a tension between educational realities and political demands.

The author Sibilía, (2012, p. 211) points out that it is “necessary to radically transform schools [...] to redefine them as spaces for meeting and dialogue, for the production of thought and decantation of experiences capable of instilling consistency in the lives that inhabit them”. And it is in this sense that we understand the school as “a meeting place with the other for the construction of new interactive learning, having the possibility of promoting the ethics of alterity, in a space of dialogue and sensitive listening” (Habowaki; Conte; Pugens, 2018, p. 179).

In view of this, the concept of Alterity in Levinas and dialogic education in Paulo Freire will be discussed.

## 3. Alterity for Levinas

Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) breaks with the thinking of modernity that encourages individualism as it approaches the conception of an ethics of the Other, based on diversity and plurality. The aforementioned author criticizes Western philosophy, which has ontology as the first philosophy and which he considers egocentric, since

ontology recognizes the Self as the center of the universe, proposing ethics as the first philosophy and Alterity as the principle of human relations. The Other is an essential concept in Levinas's thought, as it is the possibility of the subject's ethical constitution and the ethical reconfiguration of subjectivity, that is, “the relationship with the Other questions me, empties me of myself and does not cease to empty myself, discovering new possibilities for myself” (Levinas, 2009, p. 56).

The Face, another concept of Levinas's philosophy, is the first manifestation of the human being that questions and leads us to become aware of responsibility for the Other: “The I before the Other is infinitely responsible” (LEVINAS, 2009, p. 53). In the Face, the essence of the human being is manifested, because somehow, “his own plastic essence, like a being that opened the window where his figure, however, was already being drawn” (Levinas, 2009, p.51), that is, the author conceives that the presence of the being “consists of undressing the form that, meanwhile, has already manifested it. Its manifestation is a surplus over the inevitable paralysis of manifestation”. The author also clarifies that “the Face speaks”. (Levinas, 2009, p.51).

The first philosophy proposed by Levinas, the ethics of otherness, opposes the power and dominance of the economy and politics of his time, which overlaps with the quality of life of human beings and their relationships. A new ethical look at humanism that respects the human person and their differences. Therefore, otherness happens in the encounter of the Self with the Other in an attitude of openness, welcome and dialogue, which builds and builds a bridge, respects identities and allows itself to be questioned, that is, otherness, a relationship of otherness, only happens through “an I that goes out of oneself to find the other” (Habowaki; Conte; Pugens. 2018, p. 185), and in this movement the intentionality is “to learn to build oneself with it, without worrying about the reciprocity, as the relation of otherness is in building and letting dwell (cultivating growth), belonging to an integrative spirit of disposition”, availability and bridge to the other.” (Habowaki; Conte; Pugens. 2018, p. 185).

It is important to emphasize that this relationship does not annul the Self, the identity of this Self is not lost, but remains available and open to discourse, “letting the dialogical composition prevail that comes from the Other, through questions about its own selfishness” (Habowaki ; Conte; Pugens. 2018, p. 185).

## 4. Dialogic Education in Paulo Freire

Paulo Freire (1921-1997) brings dialogue as a central axis in his pedagogy. Dialogue creates bonds between subjects and establishes encounters. It is from the dialogue that men get closer to each other, without prejudice or ostentatious attitudes. “No one can, wanting to dialogue, establish a relationship in which one dictates the norms and the other simply observes them. In dialogue, people are free to desire, cultivate and establish encounters” (Vasconcelos; Brito, 2006, p. 73).

The encounter established by the dialogue cannot be prescriptive, but it is a movement of interaction and knowledge of the Other, therefore, it is loving, of transformation and humanization. This amorous meeting of men that takes place mediated by the world, pronounces and transforms. It is in this transformation that they

“humanize for the humanization of all. This love encounter cannot be, for this very reason, a meeting of irreconcilable” (Freire, 2011a, p. 109).

