

# Education and Human Formation in Neoliberal Society: the “learning to learn” slogan in the light of Historical-Critical Pedagogy<sup>1</sup>

Educação e Formação Humana na Sociedade Neoliberal:  
o lema “aprender a aprender” à luz da Pedagogia Histórico-Crítica

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## ABSTRACT

This article analyzes human formation in neoliberal society, problematizing the slogan “learning to learn” as an ideological expression of education oriented toward adapting individuals to market demands. Grounded in the Historical-Critical Pedagogy and in authors such as Saviani, Duarte, Agnes Heller, and Leontiev, the study is based on bibliographic and documentary research to understand how neoliberal rationality redefines the purposes of education, shifting the focus from objective knowledge to the development of competencies and skills functional to capital. Drawing on Heller’s categories of everydayness (generic objectifications in themselves) and non-everydayness (generic objectifications for themselves), it discusses the tension between omnilateral formation and the utilitarian logic that permeates contemporary educational policies. It is argued that the slogan “learning to learn” reflects the internalization of entrepreneurial rationality within the educational field, transforming learning into an individual and permanent imperative — *Life Long Learning* — guided by self-responsibility and competitiveness. In contrast, the paper advocates a perspective of formation linked to the socialization of scientific knowledge and to the mediation of

## RESUMO

O artigo analisa a formação humana na sociedade neoliberal, problematizando o “lema aprender a aprender” como expressão ideológica da educação voltada à adaptação do indivíduo às exigências do mercado. Fundamentado na Pedagogia Histórico-Crítica e em autores como Saviani, Duarte, Agnes Heller e Leontiev, o estudo se apoia em pesquisa bibliográfica e documental para compreender como a racionalidade neoliberal redefine as finalidades da educação, deslocando o foco do conhecimento objetivo para o desenvolvimento de competências e habilidades funcionalizadas ao capital. A partir das categorias de cotidianidade (objetivações genéricas em si) e não cotidianidade (objetivações genéricas para si) propostas por Heller, discute-se a tensão entre a formação omnilateral e a lógica utilitarista que permeia as políticas educacionais contemporâneas. Argumenta-se que o “lema aprender a aprender” traduz a internalização da racionalidade empresarial no campo educativo, transformando o aprender em um imperativo individual e permanente — o *Life Long Learning* — orientado pela autorresponsabilização e pela competitividade. Em contraposição, defende-se uma perspectiva de formação vinculada à socialização do conhecimento científico e à mediação da prática social, condição

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social practice, essential conditions for the development of higher psychological functions and critical consciousness. It concludes that overcoming the neoliberal logic in education requires a pedagogical project committed to human emancipation and to the transformation of material conditions of existence.

**Keywords:** Neoliberalism. Education. Human formation. Historical-Critical Pedagogy. "Learning to learn" slogan.

essencial para o desenvolvimento das funções psicológicas superiores e da consciência crítica. Conclui-se que a superação da lógica neoliberal na educação requer um projeto pedagógico comprometido com a emancipação humana e com a transformação das condições materiais de existência.

**Palavras-chave:** Neoliberalismo. Educação. Formação humana. Pedagogia Histórico-Crítica. Lema "aprender a aprender".

## 1 Initial Considerations

For society to be happy and the people peaceful in the most adverse circumstances, it is necessary that most of them be ignorant and poor. Knowledge not only expands but multiplies our desires [...]. Therefore, the well-being and happiness of every state or kingdom requires that the knowledge of poor workers be confined within the limits of their occupations and never extend (in relation to visible things) beyond what relates to their mission. The more a shepherd, a plowman, or any other peasant knows about the world and about what is foreign to his work and employment, the less able he will be to bear the hardships of his life with joy and contentment (Mandeville, 2017, s.p.).

The excerpt from *The Fable of the Bees* (Mandeville, 2017) illuminates the conditions imposed on the working class: restricting access to knowledge to ensure order. This logic reappears in the present under neoliberal rationality, which promises "economic freedom" while subordinating social life to the dictates of the market. Lafargue (2000) critically notes that the love of work, converted into a cult of productivity, results in the renunciation of time and life—a form of social senselessness. Today, the new demands of socioeconomic development benefit the market more than human formation.

In this context, the idea of "learning to learn" is more prevalent than ever in individual education. Individuals are led to believe that technology provides unlimited knowledge at their fingertips, giving them the freedom to express themselves and learn whatever they want. However, this freedom is limited to what is offered for free because complete access to knowledge generally implies

payment with neoliberal advances. Despite this apparent "freedom," individuals find themselves increasingly trapped in ignorance and under the control of those in power. This can be seen in the Hate Office, which is composed of communication advisors from the Bolsonaro clan who spread fake news.

