


## Recent student mobilizations and their contributions to educational purposes

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### ABSTRACT

This text was developed based on the research, readings and discussions carried out in the author's doctoral course, in the Graduate Program in Education of the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar), especially in the debates that took place at the Center for Studies and Research of the Vygotsky School (NEEVY), between the years 2017 and 2021 and in the discipline Critical Theory and Education of the aforementioned program, as well as through documentary research on the topic addressed. The concepts discussed here are based on Critical Theories and Historical-Cultural Theory and are part of the analyses presented in the resulting thesis, defended by the author in 2021. It carries out an analysis of the student mobilizations that have recently taken place in Brazil, drawing a comparison with other Brazilian historical contexts, in order to promote a discussion about the causes of the current struggles, their coping mechanisms and some of the main educational results obtained.

**Keywords:** Democratic education, Student mobilization, Political participation, Citizen emancipation, Social transformation.

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## INTRODUCTION

Between 2013 and 2016, Brazil registered important and diversified student mobilizations in struggle for their rights, which were greatly threatened by changes in official public policies in the various spheres of power: local, state and federal. These mobilizations took place in several municipalities and states of the country, reaching a significant number of individuals.

Among the various episodes that marked these student mobilizations, a group of students occupied, in November 2015, the Diadema State School (SP) and, soon after, the Fernão Dias Paes State School, in an upscale area of the city of São Paulo (capital), to protest against the project of the governor at the time, Geraldo Alckmin, which, if it had advanced, It would lead to the closure of 94 schools in São Paulo. The project foresaw the implementation of the new cycle system and would imply the relocation of more than 300 thousand students. The student movement has spread and affected the classes of at least 26,000 students in 25 occupied schools, according to the Department of Education. Other states, such as Rio de Janeiro and Rio Grande do Sul, began to have the action of student movements similar to the one started in São Paulo.

More than schools, the students demonstrated that they wanted to occupy other spaces of representation, demanding more funds, positioning themselves against the reforms, fighting for more rights and to be effectively heard. These demonstrations, marked by an expressive capacity for organization and articulation, impressed and instigated: after all, what new form of student action would be presented in these occupations and what would be the objectives of these new fronts of struggle?

According to the statements of Pessoni and Libâneo (2018, p. 154): "Education, understood as a social practice, is situated in a dynamic and multifaceted context that requires a deep understanding of its purposes, since they give the direction of meaning to this practice".

Another relevant aspect of these episodes was the youth protagonism, since it was the students, organized in their school units, who elaborated and managed the various activities promoted, such as lectures, exhibitions, debates, artistic presentations, among others. The determination and effort to defend their positions engender what Petrovsky (1980) calls "volitional activity", pointing to necessary learning that involves autonomous thinking.

Many of these mobilizations had the support of teachers and the school administration. However, this was not the determining factor of success, since there were several cases in which students took control of the schools, closing them for the planned teaching activities, collectively creating a specific schedule for each unit.

It was said, especially of high school students in public schools, that they were politically apathetic and distant from the school institution. However, through participation in discussion activities on educational policies, in organized public demonstrations, in debates on social



networks on the internet, or in the face of the concrete experience of the precariousness of educational institutions, students became self-politicized. (GROPPO, 2018, p. 113)

Since the movements for "Diretas Já" in 1984 and "Fora Collor" in 1992, similar student mobilizations have not been registered in Brazil, suggesting a resumption of the strength of the struggle of the youth, thus opposing the idea of their apparent political apathy and disinterest. As stated by Piolli, Pereira and Mesko, cited by Groppo (2018):

[...] We are witnessing in Brazil a new cycle of collective actions or social struggles since the June Days of 2013. The occupations of schools by high school students in several states at the end of 2015 and beginning of 2016, as well as the occupations of schools and universities against MP 746 and PEC 55 at the end of 2016, have continued this cycle. (GROPPO, 2018, p. 89).

