


**Political education against inequalities and citizenship for democracy:  
international scientific literature review after twenty years of neoliberalism  
(1999-2019)\***


**Educação política contra desigualdades e a cidadania para democracia:  
Revisão da literatura científica internacional após vinte anos de  
neoliberalismo (1999-2019)**

**Formación política contra las desigualdades y ciudadanía para la  
democracia: una revisión de literatura científica internacional después de  
veinte años de neoliberalismo (1999-2019)**

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses the role of citizenship and political education in the contemporary society. It analyses the consequences of neoliberalism regarding its assault on the social sphere and its production of mass inequality around the world. We initiate the conversation by making education central to politics, culture as the key tool that helps us to analyze the meanings of citizenship. The privatization of citizenship narrows the debate around the role of the citizen, the public sphere and undermines democratic values. The goal of this research is to try and understand whether political education can reduce social inequality or not, and how the presence of an informed and politically engaged culture helps create the agents necessary for a substantive democracy. The chosen method enables the production of an international literature review with a systematic bibliographic search, exploring the meanings and scientific uses of the categories *Political Education*, *Social Inequality*, *Citizenship* and *Democracy* after many years under the neoliberalism hegemony around the globe. This research was conducted via the following databases: *Google Scholar*; *Networked Digital Libraries of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD)*; *Education Research and Information Center (ERIC)* and *Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO)*. It includes papers written in English, Spanish and Portuguese which publishing dates range from 1999 to 2019. A total of 51 articles were selected to compose the analytic corpus

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\* Sponsored by the Institutional Program for Internationalization (Programa Institucional de Internacionalização – PrInt) of Coordination of Superior Level Staff Improvement (Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior – CAPES), Brazil at Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil.

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( $n=51$ ). After reading all of the texts and making a content analysis, the results were presented in 3 categories: i - *Citizenship education and political education: theories and practices* (Conceptual approaches on citizenship and Students' capacity for political or moral reasoning fostered by political education); ii - *Politics, human rights & democratic values in education* (Critical approaches of human rights or democratic values on higher education; Popular education or citizen participation on political education and Politics as a teaching or learning tool for formal education); iii - *Relationships among State, citizens and civil society* (Positive relationships in contemporary societies and Conflicts in adult education). Under neoliberalism, civic culture, democratic values and informed dialogue atrophied. Clearly, this is partly due to the dominant neoliberal view that social agency is dangerous and needs to be shaped by neoliberal forms of education. Under the reign of neoliberalism, there has emerged a pedagogical machinery of power engaged in producing a culture of manufactured ignorance that works to produce a form of political repression. However, as an alternative, many pieces of research are arguing that education must empower citizens to engage in their communities as a method to learn, engage in individual and collective action, and how to participate in political struggles and public affairs. Political education can be an important social movement against the inequalities. That seems to be crucial for building a direct and participative citizenship in our contemporary democracy.

**Keywords:** Political Education. Social Inequality. Citizenship. Democracy. Neoliberalism.

**Resumo:** Este artigo discute o papel da cidadania e da formação política na sociedade contemporânea. Analisa as consequências do neoliberalismo em relação ao seu ataque à esfera social e à produção em massa da desigualdade em todo o mundo. Iniciamos a conversa atribuindo à educação um papel central para a política e analisando a importância da cultura política como elemento fundamental para o exercício crítico da cidadania. A privatização do conceito de cidadania estreita o debate em torno do papel do cidadão na esfera pública e coletiva, abalando os valores democráticos. O objetivo desta pesquisa é investigar se, e como, a educação política pode contribuir para a redução da desigualdade social, bem como analisar como a presença de uma cultura crítica e politicamente engajada ajuda a formar os agentes necessários para uma ampliação substantiva da participação democrática. O método adotado nos permitiu realizar uma revisão da literatura internacional por meio de uma busca bibliográfica sistemática, explorando os significados científicos e as aplicações práticas das categorias Educação Política, Desigualdade Social, Cidadania e Democracia nos últimos vinte anos sob a hegemonia do neoliberalismo no mundo. A pesquisa foi realizada nas seguintes bases de dados: *Google Scholar*; *Networked Digital Libraries of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD)*; *Education Research and Information Center (ERIC)* and *Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO)*. Foram incluídos artigos escritos nos idiomas inglês, espanhol e português com data de publicação entre 1999 e 2019. Para compor o *corpus* de análise foram selecionados 51 artigos ( $N = 51$ ). Após a leitura completa de todos os textos foi desenvolvida uma análise de conteúdo e os resultados foram discutidos a partir de 3 categorias: i - Formação para a cidadania e educação política: teorias e práticas (Abordagens conceituais sobre cidadania e capacidade de raciocínio político ou moral fomentada pela educação política); ii - Política, direitos humanos e valores democráticos na educação (Abordagens críticas sobre direitos humanos e/ou valores democráticos no ensino superior, sobre educação popular ou participação do cidadão na educação política e sobre a política como conteúdo de ensino na educação formal); iii - Relações entre Estado, cidadãos e sociedade civil (Relações políticas positivas nas sociedades contemporâneas e Conflitos políticos na educação de adultos). Conclui-se que, nas últimas duas décadas sob domínio do neoliberalismo, a cultura cívica, os valores democráticos e o diálogo crítico atrofiaram e regrediram no contexto internacional. Isso se deve em parte à visão neoliberal de que o empoderamento dos cidadãos para a agência social é perigosa e precisa ser moldada por narrativas neoliberais e conservadoras sobre a educação. Sob o regime cada vez mais autoritário do neoliberalismo, surgiu uma máquina pedagógica de poder empenhada em produzir uma cultura de ignorância que trabalha para produzir uma forma alienada de repressão política. No entanto, como alternativa, muitas pesquisas argumentam que a educação pode contribuir com a transformação daquela realidade e formar politicamente os cidadãos para se engajarem nas disputas de poder em suas comunidades. A educação política, ao estimular a participação em ações individuais e coletivas que envolvem lutas concretas de assuntos públicos como método, pode impulsionar importantes movimentos sociais contra a desigualdade. E isso parece cada vez se tornar mais crucial para a possibilidade real de exercício de uma cidadania radical, crítica, direta e participativa nas democracias contemporâneas sob crescente ataque no panorama global.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação Política. Desigualdade social. Cidadania. Democracia. Neoliberalismo.