Technological advances have provided new forms of freedom, but it's important to recognize that this liberation is largely restricted to those who can access and enjoy these technologies. As Antunes (2018) points out, digital work, which is often touted as being autonomous and flexible, relies on an invisible chain of production and disposal and reconfigures exploitation through new technological mediations. Digital work is evident and desired today, especially due to the ease of using a smartphone. However, the essence of digital work has its roots in the hard labor of miners, from extracting minerals to processing them. Only then do the minerals reach the hands of users. Consequently, the working individual, often oppressed and without access to technological education, becomes lost amid various technologies and stuck in low-paying jobs, desiring to own the latest technologies. Their spare time is consumed by the alienation of "knowing how to live" imposed by the system. They are trapped by a screen that controls their movements and desires for consumption, both material and immaterial. Thus, while controlling the desires and movements of workers, the system also redefines forms of work, promising freedom while imposing new chains.

In this context, capitalism has introduced a new occupation that promises happiness: online and digital work. This work is falsely presented to the working class as "self-employment" and "work when I want," but it is, in reality, a new form of slavery—the "digital slave" (Antunes, 2018). As Bernard Mandeville (2017, s.p.) describes, "The welfare and happiness of every state or kingdom require that the knowledge of poor workers be confined within the limits of their occupations and never extend in relation to visible things."

This reality prevents individuals from finding time to "learn about the world and things unrelated to work and employment," as Mandeville (2017, n.p.) states. In this context, educational reforms aim to instill established

knowledge, focusing on forming psychoneurological structures that allow for minimal affective-cognitive development. This minimum is associated with teaching useful, practical content geared toward market demands. This content develops skills and abilities that do not allow individuals to see, understand, and transform reality beyond appearances. Rather, it allows them to reproduce reality to always be prepared to "learn to learn" according to the demands of the capitalist system (Duarte, 2013).

In contrast to this utilitarian view of education, some argue that teaching school content should provide essential tools for increasingly complex thinking. This approach places learning at the service of the integral development of the human being — that is, omnilateral formation — and not just capital. Thus, individuals can engage in various activities throughout their lives. However, considering the formation of the psyche in motion, certain activities facilitate greater progress in interpreting reality and take precedence over other activities.

Based on Agnes Heller's (2008) theory of everyday life, Duarte (2013) and Rossler (2006) studied the process of human formation. They understood school education as a struggle against alienation. This struggle involves overcoming purely everyday and fetishistic forms of consciousness and socializing higher knowledge by criticizing ideologies that distort reality.

Understanding the categories of the everyday sphere ("generic objectifications in themselves") and the non-everyday sphere ("generic objectifications for themselves") supports the hypothesis that methodological trends associated with "learning to learn" contribute to the development of individuals who perpetuate neoliberal concepts in society as a means of economic development (Spring, 2019).

The neoliberal rationality that structures contemporary society manifests itself in this movement of intensified control and alienation through the logic of digital work and new technologies. This mode of social and political organization subjects all dimensions of human life to market logic, transforming rights into opportunities and citizens into entrepreneurs of

themselves (Dardot & Laval, 2016).

Thus, "neoliberal education" can be understood as a set of policies, discourses, and practices that guide human development primarily in response to the demands of capital. This converts the educational process into a mechanism that produces market-adjusted skills and subjectivities.

In this context, the article examines the process of human development in a neoliberal society and questions the logic of "learning to learn" that pervades education. While Duarte (2011) has provided a thorough critique of the neoliberal appropriation of Vygotsky's work, this study aims to expand the conversation by linking the "motto of learning to learn" to Agnes Heller's concepts of everydayness and non-everydayness. This analysis demonstrates how these concepts contribute to our understanding of human development under neoliberal logic and its implications for educational practices.

To this end, the study adopts a methodological approach based on bibliographic and documentary research grounded in historical and dialectical materialism (Martins & Lavoura, 2018). The analysis is based on Historical-Critical Pedagogy, as outlined by Saviani (2008, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2019, 2020), Duarte (1999), Marsiglia, Martins, and Lavoura (2019), and Lavoura and Marsiglia (2015). It also draws on the concepts of "everydayness" and "non-everydayness" from Heller (1994a, 1994b, 2008) and Duarte (2013) to explore the implications of neoliberal methodological trends. These trends include the "motto of learning to learn" from Duarte (2011), Rossler (2009), Laval (2019), and Dardot and Laval (2016).

The article is structured into sections that address the influence of neoliberalism on education and human formation from the perspective of historical-critical pedagogy, criticisms of the "motto of learning to learn," and a proposal for emancipatory human formation. This reflection aims to contribute to the debate on education in neoliberal times and to the development of a human formation that fosters emancipation and social transformation, particularly among the working class. Furthermore, given the complexity of the issue and the need for successive approaches to the subject of discussion, the analysis developed does not

intend to provide a definitive answer to the problem in question.

## **2 The “learn to learn” motto as an influence of neoliberalism on education**

As an economic and political model, neoliberalism has had a decisive influence on education, shaping its purposes, content, and practices (Facci, 2004; Libâneo, 2022). One of the most evident expressions of this influence is the "motto of learning to learn" (Duarte, 2011), which plays a central role in labor market-oriented training. Since the 1980s, this discourse has been incorporated into educational texts and policies, constituting the ideological axis of neoliberal education. It shifts the focus from teaching and the objectivity of knowledge to the individual's self-responsibility for their learning and performance. This concept embodies the adoption of business principles in education, redefining learning as a process of continuous adaptation and productivity (Laval, 2019).