Cavalcanti (2011, p. 41) presents us with his view on student movements and their new forms of action:

Although it is no longer possible to clearly perceive organized and politicized youth movements to contest the current order, as was the case in past decades, when they played a relevant role in restructuring the current order in several countries, at any time it can be said that their different groupings have political, ideological, symbolic, implicit and explicit links. being, in any case, ways they find to interpret and manifest their own conceptions of the world, of life, of place, of space, ways of contesting the dominant culture.

The episodes that took place, marked by their evident strength of struggle and resistance, as well as the breadth achieved, fostered the analyses presented here. The aspects related to the important political-ideological clashes and the possibilities of transformation of the current order, as a result of the youth's position, assumed in the face of the official political-educational propositions, revealed themselves as possible and powerful forms of student action, contributing to the desired citizen emancipation.

## **EDUCATION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN BRAZIL**

The analysis of the main and most discussed pedagogical currents, no matter how many variables they may present in terms of their content and method, shows that their main purposes are as follows: good theoretical foundation and technical/practical qualification, in the most diverse fields of professional activity.

Although they differ in many aspects, these pedagogical currents defend the need to ensure the appropriation of the content and its use as a tool, considering the particularities of the reality in which the students are inserted.

However, a more careful investigation allows us to highlight more specific elements, such as the need assumed by education to promote the autonomy of citizens, making them capable of



exercising their criticality on a daily basis. As Santos (2008) presented to us, a way of transforming the condition from mere consumers to citizens.

Also in this sense, Mészáros (2008, p. 47) warns us:

What needs to be confronted and fundamentally changed is the whole system of internalization, with all its dimensions, visible and hidden. Breaking with the logic of capital in the field of education is therefore equivalent to replacing the ubiquitous and deeply rooted forms of mystifying internalization with a comprehensive concrete alternative.

Educational institutions, guided by such precepts, must guarantee the right to education, not only as a form of qualification, but, above all, as a passport to definitive entry into citizenship.

As a process of knowledge, political formation, ethical manifestation, search for beauty, scientific and technical training, education is an indispensable practice for human beings and specific to them in History as a movement, as a struggle. History as a possibility does not dispense with controversy, with conflicts that, in themselves, would already engender the need for education. (FREIRE, p. 2014b, p. 10)

Corroborating this discussion, Adorno (1995) states:

[...] a democracy with the duty not only to function, but to operate according to its concept, demands emancipated people. An effective democracy can only be imagined as a society from which it is emancipated. (1995), p.140-141)

More broadly, education should provide men and women with multiple capacities for citizen action, which allows them to act in a way that fully enjoys what is offered, or what should be. The constant and effective participation of citizens in the elaboration of living conditions becomes a fundamental aspect for more successful and less exclusionary social constructions, allowing the overcoming of existing socioeconomic discrepancies.

In this sense, educational processes, when successful, can promote the expansion of community participation, establishing new and more elaborate criteria for the daily construction of citizenship.

Education is permanent not because a certain ideological line or a certain political position or a certain economic interest requires it. Education is permanent in reason, on the one hand, of the finitude of the human being, on the other, of the awareness he has of his finitude. Even more so, because of the fact that, throughout history, it has incorporated into its nature not only *to know that it lived*, but *to know that it knew* and thus to know that it could know more. Education and ongoing formation are based on this. (FREIRE, p. 2001, p. 14)

In the Brazilian case, due to the political opening carried out since the end of the Military Dictatorship in 1985, many and long steps have been taken in the construction of an educational model that promotes this citizenship. The implementation of the Law of Guidelines and Bases (LDB) in the 90s was a milestone in this process, establishing the general and fundamental parameters of education in the country. The movement of democratization of institutions, the inclusion of social



sciences in the curriculum and the expansion of popular participation in the daily life of the school, with emphasis on those living in the large peripheries, among other measures, allowed a reorientation of the school content, with emphasis on the problematization of the themes addressed. Gradually, a more critical educational process was outlined, supported by aspects of the Brazilian reality:

An education that would enable man to courageously discuss his problems. Their insertion in this problem. That he would warn him of the dangers of his time, so that, aware of them, he would gain the strength and courage to fight, instead of being led and dragged to the perdition of his own "I", submitted to the prescriptions of others. Education that would put him in constant dialogue with the other. That would predispose him to constant revisions. To the critical analysis of their "findings". To a certain rebelliousness, in the most human sense of the term. (FREIRE, 2014a, p.90)

In this sense, educators and students began to establish new forms of work relationship, more open and based on dialogue. The old and conservative paradigms imposed by the military regime were abandoned, and there were spaces for the propagation of liberating and libertarian pedagogies developed inside and outside Brazil, with emphasis on the works of Freinet (1978) and Freire (2001).