Therefore, dialogue is an existential requirement, where the word is spoken and new knowledge and thinking are generated. In other words, dialogic education is the place for recreation and the new, where the educational process takes place in dialogue, because, through this, the generating themes that found an authentic education and that oppose the traditional system of “banking education” are established:

In the banking view of education, “knowledge” is a donation from those who think they are wise to those who think they know nothing. Donation that is based on one of the instrumental manifestations of the ideology of oppression – the absolutization of ignorance, which constitutes what we call the alienation of ignorance, according to which it is always found in the other. The educator, who alienates ignorance, maintains himself in fixed, invariable positions. They will always be the ones who know, while the students will always be the ones who don't know. The rigidity of these positions denies education and knowledge as search processes. (Freire, 2011a, p. 81)

Dialogical education consists of welcoming experiences and mutual respect. Together, it reflects what we know and what we don't know. One looks at the world critically and pronounces it. Because of this, the interpretation of the programmatic content of Education takes place on other bases. For the educator-student, who is dialogical and problematizing, the programmatic content – in this case, the curriculum, the textbook and the like – are not a donation or imposition to “be deposited in the students, but the organized, systematized and added return to the people of those elements that it handed over in an unstructured way”. (Freire, 2011a, p.116)

Freire emphatically stated that thinking is very dangerous, and this can be seen in world history and especially in Brazil. The act of thinking is dangerous because authoritarian regimes and authoritarian people want “by saying do this! The person does it, don't even think if it's good or bad. For whom, and why are you going to do that” (ARAÚJO FREIRE, 2019). Because of this, for Freire, education should lead to thinking, it should be conscientious.

### **5. Alterity and dialogic education: a path to education in strange times**

The relationship between the concepts of Levinas and Paulo Freire is possible, as both are intertwined as a formative process of the human being, in a movement of turning to the Other, in an ethical perspective, of respect, acceptance and responsibility. Levinas, in establishing the ethics of alterity, enables a new look at the human person, no longer centered on himself, egocentric, but focused on dialoguing with the Other. This relationship is a source of learning, humanizing and responsible. Paulo Freire, in turn, did not specifically address the issue of ethics, but in his work he helps to pronounce the world with an ethical look of transformation and appreciation of human dignity, since all of Freire's thought is permeated by an ethical rigor which is rooted in the defense of human dignity. Paulo Freire's humanist option is manifested mainly in his ethics of liberation and solidarity, as they are committed to fighting, always, for the dignity of the oppressed, the

excluded and for global justice (Trombetta; Trombetta, 2016).

It is in this relationship between Levinas' alterity and dialogic education that it is possible to see them as a path for education in our days. For, the school, in view of these concepts, becomes a space for building relationships of reciprocity and alterity, and education – bearing in mind the dialogical and alterity, becomes a path of humanization. Dialogic education and alterity open a way to dialogue not only with knowledge, but also with sharing existence. Dialogue with the reality of the interlocutors: “Why not discuss with the students the concrete reality to which the discipline whose content is taught...?” (Freire, 2011b, p. 32).

Alterity and dialogic education converge in an education that opens up personal experiences, which, when shared, become a source of knowledge and learning. An authentic education that breaks the traditional patterns of given knowledge and subordination, for an education that is born from dialogue and from the bonds established in alterity. Education from the perspective of the ethics of otherness is established in the relationship of interdependence and openness to different values, allows one to recognize oneself, establishes a critical look to pronounce the world and awakens responsibility for the Other. Dialogue is the guiding principle of this process of openness and acceptance.

Thus, dialogic education is the place of otherness in which the encounter of the Self with the Other is established, it welcomes the Face, that is, the essence of the human being and leads to awareness.

### **6. Final Considerations**

As discussed, Education is an increasingly recurrent theme in discussions due to the economic, social, political and cultural context that we are living, mainly, in these two decades of the 21st century. The school, in turn, becomes an environment increasingly questioned in relation to its function, its objectives. However, the need for this space to be more and more a place for meetings and dialogues that allow the construction of new learning becomes even more necessary. Thus, taking these questions into account, the aim of this article was to relate the concepts of alterity in Levinas and dialogical education in Paulo Freire, and then understand how this relationship can become a path for education in strange times.

In fact, safeguarding the singularities that are relevant to each author, in view of each one's own experiences, it is noted that both, based on their particularities, discuss the need to look at the human person, share existences, recognize the Other as the Other and starting from that, recognizing oneself also as Me, being open to dialogue, to discourse, accepting experiences and respecting each other. Starting from the relationship of these concepts, it is then possible to rethink the relationships established in the field of education, in schools and in learning methods. In the midst of today's individualism, it places dialogue as the guiding axis of an authentic and humanizing education and rescues ethical values for human relations. The school must be the place of hope where new winds blow and be able to see the Other before the Self, form networks that foster dialogue and alterity, giving new meaning to the lives that inhabit it. In strange times where “each man for himself” stands out, the culture of violence, hatred as a response to

what is different, the policy of devaluing education, totalitarianism and the school as a place of order and discipline, with the rise of military schools, talking about the otherness that is born from dialogue, becomes a path of resistance and also of hope, as it is to believe in the humanization of the human.

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