In this context, school is considered a training ground for the workforce, where students must acquire specific skills and abilities (Santos, 2012). The school curriculum is shaped to meet these demands, emphasizing subjects and content considered "useful" for the workplace. Consequently, comprehensive education, including the development of critical thinking, creativity, and autonomous knowledge, takes a backseat.

Furthermore, the "learn to learn" motto perpetuates the notion that individuals are solely responsible for their learning and professional success. However, this individualistic logic disregards the social and economic inequalities that affect access to and retention in school, as well as students' learning conditions. It transfers responsibility for education from the state to the individual, exempting the system from its obligations and perpetuating inequalities (Santos, 2012).

Currently, pedagogical approaches based on the "learning to learn" motto include competencies, reflective teaching, the flipped classroom, active learning, and multiculturalism. These pedagogical approaches, which are based on constructivist principles and the New School's methods, have become hegemonic, as analyzed by Duarte (2011).

The concepts of the New School and constructivism are currently determined and interpreted by new demands institutionalized by international organizations. These organizations seek to appropriate the concepts for education, aiming to determine the production and reproduction of the capitalist system in its current form. They do so according to the dictates of neoliberal concepts and the formation of flexible, entrepreneurial individuals who are always willing to "learn to learn" (Pires, 2022). These individuals are constituted through competencies and skills in minimal doses. This aims to instruct individuals to perform tasks that contribute to the growth of capital (Saviani, 2011).

Thus, based on Duarte (1999), it is understood that the problem is not the distance between the student's daily life and school knowledge, but rather in the distance between these types of knowledge, that is, the relationship between everyday life and academic knowledge, the overvaluation of method in some cases, to the extent that basic scientific knowledge essential for understanding reality and, above all, for the development of the human psyche, which is nothing more than the subjective reflection or mental representation of objective reality, is left aside.

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In this case, the methodological forms determined by the "learn to learn" motto are identified as enabling the development of a mental representation of reality based solely on its appearance. In other words, it is a "superficial characteristic that is fixed or crystallized unilaterally, obscuring the profound nature and determination of the phenomena themselves" (Markus, 2015, p. 71). Reality as a concrete totality (Kosik, 1976) is thus understood to be a lengthy



process of historical and social knowledge development through theoretical abstraction. In other words, it requires humans to relate to their environment more and more and to use increasingly abstract forms to understand it.

It is not intended to assert that immediate forms of reality are not a means of relating and developing. The most immediate manifestations of reality, reality as appearance, allow a preliminary interpretation of reality and often create conditions that enable the subject to situate themselves satisfactorily within it. This leads the subject to understand and determine the capture of reality, which is rich in that it encompasses a multiplicity of aspects. However, this multiplicity does not reveal the essence of these aspects, thereby revealing its limits.

Due to these aspects and considering the neoliberal ideas that are attempting to take hold in various economic sectors, we often see the relationship of the subject supported by a reality that is based on the appropriation of ways of interpreting reality according to the explanatory framework of pragmatic-utilitarian thinking about market demands.

To better understand this relationship between teaching and learning as evidenced in the student's daily life, Duarte (1999; 2013) provides concepts that support the justification that methodological trends linked to the “motto of learning to learn” contribute to the development of neoliberal concepts. An alienated education that is subject to “generic objectifications in themselves,” namely, a flexible, pragmatic, and utilitarian education that is reflected in school curricula, which prioritize the development of technical skills and abilities over scientific and cultural knowledge.

### **3 The generic objectifications of everyday and non-everyday life in social practice**

According to Duarte (2013), human formation depends on the relationship between everyday life and non-everyday social practices. According to the historical-social theory of individual formation, these spheres shape human development. Based on Leontiev (2004), Duarte (1999) understands the formation of the subject—not as a biological individual but as a socially constituted personality—as an educational process of appropriating and objectifying historical



and social experience. In other words, the appropriation of human culture—both material and immaterial—produced and accumulated throughout history enables the elevation of the human psyche, which is structured by the social and historical activity of subjects.

Human culture itself is constituted through the vital activity of work, which mediates between humans and nature. This distinguishes humans from other species. This vital activity ensures the life of all animal species and, in the case of human beings, the existence of culture. It allows a member of a species to reproduce as an individual and consequently reproduce their species (Galvão, Lavoura, & Martins, 2019).

This process extends to social development because the vital activity of work depends on social relations. It does not presuppose an isolated subject but rather "a subject who is inserted into a certain set of social relations of production that no longer obeys pure biological, organic, and natural determinism" (Galvão, Lavoura, & Martins, 2019, p. 47). This allows for the constitution of the real historical subject (Kosik, 1976).

Through work, human activity generates material and immaterial objects that transform human beings themselves, affecting their physicality and psyche. These transformations range from sensations and perceptions to the most complex thoughts and feelings. These characteristics are shaped by human experience and determined by activities that unfold in everyday and non-everyday spheres of life.