The last decades of the twentieth century were marked by pedagogical experiences in some Brazilian municipalities that had great relevance, such as the one carried out under the command of Paulo Freire in the Department of Education of the municipality of São Paulo, under the management of Luiza Erundina, in the early 90s. On the occasion, the project of democratization of the school institution began, with effective popular participation in its management. The dismissal of the old hierarchical forms of power (principal, teachers, employees, etc.) allowed for a reorganization of pedagogical practice.

It was therefore necessary to democratize the Secretariat. Decentralize decisions. It was necessary to inaugurate a collegial government that would limit the power of the Secretary. It was necessary to reorient the policy of teacher training, going beyond the traditional vacation courses in which the discourse on theory is insisted, thinking that the educators then put into practice the theory that was talked about in the course through the practice of discussing the practice. This is an effective way of living the dialectical unity between practice and theory. (FREIRE, p. 2014b, p. 38)

The results achieved in this period reinforce the thesis of the need for democratization of the school and pedagogical practices, aiming at its greater effectiveness. After all, it seems difficult to suppose today an effective educational practice that is carried out simply **for** someone, but between and with the people involved. "In the information society, the social and educational projects that mobilize the most motivation are those that contribute to the creation of meaning." (AUBERT et al, 2016, p.180).

Not only does the administrative machine gain from the greater division of functions, but the community also feels that it belongs to that place, due to the protagonism played by it. As the mother of a student from one of the schools in the municipal network of São Paulo pointed out at the time of



the aforementioned administration: "It's good because in part the community can know what the school is like from the inside. What is done with our children, the use of money. Before, the community was outside the gate. We only went to school to find out about our children's grades and complaints. That's all parents were called to do in the old days – or to bring a plate of delicacies to the parties." (FREIRE, p. 2014b, p. 38)

There have also been important changes in public educational policies in other Brazilian regions, such as those adopted by the government of Olívio Dutra, in Rio Grande do Sul, which created the "School Constituent Assembly" in 1999, being an important instrument for the construction of a more democratic school in that state and the new forms of choice of leaders by the community, adopted in states of the Northeast and Midwest. among many others.

In this way, gradually, the country was building a new education, guided by the need for a dialectical practice among all those involved, allowing a greater understanding of the educational process and its purposes, embarking on dialogical methodologies. The importance of the participation of the entire community in the educational process has become increasingly evident, contributing substantially to its elaboration and decision-making.

Brazilian society, after overcoming the difficult context of total lack of freedom experienced in the military regime, currently enjoys important pedagogical advances, such as the successful experience carried out by the Unified Education Centers (CEUs) in the city of São Paulo, which, installed in the most peripheral and needy areas of the city, carry out a great transformation in the communities. both within the schools and in their surroundings.

Another example to be considered is the Schools of Learning, developed in Spain and studied and applied in Brazil. They promote, through new methodological approaches, the breaking down of barriers between school, teachers, principals, students and the community. An example of this application in Brazil is the impressive transformation, both theoretical and practical, promoted by professor and manager Braz R. Nogueira at EMEF Pres. Campo Salles, in the community of Heliópolis, in São Paulo. With the valorization of popular actions and local social movements, it resignified the role of the school and the educational objectives in a slum area.

The examples cited here, as well as so many others, support the thesis of the need for democratization of education in order to achieve the desired success: an education that enables the human being to participate effectively in his own constitution as a social agent and in the society in which he lives, endorsing an important concept of the Historical-Cultural Theory. that of the "social situation of development" (BOZHOVICH, 1981).