**Resumen:** Este artículo discute el rol de la ciudadanía y de la formación política en la sociedad contemporánea. Analiza las consecuencias del neoliberalismo respecto a su asalto a la esfera social y su producción de desigualdad masiva a nivel mundial. Comenzamos la conversación poniendo en un lugar central a la educación respecto a la política, y a la cultura como la herramienta clave que nos ayuda a analizar los significados de la ciudadanía. La privatización del concepto de ciudadanía empobrece el debate acerca del rol del ciudadano y la esfera pública, socavando los valores democráticos. El objetivo de esta investigación es intentar comprender si la formación política puede reducir la desigualdad social o no, y cómo la presencia de una cultura informada y comprometida políticamente ayuda a crear los agentes necesarios para una democracia sustantiva. El método elegido permite la producción de una revisión de la literatura internacional con una búsqueda bibliográfica sistemática, explorando los significados y usos científicos de las categorías *Formación Política*, *Desigualdad Social*, *Ciudadanía* y *Democracia* luego de muchos años bajo la hegemonía del neoliberalismo en todo el mundo. Esta investigación se realizó a través de las siguientes bases de datos: *Google Scholar*; *Networked Digital Libraries of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD)*; *Education Research and Information Center (ERIC)*; y *Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO)*. Incluye textos escritos en inglés, español y portugués publicados entre 1999 y 2019. El corpus analítico se conformo con un total de 51 artículos ( $n=51$ ). Después de leer todos los textos y realizar un análisis de contenido, los resultados se organizaron en tres categorías: i - *Educación para la ciudadanía y formación política: teorías y prácticas* (enfoques conceptuales sobre ciudadanía y capacidad de los estudiantes para el razonamiento político o moral fomentado por la formación política); ii - *Política, derechos humanos y valores democráticos en la educación* (Enfoques críticos sobre derechos humanos o valores democráticos en la educación superior; Educación popular o participación ciudadana en la formación política y la política como herramienta de enseñanza o aprendizaje para la educación formal); iii - *Relaciones entre Estado, ciudadanos y sociedad civil* (Relaciones positivas en las sociedades contemporáneas y Conflictos en la educación de adultos). Bajo el neoliberalismo, la cultura cívica, los valores democráticos y el diálogo informado se atrofiaron. Claramente, esto se debe en parte a la visión neoliberal dominante de que la agencia social es peligrosa y debe ser moldeada por formas neoliberales de educación. Bajo el reinado del neoliberalismo ha surgido una maquinaria pedagógica de poder comprometida en producir una cultura de ignorancia manufacturada que trabaja para producir una forma de represión política. Sin embargo, como alternativa, muchas investigaciones sostienen que la educación debe empoderar a los ciudadanos para que se involucren en sus comunidades como un método para aprender, participar en la acción individual y colectiva, e intervenir en las luchas políticas y los asuntos públicos. La formación política puede ser un importante movimiento social contra las desigualdades. Eso parece ser crucial para construir una ciudadanía directa y participativa en nuestra democracia contemporánea.

**Palabras clave:** Formación Política. Ciudadanía. Democracia. Neoliberalismo.

## Introduction

### *How can citizenship and political culture improve democracy?*

The 21st Century presents us with all the consequences of global capitalism, which has created a scenario of precariousness and misery around the world. Its measures of fiscal austerity, outsourcing of work and uncontrollable profit are maintained at the expense of the relentless exploitation of workers. Neoliberalism has created a world crisis, causing an enormous rise of social and economic inequality, as well as an intense accumulation of wealth and concentration of power. The failure of neoliberalism to deliver on its promises has produced two interesting movements that have been gaining strength over time: the rejection of the traditional elite's control, and the rejection of their leadership skills. The implementation of neoliberal policies has enacted adoption of repressive, punitive and violent governments in many countries around the world. In some of them, such as the United States, Israel, Egypt, Turkey and Brazil, this authoritarianism took on fascist characteristics, something that Giroux (2018) calls *neoliberal fascism*.

For politicians aligned with this ideology, lying is reduced to a rhetorical device in which everything that is important is denied, reason loses its power to illuminate decisions and *fake news* dissolves the connection between the truth and falsehoods. At the same time, the language of hate, dehumanization, and unchecked individualism serves to infantilize and depoliticize people, as it does not offer space for individuals to translate particular problems into broader systemic considerations. Lying has become a toxic tool of power by imposing misery and trauma so deep and cruel that it kills the imagination and threatens democratic ideals. In a world where almost nothing else is true, all that is left looks like a bizarre horror movie. As a consequence, civic institutions and public cultures begin to fade.

Reis, Ferreira and Lopes (2019) state that the revitalization of a democratic political culture that transcends the discursive plane is essential for socialization and to improve the political education of population. It is in this sense that Ruitenberg (2009) defines *political literacy* as the ability to read the political scene, both in its contemporary configuration and in its historical genesis. Critical forms of literacy enable pedagogical and public spheres capable of producing informed citizens via a civic culture that can make reading the public order in political terms possible. At the same time, critical literacy furthers a knowledgeable understanding of the disputes over freedom and equality, and the social relations that shape them.

When the famous Brazilian educator *Paulo Freire*, at the height of his maturity and political conscience, wrote the book *pedagogy of hope: a meeting with the pedagogy of the oppressed* (Freire, 2011), he stressed the importance of the *cultural circles* as a successful project for producing critical forms of political education. He emphasized both the necessity of people to have a say in their own education but also for what it meant for them to be heard. Express their needs, and use language critically as a way to both understand and intervene in the world and to use their imagination for the creation of new utopias, called by him the *Unheard-viable*.

"It was as if, suddenly, breaking through the *culture of silence*, they discovered that not only could they speak, but that their critical discourse about the world, their world, was a way of remaking it. They started to realize that the development of their language, occurring around the analysis of their reality, ended up showing them that the most beautiful world that they aspired to was being announced, in advance, in their imagination. (...) Imagination and conjectures from a world where oppression is not necessary anymore, where they could be historical subjects and transformers of the reality with their praxis. The unheard-viable as a necessary part of the human work, as something the worker has in mind before they're able to make it. (...) This is one of the main challenges for democratic, and political, education. Allowing the popular classes to develop their own language, which, emerging and turning to their reality, shapes the hypothesis, drawings, anticipations of the new world, viable. That is the aim of the *Pedagogy of Hope*." (Freire, 2011, p. 56).

According to Maciel (2011), Freire's proposals are not only limited to the school context, but they also promote a dialogue about social relationships, and inspire the constant struggle to guarantee a good-quality and democratic education. This leads us to consider political education as an instrument of transformation. Meanwhile, institutions that make democracy possible are always trying to emerge. Therefore, through political education and a culture of citizenship, it is possible to transmit hope of change. But this training cannot be just conceptual; it must also be practical, through action, with social movements promoting critical thinking associated with the ability to act on the social reality.

However, according to Kisby (2009), the hybrid model of political education, which emphasizes the value of citizens' participation, and the expansion of this participation with action in the community, is being severely repressed by contemporary neoliberal policies. There is more at stake here than freezing the capacity to develop modes of a critical agency; there are also

signs of widespread apathy, as more and more people refuse even the most elementary calls to participate in elections, showing little interest in becoming active citizens or educating themselves about politics. Meanwhile, we see the slow deterioration of public spheres, and the culture of anger, despair, immediacy and entertainment is increasing day by day.