These spheres—everyday and non-everyday life—constitute a dialectical unity. The former provides the material basis of existence, while the latter expresses the conscious elevation of human beings to the level of the generic. This is an intentional relationship with human history and the universal objectifications of work, science, and art.

Everyday activities focus on reproducing the individual and indirectly contribute to reproducing society. Duarte (2013), based on Heller (1994a), conceptualizes these activities as "generic objectifications in themselves." These objectifications are related to the appropriation of the basics for development and

the subject's relationship with the environment. Examples include the use of objects and the understanding of language and customs—elements that define a person as human.

According to Agnes Heller (1994a), human beings begin to effectively humanize themselves when they appropriate the sphere of "objectifications in themselves" through their activities. This is the starting point of all human culture and the foundation of every sphere of objectification, which is particularly important in everyday life. In their daily lives, each person must appropriate these generic objectifications as a necessary foundation for growth and becoming a human being. Through the appropriation of these basic daily relationships, the individual indirectly contributes to the reproduction of society. This establishes the foundation of "generic objectifications for oneself" (Heller, 1994a).

Other activities that require understanding and knowledge for producing and reproducing more advanced and sophisticated materials for existence also arise in this sphere of everyday life. According to Heller (1994a), these activities relate to non-everyday life; that is, they refer to spheres of "generic objectifications for oneself." Dependent on and related to knowledge of science, art, morality, philosophy, etc., these activities constitute a higher degree of historical development achieved by humanity. They require the concentration, intellectual effort, and abstraction of human beings, absorbing all the energy necessary to determine the activity (Heller, 1994a).

To this end, human beings must establish a homogenization process, overcoming the heterogeneity of everyday life by suspending activities unrelated to the specific activity being performed.

Based on Heller (1994b), Duarte (2013) addresses the issue of the homogenization process of "generic objectifications for oneself." According to Duarte, this process occurs when three aspects converge: "[...] we concentrate on a single activity; we invest what is most essential to our personality; and we transcend ourselves, adopting the perspective of humanity" (Duarte, 2013, p. 156).

According to Duarte (2013), this procedure will only be systematized if these activities within the scope of "generic objectifications for oneself" are carried out

with passion. This activity becomes the main focus of one's existence, requiring one to put all their faculties, abilities, attention, and feelings into it. In other words, becoming aware of reality means becoming aware of the task. This is more easily perceived when thinking of people acting as scientists or artists, that is, when thinking of scientific and artistic objectifications that led to the need for the homogenization process.

The aim is to demonstrate that regardless of the situation, the intentionality attributed to performing a task is identified with "generic objectifications for oneself," which impose a new posture on the subject in the face of the situation: an attitude of awareness of the activity. However, it is important to note that regardless of the conscious relationships human beings establish between everyday life and education, education is always related to a teaching and learning process. This is true even when education takes place spontaneously in everyday life, that is, "[...] when there is no conscious relationship with the educational process, both for those being educated and for those educating" (Duarte, 2013, p. 46).

Some argue that if individuals seeking to learn and understand do not establish a homogenization process with generic objectives, they will not be able to consciously relate to the activity. This leads to a series of spontaneous, unreflective actions that only result in the utilitarian reproduction of what was initially intended to be acquired.

An example of this is the production and reproduction of human language in everyday life. In the early years, children only repeat sounds. Over time, they begin to say a few words, and as they develop, their vocabulary increases and they begin to form sentences. This process is natural, spontaneous, and heterogeneous without the need for a conscious relationship. These activities allow the child to appropriate the social meaning of "generic objectifications," which constitute their individuality. As the child develops and gains a greater perception of the world, especially of human relationships, the process of establishing a conscious relationship begins. This occurs when parents, guardians, and schools guide children and force them to reflect on pronunciation, phrases, the relationship between handling objects, and the abstraction of numbers. Thus, all of these

actions and intentions originating from children are no longer voluntary, spontaneous, or pragmatic acts of daily life.

Thus begins the process of homogenization with the activity. In this case, their relationship with "generic objectification" must be fully humanized through the activity. In other words, they must incorporate the level of development already achieved by humankind into their activity. The child begins to distinguish between the various heterogeneous objectifications presented by everyday life and starts to think more about carrying out activities. The child no longer accepts how things occur, how they are, or how they are done as natural. They do not just repeat the activity spontaneously. Rather, as they become more involved in social activities mediated by adults, they begin to understand the accumulated experience of previous generations. This allows them to reconstruct the hierarchy of everyday activities and the values that guide such activities. This demonstrates that the creation of the new is not an immediate product of individuality but rather the result of the historical appropriation of human objectifications (Duarte, 2013).

Regardless of whether it is everyday, spontaneous, or school-based, Leontiev (2004) asserts that the formation of the subject is based on scientific foundations and determined by social practice. In other words, it is always mediated by relationships between human beings that are characterized by the transmission and assimilation of social experience. Duarte (2013) states that this process is "[...] and, therefore, with an educational process, in the broad sense of the term" (p. 146-147).

