

# THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FREIREAN PRAXIS

## OS OBJETIVOS DE DESENVOLVIMENTO SUSTENTÁVEL NA PERSPECTIVA DA PRÁXIS FREIREANA

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### ABSTRACT

The UN launched the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in 2015. Therefore, thinking about strategies that improve people's lives in the face of polarized relations with the planet will be essential. It is also reinforced that it is important to disseminate the SDGs in teaching environments, in which both schools and educators are prepared to propose truly transformative education. In this sense, through this theoretical study we aim to discuss the importance of, during the study of the SDGs, teachers using, essentially, a critical, awareness-raising and dialogical pedagogical praxis with students. Thus, as a proposal for transformative education, from Paulo Freire's perspective, the concepts of criticality, consciousness and dialogicity were analyzed for discussions involving the SDGs in school environments. Knowing that educators must dialogue with students, the concepts brought by Freire suggest that it is the best strategy to propose the SDGs and Education for Sustainability in teaching environments.

**Keywords:** Teachers Training. Pedagogical Praxis. Education for Sustainability. Sustainable Development Goals.

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## RESUMO

A ONU lançou os Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável (ODS) em 2015. Por isso, pensar em estratégias que melhorem a vida das pessoas diante das relações polarizadas com o planeta será essencial. Reforça-se, também, ser importante disseminar os ODS em ambientes de ensino, nos quais, tanto escolas, quanto educadores estejam preparados para propor uma educação verdadeiramente transformadora. Nesse viés, por meio deste estudo teórico objetivamos discutir a importância de que, durante o estudo dos ODS, os professores utilizem, essencialmente, uma práxis pedagógica crítica, conscientizadora e dialógica com os educandos. Assim, como proposta de educação transformadora, na perspectiva de Paulo Freire, foram analisados os conceitos de criticidade, consciência e dialogicidade para as discussões que envolvem os ODS nos ambientes escolares. Sabendo que os educadores devem dialogar com os alunos, os conceitos trazidos por Freire sugerem ser a melhor estratégia para propor os ODS e a Educação para a Sustentabilidade nos ambientes de ensino.

**Palavras-chave:** Formação de Professores. Práxis Pedagógica. Educação para a Sustentabilidade. Metas de desenvolvimento sustentável.

## INTRODUCTION

The 20th and 21st centuries have been marked by dichotomous<sup>4</sup> thinking that involved, on one hand, producing to satisfy an insatiable consumption model, and the need to think about the sustainable use of the planet, on the other. In such context, thinking about a way out that is feasible for everyone is necessary and, above all, urgent. Moving in that direction, Sachs (2011)<sup>5</sup> proposes giving future generations a chance by presenting an idea that discloses the possibility for sustainability.

So, in order to propose a discussion that would point to the planet's great problems, the UN launched in 2015 the 2030 agenda which outlines 169 goals within 17 objectives, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), that aimed to improve relations between the individuals and of those with the world. Despite the fact that UN

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout Psychology's history, numerous individuals have taken for themselves, as immovable, some positions located in one or another of the extreme poles of the main dichotomies usually enunciated and discussed in this trajectory, exemplified by the dyads innatism-environmentalism, monism-dualism, structuralism-functionalism, determinism-indeterminism, objectivism-subjectivism and internalism-externalism (CARRARA, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> "Sustainability, seen as a balanced economic, social, political, cultural and environmental model capable of meeting the needs of current generations without removing the possibility of future generations also meeting their needs" (SACHS, 2011).

member countries act in a set of common actions, each country has been using, in its own way, different strategies to try achieving these goals and everything leads to believe that education will be the most effective way in promoting the SDGs between people.

Therefore, bringing critical dialogical thinking in the light of sustainability, to be discussed in educational settings, will be of great opportunity to be able to consider with regards to Freire's thoughts and, in this context, education should be treated as an essential force for promoting the SDGs. In this perspective, the concept of sustainability<sup>6</sup> here will be treated as something broader, not being restricted only to the terminologies specific to Environmental Education (EE), since the very documents that guide this theme and proposed by Unesco show the importance of adding the essential values to sustainable development in all aspects that involve teaching and learning possibilities 'with the purpose of promoting behavioral changes that allow the creation of a sustainable and fairer society for all' (UNESCO, 2005, p. 17).