If all public institutions and organized movements of collective struggle collapse a form of neoliberal fascism will emerge, reinforcing an ideological environment of ignorance and hatred. This is a form of updated fascist politics that will attempt to dominate the world, with a mixture of nationalism, racism, religious extremism and market fundamentalism. This rhetoric does more than pit one person against the other in an endless cycle of competitiveness. It creates an image of a world in which there are only individual winners, a selfish coldness, and culture of cruelty that rejoices in the suffering of others. Democratic public spheres such as the opposition media, schools and other public institutions are disappearing under these neoliberal policies of austerity and privatization, thus reinforcing a hyper-individualized, masculine and militarized culture. It destroys the notions of a committed and critical citizenship, as well as any viable sense of agency.

Despite this conceptual agency crisis, Giroux and Figueiredo (2020a) state that people around the globe are fighting against the neoliberal system that denies health care, decent retirement, quality of education, public transport, and income distribution. Actually, after twenty years in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we can see some political tremors shaking the world: on the one hand, we notice the spread of collective resistance and struggles against the rising of fascism in places such as Brazil, Israel, Turkey, Europe, and the United States. On the other hand, we can see new waves of massive protests of popular resistance against neoliberalism, more evident in countries like Spain, Chile, Ecuador, and France. Associated with the struggles against neoliberalism, the contemporary form of capitalism, there are explicit movements against authoritarianism around the world, as they occur in Hong Kong, China, Russia, Iran, Bolivia, Peru, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and Egypt.

Protests sometimes fill the streets with millions of people, but sometimes they remain unseen in the both in the mainstream media and in the civic culture in which they operate. These events may seem unrelated, but, in fact, they are part of intertwined trends that are transforming the political landscape of the globalized culture. The resistance movements and the collective agency represent a reaction to the multiple waves of abuse produced by the fusion of political authoritarianism and neoliberalism in the economy.

Without hope, there is no possibility of resistance, dissent and struggle. The agency is the condition of the struggle, and hope is the condition for agency. Thus, we can consider human agency a path for social struggle and the construction of new utopias, in which a new world is possible. The urgent need to recover a language of hope and motivation is not possible without citizenship and political education to improve democracy in order to guarantee the survival of the human, social, cultural and political rights achieved with great effort in the last century. An international progressive movement must start now. The history of the 21st Century still hangs in the balance.

#### *How political education can reduce social and economic inequality?*

If we accept that the future is not set in stone yet, we understand that there is still space to act. In this action, the political education and the education for citizenship have an important role to play. According to McCowan (2006), these educational actions should be organized by the following principles: Expansion of social, civil and political rights; Popular participation; Collective

organization; Universal human values ensuring space for the differences; Critical attitudes towards authorities; Loyalty to the people and not to the territory, city, region, country or nation. However, this dispute for the future approaches conflicts with the neoliberal discourse on education, impregnated by the market-based ideologies such as competition, managerialism, privatization and performativity.

Under such circumstances, liberal democracy runs the risk of collapsing and undermining the population's ability to exercise critical judgment and mobilization for action. Operating on the false assumption that there are only personal solutions for socially produced problems, neoliberal pedagogy reinforces depoliticizing states of individual alienation and isolation, which are progressively being normalized, making people numb and fearful, immune to the demands of economic justice and more and more divorced from issues of politics, ethics and social responsibility. This is a form of depoliticization. Contributing to this, there are also concrete problems, such as growing social inequality, widespread political alienation, censorship and culture control, the destruction of public services, the dismantling of the social contract, the criminalization of social needs and the growing political and civic illiteracy. Material deprivations, poverty, and the fight to merely survive place constraints on both the choices available to people, how they can use time, and limits profoundly their ability to be political agents.

Nevertheless, being a citizen is a complex phenomenon in which institutional processes, cultural practices and political actions are intertwined. As Lindstron (2010) states, we have to ask new questions about citizenship and civic engagement, and we must explore how people themselves define their citizenship. In a relevant investigation with young audiences, Schugurensky (2006) defined the critical citizen as someone who is willing and able: to raise important issues and problems; to gather and evaluate relevant information; to think in an open way; to communicate not being persuaded by arguments based on authority or tradition; and to reach logical conclusions. Therefore, real critical citizens do not take the status quo for granted; they use the power of reason and evidence in the search for the truth; they are tolerant and not afraid of challenging their own assumptions and perspectives; they understand that their perspectives are shaped by the social context in which they were socialized.

It is not possible to change the world without changing consciousness. Changing the world and changing people are interconnected processes. Another important Latin-American educator, the actual director of Paulo Freire's Research Foundation in Brazil, Gadotti (2012), affirms that once you teach someone about the possibility of a different, better world, you're also teaching them how to overcome the dehumanizing logic of capital that is based on a regressive notion of individualism and the endless pursuit of profit. Critical education teaches individuals how to transform the current economic and political model into one that aspires to social and environmental justice. Such education is considered *utopian* by neoliberals who believe that their economic rationality is the right way; they accuse us of creating a politicized education, when, in reality, they have always known that education is about politics. Still according to the same author, as they are unable to convince us otherwise, they do everything in their power to divert us from the central debate, which must be: *Why; in favor of who; against what do we educate? What are our projects for an equal society? What other new worlds are possible?*

Political education, as well the critical pedagogy, rather than talking abstractly about freedom, equality and justice, necessitates the development of a new vision and language in relation to the experiences and problems that people face in their daily lives. It is a big responsibility for the progressive field to offer the opportunity for an approach of citizenship that defends the fundamental values of justice, equality and solidarity. Citizens must be able to criticize inequality, economic domination, corporate power and social injustice. It is crucial that progressive political

groups articulate a language that resonates politically and emotionally with people's daily needs in order to build new relations based on the values of democracy, freedom, solidarity, justice and socioeconomic equality.

## Materials and Methods

The authors performed this bibliographic search from June to November of 2019, in the Mills Library, at McMaster University, using an institutional ID, which facilitated the access to the full texts of the selected articles. The following databases were used: *Google Scholar*; *Networked Digital Libraries of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD)*; *Education Research and Information Center (ERIC)* and *Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO)*. Advanced configurations were applied to all databases, as well as the inclusion of the same research criteria: i) the usage of key words and/or their synonyms (Figure 1) appearing anywhere in the title or the abstract; ii) all texts were written in either English, Portuguese or Spanish, iii) all texts are available online and, although published in different dates, they all range from 1999 to 2019.