Thus, we understand the importance of appropriations obtained outside the school environment in the subject's experience with other human beings. As Leontiev (2004) points out, these appropriations contribute to the development of the subject and humanity, establishing that the educational process does not only take place in the school environment. However, the most developed forms of knowledge and learning produced by human beings are not available everywhere. Even with the advancement of the internet and access to a range of knowledge production and reproduction, Leontiev (2004) argues that these forms are only obtained through school education based on mediation between teacher and student. This methodology seeks to express the

movement of knowledge from the empirical to the concrete through the mediation of the abstract (Saviani, 2019).

Thus, according to Duarte (2013) and Rossler (2006), regarding the characteristics of spontaneous conceptions, “generic objectifications themselves” limit human beings’ understanding of a more advanced and acute perception of nature and culture. In this sense, these objectifications themselves end up determining a conscious relationship that allows for the realization, through the processes of objectification and appropriation, that, in the formation of the individual for themselves, they become the object of constant questioning, of constant de-fetishization. Thus,

[...] individuals permanently de-fetishize their relationship with the world, which means that they de-fetishize both their relationship with society and their relationship with themselves. In this process, conflicts often arise between the particular motivations that they have spontaneously appropriated throughout their lives and the generic motivations that they have consciously chosen as fundamental values for themselves (Duarte, 2013, p. 226).

Through these transformations, which are carried out by the relationships between human beings and reality, the subject can develop their knowledge of reality, not only by developing their most immediate senses but also by becoming aware of reality. This understanding has led to the development of various types of knowledge, such as artistic, rational, logical, theoretical, and affective. These types of knowledge depend on a process of objectification and appropriation from an educational standpoint. That is, this knowledge is not interesting in and of itself, but rather, it is interesting only insofar as it contributes to the formation of individuals as members of humanity. To achieve this, human beings must learn to think, act, and feel, a process that requires educational work.

Thus, it is evident that schools significantly impact the development and comprehension of the most profound concepts of accumulated socio-historical practices as humanity evolves, equipping individuals with the necessary tools to grasp reality in all its complexity. However, neoliberalism's influence on education promotes utilitarian, short-term education focused on market

demands and competitiveness. This harms the development of critical thinking and autonomous knowledge.

Thus, the transition from objectifications in themselves to objectifications for themselves presupposes intentional educational mediations, such as homogenization of activity, mastery of conceptual language, and systematized transmission. These are conditions for de-fetishizing reality and raising consciousness (Heller, 1994a; Duarte, 2013).

## **5 A possible proposal for emancipatory human education**

As discussed, historical-critical pedagogy and historical-cultural psychology propose an emancipatory human education that transcends the demands of the market and individualism. In the context of Historical-Critical Pedagogy, this emancipatory education should be understood as a process of overcoming the working class's alienation and subordination to the logic of capital. Emancipation entails breaking free from the exploitative and domineering conditions that hinder the realization of human potential, and directing educational efforts toward class struggle and social transformation.

To this end, this education must enable individuals to understand reality in all its complexity, develop critical thinking skills, and consciously participate in social transformation. Thus, knowledge taught in schools should aim not only to prepare individuals for the practical demands of everyday life but also to provide them with systematic, elaborate knowledge based on scientific, artistic, and philosophical principles. This knowledge should enable individuals to understand reality and themselves as part of that reality (Duarte, 2020, p. 37). Additionally, the school curriculum should enable the acquisition of knowledge and the development of higher psychological functions.

In his work *School and Democracy*, Saviani (2008) contrasts the traditional pedagogical method with new methods guided by Historical-Critical Pedagogy. He proposes five stages for the logical organization of teaching: social practice, problematization, instrumentalization, catharsis, and social practice. However,

"[...] these moments are not mechanically related to one another, nor is there a predetermined order to them" (Saviani, 2015, p. 37).

Given this fact, the entire methodological process of Historical-Critical Pedagogy can be considered a dialectical movement of the educational process in relation to social practice. Therefore, Saviani (2019) understands social practice as both the starting and end points of the educational process. The center of the educational process is found between these two points, where human beings seek to humanize themselves through a complex formative process related to abstract thought.

The teaching and learning process is systematized from the social practice in which teachers and students are involved. The methodological proposal of Historical-Critical Pedagogy is guided by problematization, which are intermediate moments of the method related to identifying issues raised by social practice, and instrumentalization, which is the appropriation of the theoretical and practical instruments necessary to address the detected problems in social practice, with the aim of understanding and solving them. This process mediates the formation of the human being beyond "generic objectifications themselves." Catharsis is "[...] the culminating moment of the pedagogical process [...]" (Saviani, 2013, p. 68) from the initial to the final social practice.

However, it must be emphasized that the cathartic movement raises individual consciousness and ultimately aims to transform social practice collectively. Thus, catharsis does not end in the subjective dimension but is realized through concrete social action mediated by educational work and class struggle.

The category of mediation plays a central role in developing the pedagogical proposal to the extent that this pedagogical theory understands education as a mediating activity within global social practice. Work is a mediating category in the relationship between human beings and nature; to exist, work must produce and reproduce life by acting on and transforming nature. Similarly, mediation becomes educational work, which is necessary for the mediation of "generic objectifications for oneself," or the objectifications of non-everyday human spheres. In this case, the relationship between humans and nature began to be mediated by science (Duarte, 2013).