## STUDENT MOBILIZATION CREATING POSSIBILITIES FOR EMANCIPATION

The student classes have always played an important role in political and economic transformations around the world, from the Student Revolution of 1968 to the Arab Spring in 2011, they have been the protagonists of important conflicts and struggles for civil rights.

In Brazil, before, during and after the military dictatorship, young students have always been at the center of debates and actions. There are many historical episodes that have recorded the mobilization of this category. Much of the democratization experienced in the country in recent decades is due to the struggles waged by them.

However, many claim that in recent decades there has been a distancing of them in relation to political issues in the country. Whether due to frustration with the corruption installed at the various levels of power, or due to the fossilization of the forms of organization and action of politicians and parties, the fact is that there is widespread discontent with this segment of public life.

As the social scientist Marco Aurélio Nogueira analyzes: "They are less politicized in the sense that they are dedicated to entering the political system as it is there, with political parties, candidacies."<sup>2</sup> Such a group does not seem to find representativeness in the current entities of classes and acronyms.

However, contrary to the maxim of non-political involvement, they seek other mechanisms of action and transformation of society. They use new digital resources and the virtual communication of social networks and applications to establish action strategies. With so many modern communication tools available on the market, they reorganize their forms of struggle. In the words of Carina Vitral, who was in charge of the presidency of the National Union of Students (UNE), "[...] Politics is an instrument for the transformation of society and every occupation knows what politics is. Every movement knows that it is a political movement. They deny the political class, but not politics as a way of transforming society."<sup>3</sup> Because of this disengagement from parties and politicians in general, they redraw the paths of the student struggle in the search for transformations, for whatever reasons.

With this new attitude, detached from the process of formal education and outside the planned pedagogical expedient, there seems to be a resignification of educational practice, often plastered in the old known forms. Subverting the established norm, these young people who took to the streets for a reduction in bus fares, for the cancellation of authoritarian government measures to close schools or for the end of corruption in the country, showed signs of political maturity and possible emancipation. As stated by Adorno (1995, p. 182), "[...] The only effective realization of

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<sup>2</sup>Available:[https://noticias.uol.com.br/Novo%20protagonismo%20estudantil%20\\_%20UOL%20Educa%C3%A7%C3%A3o.html](https://noticias.uol.com.br/Novo%20protagonismo%20estudantil%20_%20UOL%20Educa%C3%A7%C3%A3o.html)

<sup>3</sup>Available:[https://noticias.uol.com.br/Novo%20protagonismo%20estudantil%20\\_%20UOL%20Educa%C3%A7%C3%A3o.html](https://noticias.uol.com.br/Novo%20protagonismo%20estudantil%20_%20UOL%20Educa%C3%A7%C3%A3o.html)





emancipation is that those few people interested in this direction direct all their energy to making education an education in contradiction and resistance."

These mobilizations are manifestations of the need for political positioning on the part of the student class, since democracy, contrary to what has been imagined, is not a permanent condition of a country, but a daily conquest. In many cases, and in the opinion of several analysts, Brazil is still rehearsing its democracy. "[...] In a truly democratic country, it is necessary to have institutions in society that are solid, and Brazil does not have this, or has this very embryonically." (FAUSTO, B. 2018)<sup>4</sup>

Thus, as Adorno warned, conformation generates an adaptation of the human, leading to its domestication (PUCCI, B; ZUIN, A. A.S.; LASTÓRIA, L. C. N., 2010). And, in a society where democracy is still so incipient, there is a permanent risk of collective control through the mechanisms strongly established by the culture industry (HORKEHEIMER, M. ADORNO, T. W., 1985), establishing semi-formation, making it impossible for subjects to achieve autonomy.

Thus, it remains for the resistance, be it from students or any other organized social segment, to devise new and necessary ways to minimize or eliminate this control.