**Figure 1** - Key words and their synonyms used in the literature review for databases search

<p><b>1. Political Education</b> (or Political Formation or Political Training or Political Course or Political Pedagogy)</p> <p><b>2. Social Inequality</b> (or Social Rights or Social injustice or Social Conflicts or Social Movements or Social Democracy)</p> <p><b>3. Citizenship</b> (or Agency or Resistance or Leadership or Critical Consciousness or Popular Participation)</p> <p><b>4. Democracy</b> (or Participation or Democratic Govern or Democratic Ideas or Democratic Participation)</p> <p><b>5. Neoliberalism</b> (or Capitalism or Neoliberal or Financial Capital or Neoliberal Authoritarianism or Neoliberal Fascism)</p>
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The search was developed in five sequential steps of a Systematic Review of the Literature, until arriving to the final 51 documents selected to compose the corpus of analysis. All the detailed procedures and the number of articles found (N) in each step are demonstrated in the figure 2:

**Figure 2** - The 5 Steps followed in the literature research and the number of texts found (N)

<p><b>- STEP 1: N1=426</b> Matches found: 426 References available on the searched databases. Search for the coincidence of all key words (or their synonyms) combined in any part of the referenced texts.</p> <p><b>- STEP 2: N2=389 (N1-37)</b> After reading just the title and the short description available 37 references were excluded for being either duplicated, having content that was not related to the literature Review approach, or when the complete reference of the text could not be found.</p> <p><b>- STEP 3: N3=195 (N2-194)</b> 195 references selected. After title and summary analysis. The inclusion/exclusion criteria was applied.</p> <p><b>. Exclusion Criteria (n= 194)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Articles related exclusively to the conflict of neoliberalism and democracy (n=122)</li> <li>- Articles related exclusively to local conflicts or international cases not related to social inequality (n=72)</li> </ul> <p><b>. Inclusion Criteria (n= 195)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Articles Related to Political Education and Civic Formation (n = 101)</li> <li>- Articles Related to Social Movements and Agency (n= 55)</li> <li>- Articles Related to Political Culture and Citizenship (n=39)</li> </ul> <p><b>- STEP 4: N4=83 (N3-112)</b> 83 references selected. After classification by text type. Application of exclusion inclusion criteria.</p>
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<p><b>. Exclusion Criteria (n= 112)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Books or Book Chapters with ISSN (n=46)</li><li>- Documents, Dissertations, Thesis and Books without ISSN (n=57)</li><li>- Reference not found, Impossible to identify, Anonymous texts (n=09)</li></ul> <p><b>. Inclusion Criteria (n= 83)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Scientific Articles / Papers (n=83)</li></ul> <p><b>- STEP 5: N5=51 (N4-32)</b></p> <p>51 references selected. Verification of full-text availability. Application of exclusion inclusion criteria.</p> <p><b>. Exclusion Criteria (n= 32)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Full text was not Available On line at all by no apparent reason (n=14)</li><li>- Full Text was available only by private or paid access (n=18) *Not available by Institutional access</li></ul> <p><b>. Inclusion Criteria (n= 51)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Full text available on line by free access / public access / open to general public (n=38)</li><li>- Full text available for Institutional Access of McMaster University (n=13)</li></ul> <p><b>- CONCLUSION: N=51</b></p> <p>Selected a total of 51 articles to compose the Final Corpus for analysis</p>
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(Original for the article. From authors, 2020).

As we have demonstrated above, a total of 51 articles were selected to compose the Final Corpus for analysis on this Literature Review. From the 51 articles selected, 31 texts were written in English, 12 documents in Portuguese and just 08 articles in Spanish Language. Out of those 51, 9 texts were about conceptual framework and 42 had practical experiences or empirical data.

## Results

After reading the 51 texts to their fullest extent and making a Content Analysis, the results are going to be presented and discussed in the following pages. We can summarize the content in 3 different categories:

i. From the 51 articles analyzed, 12 articles were about *theories and practices concerning citizenship or political education*, being 8 about Students' capacity for political and/or moral reasoning which can be fostered by citizenship education, and 4 about Conceptual approaches on citizenship;

ii. 19 articles were about *politics, human rights & democratic values in relation to education*, being 6 about Critical approaches to studies in higher education: Human values and Democratic Rights; 7 about Political Education related to popular education and citizen participation, and 6 about Political dimension as a teaching and learning tool in formal education;

iii. Finally, 20 articles were about the *relationships among state, citizens and civil society*, being 5 about Positive Relationships between the citizens and the state in contemporary societies and 15 about Conflicts between State and civil society in adult education. The content from the analyzed corpus was summarized on table I:



**Table I** - Conceptual Synthesis from the Literature Review: Key Ideas and Approaches

KEY IDEA	CONCEPTUAL APPROACH	REFERENCES
CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND POLITICAL EDUCATION: THEORIES AND PRACTICES	Students' capacity for political and/or moral reasoning can be fostered by citizenship education.	Ruitenbergh (2009); Arango (2015); Siede (2017); Faulks (2006); Pontes, Henn & Griffiths (2019); Muff & Bekerman (2019); Staeheli & Hammett (2010); Schugurensky (2006)
	Conceptual approaches on citizenship.	Lindström (2010); Martins (2019); Corvera (2016); Kisby (2009)
POLITICS, HUMAN RIGHTS & DEMOCRATIC VALUES IN RELATION TO EDUCATION	Critical approaches to studies in higher education: Human values and Democratic Rights.	Scarfo (2015); Casillas (2016); Monteiro & Siqueira (2019); Mirabella & Nguyen (2019); Téllez & Flores-Alatorre (2019); Leiva & Díaz (2018)
	Political Education related to popular education and citizen participation.	Gadotti (2012); Kwan-Choi Tse (2007); Piñeyro-Nelson (2013); Medela (2018); Maciel (2011); Thal & Leal (2017); Crowther (2018)
	Political dimension as a teaching and learning tool in formal education.	Hakansson, Kronlid & Ostman (2019); Mirabella & Nguyen (2019); Tolstenko, Baltovskij & Radikov (2019); Levy (2014); Mirshak (2019a); Kennelly & Llewellyn (2011)
RELATIONSHIPS AMONG STATE, CITIZENS AND CIVIL SOCIETY	Positive Relationships between the citizens and the state in contemporary societies.	Pun (2007); Costa (2009); Catini & Mello (2016); Aznar & Albert (2016); McGregor, Clover, Farrell & Battacharya (2009); Roman-Alcalá (2018)
	Conflicts between State and civil society in adult education.	Souza-Maiolino (2015); Martins (2019); Castro, Cavicchia & Valle (2019); Martinelli (2006); Aguilera (2016); Fragoso & Guimarães (2010); Crowther (2018); Mirshak (2019b); Sümer & Eslenzia (2017); Emejulu & Scanlon (2016); Bertolin (2018); Rickford (2011); Reis, Ferreira & Lopes (2019); McCowan (2006); Puljek-Shank & Fritsch (2019); Ross (2008); Kwan-Choi Tse (2007)

(Original for the article. From authors, 2020).

Concerning the world regions that the articles considered in their analysis, 3 texts talked about Africa, 3 papers analyzed Asia, 9 documents explored Europe, 18 articles had Latin America as a reference, 7 texts talked about North America and 4 of them considered war regions or active conflict zones. It is also important to say that 3 papers talked about more than one region, 2 texts treated the European Union as a uniform unit. The countries classified as war/conflict ones were identified after reading the full text, considering only the article content and not necessarily the United Nations Criteria. The synthesis of key arguments is presented in Table II.