Approaching the educational process through problematization and instrumentalization for pedagogical guidance requires considering how today's society, of which students are a part, is structured. In this case, educational work must promote these intentional actions, which require planning and sequencing to enable the contradictory unity between teaching and learning (Saviani, 2011).

According to Saviani (2019, s.p.), this means that "it is not [...] the preparation of students, which is the teacher's initiative (traditional pedagogy), nor the activity, which is the students' initiative (new pedagogy), but rather social practice (first step), which is common to teachers and students." Regarding the starting point of educational practice, we highlight the following:

[...] first and foremost, the historical and social nature of school education. Its character is philosophical rather than procedural; that is, what is at stake, strictly speaking, is pedagogical work as a form of expression of social practice, because of which lie the social relations of production that generate, beyond "things," human subjectivity itself as intersubjectivity. [...] Thus, we do not understand that the starting point is represented by some "problem" that detaches itself from the surrounding and immediate reality and is placed as school content, much less by what students already know – their experiential knowledge – and that coexists with their actual level of development. We believe that what is at stake is the need to recognize both the teacher and the student in their concreteness, that is, as syntheses of multiple determinations, and pedagogical practice as a type of relationship that presupposes man united with another man, in a process mediated by the appropriations and objectifications that are made available to them (Martins, 2011, p. 227).

According to Martins's (2011) findings, it is evident that teachers and students are in different situations regarding their understanding of this educational practice. While the teacher has a synthetic view of social practice, albeit in the form of a precarious synthesis, the students' understanding is syncretic and confused.

The teacher's synthetic view is related to the knowledge made available and appropriated by the teacher. This knowledge is fundamentally organized by the teacher's academic training and the objective social conditions that ultimately guide their work. However, the precarious synthesis is systematized by the

fragility of this training. Despite their understanding of the tools that allow a vision beyond everyday appearances and their placement on the "generic objectifications themselves," the teacher's understanding of the starting point of social practice is nearly the same as their students'. In other words, the teacher is unaware of part of this reality (Martins, 2011).

Students with a syncretic view of reality, on the other hand, have a superficial understanding marked by empirical experiences tied to immediate impressions of everyday life. They still lack the elements that would enable them to advance their understanding of reality beyond appearances and identify the links between their schooling and concrete reality decoding (Martins, 2011).

To raise students' awareness of reality, which is currently determined by immediate meanings, such as the messages that reach them through social networks and are accepted as true without being screened for veracity, they must understand the hidden determinations beneath the empirical manifestations of phenomena (Saviani, 2019). This deficit in the formation of psychic capacities that certify the intelligibility of reality can be understood as a lack of higher psychic functions, which will be developed through educational practices organized by schools.

Saviani (2011) proposes a pedagogical method of understanding reality by accessing the objective content of reality supported by scientific knowledge to understand subjective reality. As discussed, social practice identifies the main problems that need to be resolved within itself. These problems can be explained beyond the phenomenal appearance already understood through experience. However, they can be investigated and analyzed through scientific knowledge. Saviani (2008, p. 57) calls this process problematization: "[...] it is a matter of detecting issues that need to be resolved within the scope of social practice and, consequently, determining what knowledge is necessary to master to resolve them."

It is important to understand that problematization does not imply that developing projects based on students' personal interests is important or interesting. According to Saviani, this would not be very

[...] it is appropriate to understand that problematization means asking students [...] what they think, what they know about this or that. This is the procedure that Escola Nova advocates; it is the procedure that these theories circulating today advocate in the sense of valuing and considering children's knowledge, even though it is common-sense knowledge, everyday knowledge, tacit knowledge [...] but that would be the starting point. You start from there, value knowledge, and then move on to other modalities (Saviani, 2012 apud Marsiglia; Martins; Lavoura, 2019, pp. 16-17).

Thus, for Saviani, problematization is not equivalent to students freely selecting topics. Rather, it involves identifying the issues that social practice raises and the knowledge needed to address them from the most advanced stage of the historical development of material and human productive forces (Saviani, 2012, as cited in Marsiglia, Martins, & Lavoura, 2019).

In this case, Saviani attempts to show that, although teachers and students are part of the same social practice, they have distinct understandings of it since students are learners and teachers are teachers. Therefore, the more advanced level is not related to how students understand reality. Their comprehension abilities synthesize a confused and chaotic representation of the whole. This is not determined by the teacher's representation of reality. Despite being precarious, the teacher's representation still has the tools to support a deep analysis of relationships and determinations based on "generic objectifications for oneself," that is, scientific knowledge. In this sense, it is clear that

[...] it is up to the teacher to ask themselves what is important for students to learn [...] to live in this society and actively participate in it, and to what extent this society is perceived as unsatisfactory in terms of meeting human needs, what students need to learn in order to act in this society, seeking to transform it, to overcome it in the direction of a social form more suited to human needs (Saviani, 2012 apud Marsiglia; Martins; Lavoura, 2019, pp. 16-17).