From Paulo Freire's dialogical pedagogical critical praxis point of view, taking the implementation of SDGs<sup>7</sup> proposal to a classroom at different levels of teaching will directly assist in understanding and consolidating a practice that, due to its dialogicity foundation, will avoid the use of the banking model of education<sup>8</sup>. In this regard, it is not difficult to find common points presented by Freire (1987), when discussing his idea of Freirean praxis, with the documents indicated by Unesco (2017)

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<sup>6</sup> Unesco's national implementation plan final document (UNESCO, 2005, p. 36-a) states that Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 emphasizes that education is essential to promote sustainable development and improve people's ability to understand the problems of environment and development. Since then, sustainable development has become a common concern at all United Nations conferences and there has been a consensus that education is the driving force for the necessary change to take place.

<sup>7</sup> At the United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development, September 25-27, 2015, government and state leaders from 193 countries adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which contains a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs were built from the results of Rio+20 and it takes into account the legacy of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), eight goals to combat poverty that the world has committed to achieving by 2015 (UN, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> The narration, that the educator is the individual, leads the students to the mechanical memorization of the content. Furthermore, the narration transforms them into "bowls", into containers to be "filled" by the educator. The more you "fill" the containers with your "residues", the better the educator will be. The more they let themselves be gently "filled", the better the students will be. [...] Instead of communicating, the educator makes "announcements" and insertions that the students, mere recipients, patiently receive, memorize and repeat. [...] 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 based on one of the instrumental manifestations of the ideology of oppression (FREIRE, 1987, p. 58).

concerning Education for Sustainable Development (EDS). Therefore, this paper aims to discuss the importance of, during the study of the SDGs, teachers use essentially a critical pedagogical, awareness-raising and dialogical praxis with students.

## **THE UN PROPOSAL FOR THE SDG**

Both, the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, have been marked by joint actions, proposed by the UN, which reflected the concern with the planet's environmental issues. In Brazil, the CNUMAD-92 or Rio/92 Conference took place, a major event that established Environmental Education as a continuing training need in educational institutions, from the early years, through basic education to higher education (UN BRAZIL, 2018).

At this conference, Agenda 21, the Environmental Education Treaty for Sustainable Societies was created and various civil society commitments to Environmental Education and the Environment were signed. In Brazil, the Ministry of Education points out that training in this area will be necessary (BRAZIL, 1995). Later, in September 2000, some 200 world leaders gathered at the United Nations headquarters in New York to approve the Millennium Declaration that became known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (UN, 2018).

On the same direction, in 2002, a few months after the end of Rio+10, resolution 57/254 (UN, 2002) was approved at the UN general assembly. With such resolution, education came to be considered an essential tool for the promotion of Education for Sustainable Development (EDS), in addition, the period from 2005 to 2014 became the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) (UNESCO, 2005), whose function was to provide essential values, attitudes, capacities and behaviours, committed to an environmental approach that could interrelate social, ecological, economic, political, cultural, scientific, technological and ethical aspects.

However, criticized by many for the possible failures of the Millennium Declaration, the UN recognizes that progress has been made, but that it needed to outline new goals and partnerships for the coming years, and based on the 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the organization launched in 2015 the 2030

agenda with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which, in turn, are seen as an opportunity to promote global action to care for people as well as the planet.

The launch of the 17 SDGs (figure 1) with its 169 goals and 232 global indicators for Sustainable Development may have been a historically significant moment in the attempt to promote a better world for all. That is why the SDGs will need to be disseminated around the world and seen as goals to be achieved by 2030 by all member countries.