**Table II** - International Scientific Literature Review about Citizenship and Political Education related to Social Inequality and Democracy (1999 - 2019)

COUNTRY	KEY ARGUMENTS	REFERENCES
<i>South Africa</i>	Citizenship education used to create particular kinds of citizens in the effort of building a nation.	Staeheli & Hammett (2010)
<i>Egypt</i>	Political education and the mobilization of resistance attitudes under authoritarian contexts. Articulating resistance against authoritarianism through non-contentious forms of contestation.	Mirshak (2019a); Mirshak (2019b)
<i>India</i>	Women's political education and the challenge to develop leadership public policies.	McGregor, Clover, Farrell & Battachar (2009)
<i>China</i>	Citizenship education and identity contestation in Hong Kong.	Kwan-Choi Tse (2007)
<i>Russia</i>	Designing social and political values for citizenship education and their internalization by the public consciousness.	Tolstenko, Baltovskij & Radikov (2019)
<i>European Union</i>	Neoliberal attacks against social emancipation as a value of the public policies. Populism and the adult education for democracy.	Fragoso & Guimarães (2010); Crowther (2018)
<i>United Kingdom</i>	Compulsory citizenship education in England's schools. Impact of the social capital concept on the citizenship Education in the National Curriculum in England.	Faulks (2006); Kisby (2009)
	Youth political engagement and the need for citizenship education.	Pontes, Henn & Griffiths (2019)
<i>Spain</i>	Impacts of the left-party " <i>podemos</i> " in Spanish Democracy.	Crowther (2018)
	Hegemony of neoliberal thinking in Spain and its impact on schools.	Aznar & Albert (2016)
<i>Norway and Turkey</i>	Neoliberal gender policy agendas and the resurgence of women's movements. Populism and the adult education for democracy.	Sümer & Eslen-Ziya (2017); Crowther (2018)
<i>Ecuador and Venezuela</i>	Forms of direct democracy and political participation in a comparative analysis.	Aguilera (2016)
<i>Mexico</i>	Relationships among education, citizenship and democracy in contemporaneity. Formation of values in schools as a relevant issue for citizenship and democracy development.	Corvera (2016); Casillas (2016)
	Struggle for the implementation of the <i>Zapatista</i> Autonomous Rebel Educational System for the National Liberation. Governance model developed by the <i>Neozapatistas</i> based on autonomy and direct democracy.	Téllez & Flores-Alatorre (2019); Piñeyro-Nelson (2013)
<i>Argentina</i>	Teaching of human rights in Primary and Secondary Schools.	Siede (2017)
	Politics and citizenship of adult education during the 1970's based on Paulo Freire's pedagogy.	Medela (2018)
<i>Chile</i>	New paradigm of educational policy with debates about education and social transformation.	Leiva & Díaz (2018)
<i>Brasil</i>	Ideas and works from Paulo Freire in the trajectory of popular education in Brazil as a social movement and national policy in the Brazilian public health system. Popular education as a living process that contributes to local political struggles.	Maciel (2011); Thal & Leal (2017); Costa (2009)

	Neoliberal policies since 1980's and the conflicts of interests among State, Market and Civil Society. The concept of citizenship from conservative, right and extreme right groups. Denounces the attack on the freedom of teaching in different legislative houses all around Brazil. Challenges for local public educational policies in educating citizens for participatory democracy.	Martinelli (2006); Martins (2019); Monteiro & Siqueira (2019); McCowan (2006)
	Struggles of high school students in the occupations of São Paulo state schools movement. Media discourse about high school student movements. Institutionalization process of "youth" as a subject of public policies based on the political activity of the National Youth Council.	Catini & Mello (2016); Castro, Cavicchia & Valle (2019); Reis, Ferreira & Lopes (2019)
	Struggles and movements against the devastating impacts of neoliberalism in social welfare policies. Black Scholar's Marxist Genealogy since the 1980s.	Rickford (2011); Emejulu & Scanlon (2016)
<i>United States</i>	The politics of mobilization for food sovereignty towards a new ideal of democratized, egalitarian and ecological food systems. Unionism as a social movement and the strategies for rebuilding labor power.	Roman-Alcalá (2018); Ross (2008)
<i>Canada</i>	The 'active citizenship' as a discursive construction of curriculum documents in Canada. Concepts of citizenship in adult citizenship educational programs.	Kennelly & Llewellyn (2011); Schugurensky (2006); McGregor, Clover, Farrell & Battacharya (2009)
<i>Colombia</i>	Peace process between the Colombian government and the FARC movement.	Arango (2015)
<i>Israel</i>	The role of civics teachers against the political conservative backdrop in Israel.	Muff & Bekerman (2019)
	Political education and citizenship activism for peace in Israeli schools.	Levy (2014)
<i>Bosnia-Herzegovina</i>	Activism in Bosnia-Herzegovina and emergence of the social movement "Local First".	Puljek-Shank & Fritsch (2019)

(Original for the article. From authors, 2020).

## Discussion

### *Students' capacity for political and moral reasoning can be fostered by citizenship education*

Developing an original approach in his work, Ruitenberg (2009) states that the concept of power and the role of power in constituting any social order must be explicitly addressed in the curriculum, and suggests that there are three areas in which political education needs to focus: i) Understanding the concept of political emotions; ii) Knowing how to differ a moral debate from a political one; iii) Developing an awareness of the historical and contemporary political projects of the "left" and "right" sides. This approach requires that students understand that a political adversary is different not only from a moral enemy, but also, from a competitor at the neoliberal paradigm. Citizenship education should take into account that the nature of the political is necessarily conflictual and constituted by power so that students can be better prepared for having an active participation in the public space; a radical and democratic citizenship education must recognize and teach political emotions, fostering an understanding of the role of power in politics,

as well as the fundamental differences between the interpretation and implementation of equality and liberty.

On a similar perspective, Arango (2015) discusses the role of education as an instrument to strengthen the construction of a democratic society, and the important diversity of thoughts in social engagement. According to the author, to think critically about the formative processes as a dispositive for citizen formation is to understand that education, as a true instrument of power, can contribute to generate, in students, attitudes that allow them to understand themselves as social actors, and thus, contribute to generate ruptures with traditional forms of thinking in terms of culture.

Siede (2017) reveals a huge gap between the citizenship curricular prescriptions and the pedagogical practices in schools, by showing us that even though the educational system has favored the circulation of this content as a demand from the communities, schools have simplified the topic so as to make it more understandable to all ages, denouncing how several official programs are held back in an association that excessively reduces the political and pedagogical potential of human rights.

The challenge to improve political participation through the formal curriculum was also detected by Pontes; Henn & Griffiths (2019) when they register the impact of citizenship education on civic engagement and political participation across Britain. Politicians, academics, practitioners and commentators often point to the need for schools to provide more education about citizenship matters. Their results demonstrate that there are some considerable gains to offer citizenship courses to the students, proving that schools still play an important role in the political culture. The article generated important findings about the impact of citizenship education on political engagement and participation among a large representative sample of young participants.

In spite of confirming the evidences that young people who have taken citizenship courses demonstrate higher levels of political skills than those who have not, Lindstron (2010) alerts us about the fact that when participatory pedagogy is weak, there is also a risk that the engagement of young people in the issues of democracy diminishes. Also, Faulks (2006) exposes a body of evidences, confirming that the compulsory citizenship education in England's schools was largely unsuccessful in its implementation. Both findings are important because they highlight the urgency for a meaningful learning in which politics and citizenship engagement are connect to real life. The most common approach is to avoid open discussions about controversial topics among participants, instead of thinking about the conflicts with pedagogical strategies to cultivate the democratic dialogue.