Therefore, teachers and students cannot be considered equal, as hegemonic pedagogies seek to promote in educational practice. If this were the fundamental issue, educational work would be nullified. Teachers must

therefore be at a higher cognitive level than students, mastering knowledge that students have not yet grasped and knowing how to help them do so (Assumpção, 2014).

Teachers act according to the dialectical logic of teaching, which is characterized by "moving from the general to the particular, from the abstract to the concrete, from the non-everyday to the everyday, and fundamentally, from the concept itself in the service of understanding and overcoming the student's synchresis" (Martins, 2011, p. 230). According to Martins, students structure themselves according to the logic of learning, which moves "from the particular to the general, from the sensory to the abstract, from synchresis to synthesis, and from the everyday to the non-everyday" (Martins, 2011, p. 229).

According to Saviani, it does not make much sense.

I always start by asking the students. There are certain questions that do not depend on asking students, because we [teachers] already know that they are necessary, and by considering students as concrete individuals and not just as empirical individuals, we will take into account that this is their need and not our need as teachers, who supposedly already have human objectifications and are already in a position to actively participate in this society. The need is theirs, [...] but we will not discover their needs by asking them, because if they knew what those needs were, they would not be in school, they would not be there as students, they would already be active in society [...] (Saviani, 2012 apud Marsiglia; Martins; Lavoura, 2019, p. 16-17).

In light of the problems and issues identified, teachers will need to offer students more developed academic content, that is, provide students with tools for understanding reality. In this case, it is up to the teacher to

[...] is the critical task of transmitting existing social knowledge to students so they can grasp social reality as a synthesis of multiple relationships (totality). This allows them to act consciously and carry the necessary tools to transform reality (Lavoura & Marsiglia, 2015, p. 358).

However, although historical-critical pedagogy emphasizes knowledge transmission, it does not equate it with the assimilation of content

transmitted by the teacher compared to previous knowledge, as traditional pedagogy did. According to Vigotsky (2001), the direct transfer of a concept from a teacher to a student through the presentation of its verbal definition is impossible and ineffective.

Vygotsky (2001) claims that students assimilate concepts through a formation process that demands intellectual activity; that is, students must reorganize and constitute new thought operations. Thus, it is not related to data collection (new pedagogy) but rather to instrumentation. Instrumentation is the appropriation of the theoretical and practical instruments necessary to solve problems in social practice.

In this case, instrumentalization relates to objective knowledge. Objectivity is defined as the ability to reliably translate the processes that exist in reality outside of consciousness. Saviani (2008) proposes that this concept be implemented in the training of students through school knowledge, which should be organized and sequenced gradually.

As a result, various postmodern concepts are entering public school curricula through issues related to cultural diversity and pluralism of ideas, guided primarily by multiculturalism. In education, the primary and secondary elements in the formulation of the school curriculum have shifted. Objective knowledge, or systematized and elaborated content that has been historically produced and objectively interpreted, takes a back seat in the structuring of the school curriculum. As a result, the curriculum ends up being filled with events and celebrations, leaving little time for teaching essential content. This situation reflects a deviation from the school's primary function of transmitting instruments for accessing elaborated knowledge (Saviani, 2020).

Therefore, schools aim to provide students with an education that goes beyond celebrations. The main purpose is to enable individuals to appropriate "generic objectifications" to contribute to the homogenization of systematized knowledge and enable a qualitative leap in human consciousness. Saviani (2008) calls this leap "catharsis." Catharsis occurs when human beings achieve a higher level of consciousness and understanding of social practice supported by sensory

perception. Through pedagogical processes, this perception is formalized through the appropriation of concepts.

In this sense, human beings can establish concepts of reality that go beyond sensory perception. As a result, the adoption of true concepts can lead to profound psychological transformations. During this expansion process, spontaneous concepts—situated between scientific concepts and their objects—establish relationships with other concepts, becoming part of a new system of meanings (Martins, 2011).

For this reason, Saviani (2011) proposes five pedagogical moments through which human beings can acquire instruments related to the intellectual, or non-material, aspect: "generic objectifications for oneself." These moments enable awareness of reality beyond immediate appearances. In other words, they allow human beings to objectify educational processes as a means of becoming subjects in the production of their individuality and understanding their subjective reality in an increasingly objective manner.

Thus, as individuals become aware of themselves and the social relations that transform society based on education from scientific concepts, developing individuality (education beyond everyday appearances and alienated forms) becomes more structured.

## 6 Final Considerations

Based on the analysis presented in this article, it can be concluded that neoliberal society, through the logic of "learning to learn," attempts to shape individuals to meet market demands by restricting their knowledge and overall development. As illustrated by Mandeville (2017), this logic aims to keep the working-class ignorant and conformist, thus perpetuating social and economic inequalities and transforming individuals into instruments for capital growth. Individuals are thus subjected to a reality of "generic objectifications in themselves," focused on activities that only aim to reproduce them as labor forces.

This leaves no room for the development of critical thinking that would allow for autonomy and liberation.