If Brazilian education and its institutions, despite having recently been democratized to a certain extent, are still co-opted by the mechanisms of control, or by the sedimentation of ideas, perhaps the necessary strength to transform this situation lies in the youthful indignation.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

As much as Brazil has registered a clear movement towards the democratization of institutions as a whole, old power structures are still active. There are many cases that show the incipient and often intermittent Brazilian democracy. In this sense, nothing is ready. There is always a lot to transform in social organization. Public policies, in general, tend to ignore the wishes of the population. They are based on isolated decisions of a questionable nature and do not meet social demands. Often they only reproduce the prevailing interests or, in an even more perverse way, create the false sense of meeting the needs of the various social groups. As Mészáros (2008, p. 35) points out:

Institutionalized education, especially in the last 150 years, has served – as a whole – the purpose of not only providing the knowledge and personnel necessary for the expanding productive machine of the capital system, but also generating and transmitting a framework of values that legitimizes and dominant interests, as if there could be no alternative to the management of society. either in the "internalized" form (i.e., by the properly "educated" and accepted individuals) or through a hierarchically and ruthlessly imposed structural domination and subordination.

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<sup>4</sup> Available in <https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2018/01/27/impeachment-de-dilma-abriu-caixa-de-males-do-pais-diz-boris-fausto.htm?cmpid=copiaecola>





However, contrary to existing norms and opinions, young people have shown the strength to resist and transform the world as it has been presented to them. In a surprising way in the country, they present new and modern weapons for old battles, achieving very expressive results, such as confronting the measures proposed by the former governor of the State of São Paulo, Geraldo Alckmin, which were withdrawn after a few weeks by the governor himself, after the success and permanence of the school occupations. Or even, public transport fares were rediscussed in several municipalities, with reductions in several of them.

At the national political level, discussions on corruption in public management have gained strength. In this particular case, the power of the media and the impressive strength of the culture industry and its efficient means of mass communication played a preponderant role in the formation and, above all, in the deformation of opinions. Even so, the fact that the political discussion has conquered the streets and is able to echo among everyone, including young people, is an important element of analysis.

Another relevant fact that can be extracted from this context is the diversified character of these current mobilizations. Unlike the years when the enemy had a certain address, today there are many causes. The change in the profile of young students in the country also explains this diversification. Today's students are from diverse social backgrounds, as the quota policy has democratized university admission. In this way, the claims are also broad and of different natures, corroborating what Arthur Poerner, author of the book "O Poder Jovem" (Young Power), at the time a law student and reporter for the daily newspaper "Correio da Manhã", states. "When you put low-income students inside the university, you generate a demand that students in the 1960s didn't have, which is student assistance. The flag, permanence grant, housing, today all of this is vital", exemplifies the UNE leader. "The agendas are diversifying a lot."<sup>5</sup>

In the struggle for the most diverse causes, young people perform the important task of resisting anti-democratic forms of government and policies that ignore the capacity for analysis and critical positioning of citizens, underestimating their potential for political mobilization and emancipation.

Society has been transformed and it is necessary to understand its new and complex forms of organization and action. They have also changed their demands. You have to be aware of them! "High school students are an example that today there is more awareness of the need for good teaching, good structure, good teachers and that this should be demanded because it is their right," says the executive president of the Todos pela Educação movement, Priscila Cruz.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Available:[https://noticias.uol.com.br/Novo%20protagonismo%20estudantil%20\\_%20UOL%20Educa%C3%A7%C3%A3o.html](https://noticias.uol.com.br/Novo%20protagonismo%20estudantil%20_%20UOL%20Educa%C3%A7%C3%A3o.html)

<sup>6</sup>Available:[https://noticias.uol.com.br/Novo%20protagonismo%20estudantil%20\\_%20UOL%20Educa%C3%A7%C3%A3o.html](https://noticias.uol.com.br/Novo%20protagonismo%20estudantil%20_%20UOL%20Educa%C3%A7%C3%A3o.html)



However, while the occupations and mobilizations took place and the conquests became effective, new social arrangements were being established. The Brazilian political, economic and, above all, educational scenario has gained new and complex elements since the 2018 presidential elections and the rise of new policies for these sectors, demanding new positions and confrontations, thus evidencing the dialectic and continuous social construction of the best living conditions for citizens.



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