Staheli & Hammett (2010) conclude that policies and programs that attempt to heal social divisions by fostering a common linkage between citizens and nation are ineffective through a consideration of citizenship education. Analyzing the international agenda for citizenship education, Schugurensky (2006) identifies the high prevalence of traditional approaches that focus on citizenship as a social status and often emphasize the formal membership to a particular political community, usually a nation-state. Most of these programs concentrate on facts about national history and geography, government institutions, and the law. All over the world, these programs tend to promote the "official story" of a nation's development, promoting uncritical patriotism and naturalizing social relations.

That situation can be deeply problematic. As Muff & Bekerman (2019) have denounced, the political elite from Israel uses citizenship education to promote the old Judaism as the most important religion and perpetuate their national-supremacy ideology. Despite the traditional political use of the citizenship education around governments, Schugurensky (2006) concludes that,

in the margins, there are some critical programs that encourage historical revisionism, contrasting the official perspective with the views of peoples that suffered conquest or discrimination. These programs also question taken-for-granted rules of inclusion and exclusion, interpret the law in the context of social dynamics of power and struggles, and promote the fulfillment of human rights.

Finally, it is largely proved that programs which focus on citizenship as agency tend to promote the development of active, engaged, and committed citizens. Instead of conceiving learners only as economic producers and consumers, these programs conceive them as active citizens who can choose their own destiny. This means that they are constantly aware about current issues, have a critical understanding of those issues, and are ready to propose alternatives, and to influence decisions when needed, through individual and collective action. It also aims for nurturing community development initiatives that foster self-reliance, empowerment, grassroots democracy and social transformation. This tradition of citizenship education for social action is closely related to popular education, a movement with roots in Latin America. (Schugurensky, 2006).

### *Conceptual approaches on citizenship*

The notion of citizenship as a member of a political community or state which has certain legal, social and moral rights, duties and responsibilities, must also focus on the cultural, demographic, political and socio-economic contexts of everyday life. According to Lindström (2010), citizenship must be seen in a broader perspective with aspects of identity like gender, race, sexuality, ability, ethnicity, religion and class. The author claims that teaching citizenship is not similar to learning democracy. The problem of citizenship is that it is not about people as individuals, but about people in context. It is no longer possible to describe a citizen as just a member of a political community or a state, who has certain legal, social and moral rights, duties and responsibilities, due to the fact that such rights change over time as the result of social struggles, economic changes and governing ideology. According to Corvera (2016), citizenship and human rights constitute the basic axes of citizen education programs. In this sense, social transformation must never go in the direction of reducing human rights, attacking democratic values or increasing social inequalities.

It is important to reinforce that not all educational initiatives propose a progressive concept of citizenship. Analyzing the practices of an ultra-right movement in Brazil, the Free Brazil Movement (*Movimento Brasil Livre - MBL*), Martins (2019) concludes that they are guided by a concept of *regressive citizenship* associated with neoliberal ideals. According to the author, the hallmarks of a regressive citizenship are: i) Action by anti-praxis, that is, effective participation in social processes to reduce rights and to deny universal access to material, symbolic and social goods, generally proposing the privatization of public services; ii) Militancy for the reduction of the welfare State and for the expansion of the market, claiming private property as its basic element; iii) The defense of narrow individualism and free initiative, with praise for meritocracy and personal entrepreneurship, which should be trained in schools. As demonstrated, the concept of citizenship is on permanent dispute and is always being redefined and reevaluated by social actors who are emerging with different ideologies to take part in the public life. It's not possible to ignore the heterogeneity of the interests at stake, nor the strong influences exerted by various institutions as well national and international actors.

Looking into the discourses that were debated in Brazil during the school occupations carried out by high school students in 2015, Castro; Cavicchia & Valle (2019) concluded that the protests were seen as an *invasion* by the state government, based on the right to own and administrate educational establishments, while the term *occupation* is more adequate for high school

students, based on the right to education. Certainly, the discursive and non-discursive practices of São Paulo's secondary students can be understood as political activities, as they guided demands and conferred greater visibility to the movement. Nevertheless, such designations are not exactly what circulated in the press; what was evidenced, in fact, was the political subject that emerged from this dispute acquired the ability to produce controversial scenes, demands and speeches in confrontation with his antagonist, the São Paulo government.

According to Biesta et al, 2009 (Apud Lindstron, 2010) if policy makers and politicians are concerned about young people's democratic citizenship, they have to pay attention to, and invest in, the actual conditions under which young people can be citizens and learn what it means to be a citizen. Consequently, the improvement of young people's citizenship should start with the improvement of the democratic quality of the communities and practices that make up people's lives. As there are conceptual conflicts among different approaches, there is also an urge for the creation of a public educational agenda committed to the full exercise of citizenship, considering some assumptions proposed by Corvera (2016): a) To be a citizen, you learn how to think critically, amass information, be discerning in one's judgments, and act with a sense of social responsibility and justice.. Citizenship is not the result of a spontaneous generation process; on the contrary, you learn through the culture; b) The education of citizens is a matter that concerns the entire society, not only governments; c) Education for citizenship is directly connected to participative democracy; d) The political education is directly linked to formal and non-formal educational and non-school educational processes; e) Education for citizenship requires active and situated methodologies that favor the development of abilities for citizen agency.

#### *Conflicts between State and civil society in adult education*

Educational policies carried out by government entities and civil society formalize the right of the population to access the educational system. Discussing the relationship between the State and civil society for educational policies in Brazil, Souza-Maiolino (2015) states that several government agencies have firmed partnerships with private corporations and non-governmental organizations to carry out various public services, which, previously, had been carried out exclusively by the state in the areas of education, health and social assistance, strengthening the logic of reducing State's responsibility.

Analyzing these partnerships with a critical approach, Martinelli (2006) denounces the institutional parasitism of the "new" private organizations from Civil Society that colonize the Public Interest taking profits from the social policies. The neoliberalism policies have a pattern of reducing social policies to a regulatory function. Such features are condensed into two general orientations: privatization and commodification. The author claims that such decisions must be under social control through councils, ombudsmen, and regulations of the institutions from Civil Society, thus guaranteeing the universalization of rights by collective decision. The importance of the councils is emphasized by the fact that they are democratic mediators and establish a reference between the State and society.