**Figure 1:** The 17 global objectives proposed by the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations (UN) for Sustainable Development



**Source:** UN, 2015.

Thus, the SDGs are shaped as an agenda that aims, in general, to end extreme poverty and hunger in the world, to protect the planet from degradation by expanding the necessary actions to achieve sustainable production and consumption, in a way to ensure that climate change remains at acceptable levels, to certify that everyone has the right to economic and technological progress, in addition to being able to live in a peaceful, egalitarian and inclusive society.

Therefore, given the premise approved by the UN, which considers education and teaching environments as effective instruments for access to EDS, as well as the SDGs, it will be the right of students, in addition to learning content directly related to

the common subjects of the curriculum base, to be able to participate in debates, reflections and actions aimed at promoting essential values, attitudes, capacities and conduct, committed to a global environmental approach that interrelates aspects which lead to social equality, respect for natural environments, access to growth and economic development, political, cultural, scientific, technological and ethical.

### **DIALOGUING WITH THE SDGs: ACTION, REFLECTION, ACTION**

Therefore, in view of the need for an expanded reflection of the world's problems, allowing for the opportunity to solve them, it is worth making it clear that the teaching model that is desired for the implementation of actions involving the SDGs cannot be the one still commonly perceived in Brazilian educational institutions, because schools that value excessive scientific qualification, in a banking concept of teaching, funded on overrating repetition and memorization, will not be able to offer the needed tools in the search for a transformative education in its essence. For Paulo Freire, the concept of teaching "is not to transfer knowledge, but to create the possibilities for your own production or construction" (FREIRE, 2010, p. 47). Therefore, it is needed a learning environment that secures much more than information transfer, that is, it will be necessary a school that is prepared to support a training practice that makes one see itself inserted in the problems presented by the SDGs.

Thus, in view of the challenges that educational institutions may face to implement the SDG, it largely depends on its success, the commitment of the most different scopes that are part of this process. In the educational field, to form a person aware of sustainable development, this commitment must be focused on the act of teaching and learning, that is, on the pedagogical practice between ones attitude and reflection, therefore, in a critical pedagogical praxis. For Gadotti (1995) to develop a pedagogical thinking based on praxis is to enable a relationship between humanization and education and, for that, it will be necessary to have a pedagogical action, a direct attention on the people involved in such practice.

In such perspective of understanding this Freire's pedagogical action, when discussing the way in which the concepts of humanity and education are presented by

Paulo Freire, Patrocínio (2010) shows that for Freire there is something peculiar about the human being: 'Education, for Freire, in turn, it is linked to the concepts of conscience and awareness, criticality, practice of freedom, dialogicity, politicity and cognoscibility', which are part of the main and founding axis of Freirean theory. In this case, it is proposed to go a little deeper into our discussions on the concepts of awareness, criticality and dialogicity, as possibilities of instrumentalizing a pedagogical praxis that can enable our dialogues with the proposal to implement the SDGs in the teaching environments.

With this thought in mind, the idea of awareness brought by Freire is the possibility of being able to identify, in the different spaces that gathers collectivity, the points of contradictions, which should be known through one's self-awareness for everyday issues: 'Why not take advantage of the experience that students have of living in areas of the city neglected by the government to discuss, for example, the pollution of streams and brooks and the low levels of well-being of the populations [...]' (FREIRE, 2010, p. 30). For Freire, this search for the awareness of the student, a situation desired by the educator, is a type of thought that, in recent years, has been increasingly common in schools within the process of teaching and learning, and it comes from the search for an environment of learning that can demonstrate its true social function. In this sense, the awareness, here announced, would be as if it were a test for reality.

In addition, one cannot think of an awareness process that manifests itself in the individual, separately from his critical state that seeks the true intentional and transforming action of pedagogical praxis. Therefore, by bringing the term "criticality" into focus, we want to make it clear that this act of critical reflection, which is based on Freire's critical pedagogy, is part of the premise that this training should lead to the development of citizens who are capable to analyze its social, historical and cultural realities, creating possibilities to transform it, leading students and educators towards greater autonomy and emancipation to better social living.