However, over time, there has been an increasing demonstration of more conscious thinking about subjective reality to make individuals the protagonists of their lives. This protagonism, however, is based on forms established by neoliberal conceptions of education geared toward a more universal, flexible, and convertible qualification. These conceptions are related to a knowledge base that is both specific and generic; that is, activities that comprise a practical, utilitarian framework. The consequences of this new educational policy are cultural disenchantment. As Dufour (2003) notes, "[...] educational institutions (including universities) find themselves on a mission to welcome uncertain populations in which the relationship with knowledge has become a very incidental and sporadic concern" (p. 148).

According to Matos (2010), the intention is to affirm that knowledge takes priority over immediate desires, i.e., the alienated labor implied by capitalist society. The nature of alienation is articulated through the limitations it imposes on life, such as social barriers generated by the social division of labor and private property. These barriers prevent people from experiencing the dialectic of overcoming the self through their activities.

Thus, "generic objectifications for oneself" aim to attribute a deeper meaning to reality. Human beings are offered the opportunity to participate fully in social activities directly focused on science, art, philosophy, politics, and so on, as well as on the process of conducting everyday life. The formation of subjects through these objectifications can contribute to conflicts motivated not by the search for satisfaction of needs determined by alienated life but by the need for a human life (Duarte, 2013).

In contrast to this utilitarian and alienating view, historical-critical pedagogy proposes an emancipatory human education that enables individuals to understand reality in its entirety and act consciously to transform society. With its emphasis on education as a social practice and access to scientific knowledge, Historical-Critical Pedagogy offers solid theoretical foundations



for constructing an education that overcomes neoliberal logic and promotes transitioning to "generic objectifications for oneself." This pedagogy values the integral formation of the individual and the development of critical thinking.

Schools must also reassume their role as disseminators of knowledge, providing students with access to the scientific, artistic, and philosophical knowledge produced by humanity. The school curriculum should promote the holistic development of students, including critical thinking, social awareness, and the ability to effect social change.

Furthermore, it is important to emphasize the importance of emancipatory lifelong education, which goes beyond the concept of "*lifelong learning*"<sup>4</sup> (Laval, 2019). The latter consolidates the idea of education as an individual investment and a tool for adapting to changes in the labor market. To this end, it is crucial to invest in the initial and continuing training of teachers, enabling them to engage in critical and reflective pedagogical practices. This can be achieved by creating spaces for dialogue and participation that allow teachers and students to express their ideas and develop knowledge beyond the utilitarian knowledge proposed by hegemonic market concepts.

Understanding neoliberal education as the rationality of capital situates historical-critical criticism as a theoretical and practical means of overcoming this logic and reaffirming scientific knowledge as an essential mediator of humanization. The construction of an emancipatory human education requires social commitment, school policies that focus on the socialization of universal knowledge, and pedagogical work that is oriented toward transforming the material conditions of existence. In this regard, Historical-Critical Pedagogy is believed to offer important contributions to this task by pointing out paths for constructing an education that can truly liberate.

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<sup>4</sup> The term *Life Long Learning*, according to Laval (2019), refers to the neoliberal policy that transforms lifelong learning into an individual imperative of continuous adaptation to the market, shifting the social and emancipatory meaning of education to the productivist logic of competitiveness and self-management of the workforce.

## Educación y Formación Humana en la Sociedad Neoliberal: el lema “aprender a aprender” a la luz de la Pedagogía Histórico-Crítica

### RESUMEN

El artículo analiza la formación humana en la sociedad neoliberal, problematizando el “lema aprender a aprender” como una expresión ideológica de la educación orientada a la adaptación del individuo a las exigencias del mercado. Fundamentado en la Pedagogía Histórico-Crítica y en autores como Saviani, Duarte, Agnes Heller y Leontiev, el estudio se apoya en una investigación bibliográfica y documental para comprender cómo la racionalidad neoliberal redefine los fines de la educación, desplazando el énfasis del conocimiento objetivo hacia el desarrollo de competencias y habilidades funcionales al capital. A partir de las categorías de cotidianidad (objetivaciones genéricas en sí) y no cotidianidad (objetivaciones genéricas para sí) propuestas por Heller, se discute la tensión entre la formación omnilateral y la lógica utilitarista que impregna las políticas educativas contemporáneas. Se argumenta que el “lema aprender a aprender” traduce la internalización de la racionalidad empresarial en el ámbito educativo, transformando el aprender en un imperativo individual y permanente — *Life Long Learning* — orientado por la autorresponsabilidad y la competitividad. En contraposición, se defiende una perspectiva de formación vinculada a la socialización del conocimiento científico y a la mediación de la práctica social, condición esencial para el desarrollo de las funciones psicológicas superiores y de la conciencia crítica. Se concluye que la superación de la lógica neoliberal en la educación exige un proyecto pedagógico comprometido con la emancipación humana y con la transformación de las condiciones materiales de existencia.

**Palabras clave:** Neoliberalismo. Educación. Formación humana. Pedagogía Histórico-Crítica. Lema “aprender a aprender”.

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