Following the idea that reinforces the importance of collective actions and political participation in the relationship between the State and the Civil Society, Aguillera (2016) makes a comparative analysis of Venezuela and Ecuador. The article concludes that constitutional justice and indigenous plurinationality are fundamental issues for Ecuador and that political polarization is the main conflict concerning the political participation in Venezuela. According to the author, the popular-national revolutionary processes in the Latin America's context supposed an injection of illusion and collective motivation towards the public of broad layers of the population. In this sense, they contributed to the renovation and re-legitimization of the state infrastructure, as well

as to the increase of political participation. There was a developmental trend of their economies and social protection networks in essential subjects such as education, health, social security, housing, culture or transportation. Pun (2007) states that citizenship can be possible through practice, via civic culture created through reflective professionalism, and when pursued as a rational ideology by state efforts. As differences are no longer found threatening or threatened, a sense of common citizenship can help enhance individuals' potential, and help social groups and society as a whole to meet the challenges posed by globalization by increasing social justice within and across the boundaries of modern states.

Summarizing the most important conflict, Fragoso & Guimarães (2010) conclude that the welfare state allowed the development of adult education programs aimed for social inclusion, economic growth and democratic citizenship. However, the neoliberal orientation for lifelong learning has stressed education as a means to prepare workers to be more productive concerning to managerial procedures. According to the authors, the hegemony of lifelong learning in the international agenda seemed to heavily transform the landscape of what used to be adult education. The *New Opportunities Initiative* constitutes of turning the real appearance of lifelong learning philosophy into the concrete field of adult education practice in Portugal. From its inception on social emancipation, critical action, humanistic, wide-open notions of citizenship, other principles dear to lifelong education have been forgotten. Discourses of strict economic growth, qualifications and human resources, and notions of training have come together with intention of providing more employable and trained workers to the economy. (Fragoso & Guimarães, 2010).

The neoliberal ideology of education works against the conditions capable of producing social agency. It reinforces the wrong supposition that poor people, working class groups and people with low educational attainment, don't have the capability of making political decisions and taking part in democracy. According to Crowther (2018), despite the crisis that Spain was suffering, a social movement called The Outraged Movement (*Movimiento de los Indignados*), aided the rise of a new left party inspired by the sentence "we can" (*Podemos*).

Comparing the Spanish situation with Scotland's, the author discusses how Censorship and self-censorship are some barriers to political education in both countries. One significant barrier was the local state's response, which, in some cases, censored educational activities by discouraging schools from going through with them. Also, self-censorship occurred amongst educators who believed they would find little support from their colleagues, and limited their own potential engagement. Uncertainty and insecurity in dealing pedagogically with political complexities was a theme that emerged as a reason why many educators felt uneasy with political education. Thus, educators need to have the skills and confidence to manage tensions and disputes within groups and harness the energy this generates for learning and action (Crowther, 2018).

Analysing the power of censorship in Egypt, Mirshak (2019a; 2019b) has indicated a critical state since the dictatorship was established in the country in 2018. Abdel Fattah al-Sisi secured a second presidential term in a constrained political environment exacerbated by his control over the media, prosecution of journalists and activists, and his crackdown on civil society. The author concludes that, as a result of this authoritarianism, the optimism that once defined the Egyptian uprisings and protests has turned into cynicism. Despite its soft and hard repressive methods, there are still some limited spaces for political education.

There is always space for resistance against authoritarianism. Sümer & Eslen-Ziya (2017) denounce how neoliberal policies are intervening in women's body rights, and describe how feminist movements responded with mass mobilizations and influenced the political agenda. The article compares two cases of feminist mobilization against recent proposals regarding abortion rights in Turkey and Norway. It argues that a feminist, multidimensional reconceptualization of

citizenship and human rights is useful to promote a strong and encompassing argument for mobilization. The fight for gender equality is seen, more and more, as a movement against neoliberalism and inequality at all levels. The new feminist movement with its inclusive approach shows that gender equality cannot be achieved unless everyone's rights, including environmental and animal rights, are achieved too. According to the authors, this unification of democratic demands would characterize a new era of feminism.

With a similar approach, Emejulu & Scanlon (2016) have demonstrated the importance of forming race and gender-neutral alliances, in order to promote pragmatic political advance, and to recognize practices of women, people of color and other groups, which are often excluded from grassroots movements. Community development can be a space where citizens learn how to make complex, political claims and organize collectively to advance in both redistribution and recognition of social justice struggles. Community development is not a neutral activity. It can be deployed in a myriad of ways to advance the various agendas of the state, the market, the non-profit sector or different kinds of citizens. We cannot resolve this dispute in the abstract, but what we can do is offer a few questions that we think activists, practitioners and scholars can consider for further action (Emejulu & Scanlon, 2016).

#### *Democracy; Inclusive political institutions and socioeconomic development*

Neoliberalism is threatening democracy and the institutions that make it possible. It has created a society where pain and suffering are seen as entertainment. Politics are no longer ethical and, therefore, the issue of social rights is divorced from any form of intervention in the world. This is the ideological metric of political zombies and the currency that finances neoliberal fascism. The key word here is atomization, a curse imposed by neoliberal and authoritarian societies, which represents a terrible threat to any viable form of democracy (Giroux & Figueiredo, 2020b).

This contemporary, reactionary and dangerous way of doing politics is at odds with the most basic principles of equality, freedom, solidarity and justice. The neoliberal fascist way of making politics needs to be strongly contested. In part, this means inventing a new language, with a socialist foundation that is reinvented for politics, civic life, the public good, citizenship and social justice. That is why Rickford (2011) criticizes the notion of *Socialism from Below*, arguing that it encapsulates the vision of democratic socialism as an egalitarian, humanist pursuit with profound relevance for black mass movements and the fight for racial justice. According to the author, we can't keep shearing the tradition of its elitist, authoritarian, doctrinaire, and vanguard elements while highlighting the benefits to anti-racist movements of materialist analysis and class struggle led by workers, minorities, poor people, and exploited groups.

What must be remembered is that history is open and that it is time to think differently, to act differently, especially if we can envision, and want to fight for, alternative futures, new horizons and new possibilities. However, we need to fuel the radical imagination to create alternatives to the growing authoritarianism of governments. Reis, Ferreira & Lopes (2019) have pointed out that even though we have a law which supposedly provides equality for all, we need to pay closer attention to some other social rights in order to make today's plans concrete in the future. What is intended is the radicalization of democracy, the expansion and qualification of participation in institutional structures, tensioning and widening the path of social policies and citizenship.

Once education is seen as a right that must be guaranteed to all citizens and, therefore, is a vital part of citizenship, then an active political participation is needed in the fight for promoting social justice.



As noticed by McCowan (2006), educational movements, in particular those influenced by Paulo Freire's ideas, intend to address the country's authoritarian history and the continuing political exclusion of large parts of the population. This way, education becomes an advantage and a helping hand for people to exercise their citizenship more effectively, because it makes them understand what citizenship actually means. Citizenship is a form of education, a learning process on how to participate in the political life.

Analyzing the political phenomenon that took place in 2014 in the Arab countries, internationally known by *Arabian Spring*, Puljek-Shank & Fritsch (2019) reinforce that protests were noted for their economic and social justice topics. The movement's challenge was to promote contestation on social justice in economic arrangements as well as in the alternative logics of engagement and organizational forms in society. According to the authors, those have strengthened the means to build an alternative third bloc via politics, encouraging a *local first approach*, with heterogeneous forms of local-scale action with explicit political strategies.