Finally, by declaring the need for the existence of critical thinking that guides the individual to the conscious formation of action-reflection-action praxis, it will also be the time to bring Freirean dialogicity into the picture, which, in turn, will involve the participation of the student in the educational process as a historical dialogical subject

of knowledge (FREIRE, 1987). Therefore, in this Freirean perspective, the teaching of the SDGs should take place with the students and not for them, that is, this practice should be carried out in dialogue between the parts. Freire, in his book “Extension and Communication?” (2002) reinforces the idea of teaching with even in non-formal teaching spaces, as is the case with the practice of rural extension.

Freire criticizes the extension practice not open to dialogue, characterized by a cultural invasion that represses the expressions experienced by local residents. In contrast to extension, Freire brings up the term “extensionist educator”, which proposes communication as a dialogical basis for exchanging experiences. Along the same lines, given what has been previously stated, from the theoretical-founding production of Freirean ideas, we were able to follow, even if briefly, the presentation of the concepts of criticality, awareness and dialogicity that lead the subject, from the conception of an unfinished being, its ability to recognize itself in this world, in the face of the challenges of living in sustainability.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In the search for a broader education that enables one to solve the problems of the contemporary world, some sectors of society have been standing out in an attempt to promote a more just and autonomous society. In this regard, when thinking about legitimizing a world governed by social justice for all, the UN proposed the SDGs and their goals as an agenda to be met by 2030. In Brazil, in turn, government policies, at the state and municipal levels, should begin to be idealized and implemented as a participatory management proposal for the SDGs. Validating them as a goal to be fulfilled as an intentional and founding pedagogical act of teaching praxis is, above all, taking a brave action for oneself, at the same time that it is recognized that life on the planet has been suffering with the dichotomous thoughts that polarizes and stiffens transformation acts.

On the other hand, we cannot rule out that there are criticisms focusing on the SDGs and also on UN own actions, in addition, many believe that the fulfillment of the 17 objectives and 169 goals is still a matter far from being achieved by 2030. From this



point of view, positioning oneself in a polarized way and contrary to these criticisms is, in reality, walking opposite to the SDGs own precepts, which advocate a more socially just planet, where everyone has the right to a voice.

The possibility of analysing the essential points presented by Freire's praxis, present in the ideas of a truly world-changing education brought by Paulo Freire, seems to flow naturally through the documents proposed by Unesco regarding Education for Sustainable Development (EDS), since they also bring in their essence an indication for the development of critical thinking, the encouragement of the participatory process in decision making, in addition to relating education with local life actions.

Thus, when we idealize a connection between the SDGs and Paulo Freire's concepts of criticality, awareness and dialogicity, we also propose to show that there is true dialogue between them, one that leads to the liberating practices of a truly transformative education, that is, which humanizes the human being, who now manages to evoke the most existing being within himself. In this line of thought, as views on the SDGs are deepened, it is realized that their objectives point out in three branches: SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11 and 16 are related to problems directly linked to society; SDGs 8, 9, 10 and 12, on the other hand, bring the economic problem to different scenarios in the world, finally, SDGs 6, 13, 14 and 15 guide the objectives leading to biosphere issues. Therefore, from SDGs' point of view, it will be essential that students have doubts that relate, to a certain extent, the content that has been studied at school to their daily lives. As for the educator, it will be up to them their restlessness search in the students' daily lives, through reports of experiences that points to themes that retrieves their anxieties, desires and needs, which, in turn, are linked to their syllabus.

Therefore, dealing with different social problems, seeking equality of values and powers for all, in which one can see themselves included in a socioenvironmental context, whether local or even global, put the concepts such as criticality, awareness and dialogicity, present and necessary in the documents governing the SDGs. Furthermore, bringing these Freirean concepts to the debate reinforces the need to always stay in communication, the kind that directs us to an action-reflection-action.

Finally, it should be the role of educational institutions to address the SDGs the individuals involved in their fullness, so that their actions are truly transformative, placing both educators and students on an equal level, each with their authentic knowledge. Hence, giving the chance for an educated dialogue for the students is, above all, to get closer to the possibilities of living a fairer world, with a peaceful and sustainable culture.

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