Looking at the union's movement in Canada, Ross (2008) also brings up the importance of engagement in local initiatives to improve political participation. According to him, when the members of contemporary social movements feel like they have real control, they are more likely to participate and open up the organization to a larger number of potentially innovative solutions to unforeseen problems.

Such involvement also creates stronger bonds of solidarity and mutual commitment that come from the ownership of decisions and the experience of working together. Developing such processes also enhances legitimacy, because members are themselves transformed through the experiences of participatory democracy in which they develop the organizational and critical abilities, forms of collective consciousness, and individual attitudes needed for full and equal participation in a self-governing society (Ross, 2008).

#### *Positive Relationship between the citizens and the state in contemporary societies*

Neoliberalism is hegemonic and it promotes the de-politicization and commodification of education and culture. However, there are new social movements growing inside public schools, and educational practices in Public Schools can have a strong emancipatory effect. Aznar & Albert (2016) have identified how various agents related to the new social movements built the public school space, and demonstrated the collective agents and their cultural processes of identity and meaning construction, as well as their social action focused on transgressing and transforming the instituted.

Advocating for the formative and organizational potentials of the social movements in the political culture, Catani & Melo (2016) have demonstrated how the high school occupation movement that took place by the students in Brazil, brought out a new perspective on criticism of the dominant modes of education. The school occupation movement also points to another process of politicization. By assuming a position of resistance and confrontation with the current educational policy, the high school students outline a notion of political education focused on the concrete conditions of class formation. In the same perspective, Costa (2009) shows evidence of continuous movement transformation thanks to the formative experiences and citizenship requisites stacked by the social movements.

There are frequent reports in which it appears that the engagement in the processes of daily self-organization within the occupations implied a radical change in the worldview of secondary school students, as well as in the relationships of companionship and responsibility among them,

highlighting the rotation of functions, the holding of daily assemblies, and the intense coexistence and interaction among members of occupations in often precarious situations, marked by tensions and threats on the part of the Police, school administrators, students and members of the school community against the movement, among others. Even in the face of constant and sometimes brutal harassment by the police and the school administration, pressure from family members, lack of material structure and fear of violent repossession, in several schools, the occupants have transformed a space that is daily shaped for direct participation. (Catini & Melo, 2016).

There is a mutual codetermination of actors in and out of state institutions to change state–society relations. Analysing a case in which a local direct action group promoted food sovereignty by illegally occupying public land in United States, Roman-Alcalá (2018) shows how even apparently autonomist movements can influence state and societal actors and contribute to state-based policies. As Aznar & Albert (2006) reinforce, on the one hand, the social movements question the instituted, proposing changes and promoting instituting processes; on the other hand, they recreate the imaginary, introducing contexts and relationships detached from the institutionalized pedagogy of capital into the school institution.

McGregor; Clover; Farrell; and Battacharya (2009) discuss the complexity of the discourses that act to shape women’s political leadership, identities and practices, and they believe that feminist movements for adult education are being successfully developed and implemented in India, and this approach to political education is providing strong parallel support mechanisms for achieving the goal of gender equity in political life. Still, gender based norms and expectations are persistent barriers to women’s participation in the political life.

At the heart of any type of policy that wishes to challenge authoritarianism is not only the recognition of economic structures of domination, but something deeper - which points to the construction of particular identities, values, social relations or, more broadly, agency in itself. Domination is also about how identities are shaped, ideas internalized, values adopted, and how the latter create particular forms of agents. The central point of such recognition is the fact that politics cannot exist without people investing something of themselves in the speeches, images and representations that appear daily. They can only engage with a different narrative if they can recognize themselves in the stories and language they are presented with. Rather than suffering alone, attracted by the frenzy of hateful emotion, individuals need to be able to identify - see themselves and their daily lives - within progressive criticisms of existing forms of domination and how they can address these issues not individually, but collectively.

#### *Critical approaches to studies in higher education: Human rights and Democratic values formation*

The discussion proposed by Scarfo (2015) focuses on the value of educational systems to build and consolidate a democratic society, and analyzes the connection and interdependency between education in human rights and university education. The author states that human rights are a component of the Right to Education, and they are essential for the fundamental freedoms coming to life; they also contribute significantly to promoting equality, preventing conflicts and violations, and promoting participation and democratic processes, in order to establish societies. Although human rights education empowers people and increases the respect for human rights itself and the fundamental freedoms, it is a means rather than an end. However, in the macro structural instance, reality tells us that the quality of teaching human rights and pedagogy in democratic values is far from being a priority. Mirabella; Nguyen (2019) argues that a critical, non-profit and philanthropic pedagogical study will transform curricular discourses to include voices of marginalized groups and communities, educate students as agents of social transformation and social justice.

Analysing the importance of education for promoting the moral development of citizens, Casillas (2016) affirms that education is an issue in which diverse visions and conflicting identities are embodied in a dynamic of innovation-conservation, creative project and resistance to change. The author defends that Mexican constitutionalism has configured an axiology that supports the thesis that there is a normative substrate for the moral development of citizens. This right, in the perspective of Mexican cultural dimensions, raises the demand to sustain and renew the school institution as a field of training with the purpose of internalizing the legal values of citizenship, of rights that mean the moral development of subjects and, with it, the progress of the democratic communities by the validity of the constitutional principles in the exercise of the government and in the social action.

In an opposite point of view about Mexican Society, Téllez & Flores-Alatorre (2019) discuss the *Zapatista* educational proposal and reinforce the process of reciprocal confluence in the cooperation between academy and local communities to foster indigenous social movements. The main resonance of this interaction is that it was not the researchers-academics-activists who allowed the establishment and deployment of an alternative educational proposal, much less those who allowed the movement to develop. It was the communities that created a specific place in the western debate, and opened the path to generating knowledge, promoting new teaching processes and different ways of making politics.

Discussing the political role of teachers and the importance of the plurality of ideas in the school environment as an essential attitude to ensure more symmetrical relations in society, Monteiro & Siqueira (2019) denounce the threat of censorship to teachers from all over the country in Brazil. The discourse of the authoritarians considers that the exercise of teaching activity is incompatible with freedom of expression. The authors emphasize how important the civil society is, and its academic associations and social movements actively taking a stand and reacting to schools' censorship and democracy affronts. They also emphasize the central political role of the teachers in the implementation of a critical and intercultural pedagogy that strengthens the consolidation of identities, individual and collective, offering the opportunity for the students to live with different beliefs and values and to empower themselves in the pursuit of their social rights.

As avid system critics who tend to promote social change, Leiva & Díaz (2018) discuss the role of education and analyze the crisis of the educational policy in Chile, and the university student mobilizations in 2006 and in 2011 that took place in that country. The authors state it is necessary to understand that there is no educational quality without social equity. For them, the change in education involves the change in the commercial model that has dominated the design of social policies, along with the growing abandonment, by the State, of what were its fundamental duties in relation to the rights of citizenship. In this process, expectations about education as a corrector of social inequality and a tool for the development of society have been maintained and increased in recent decades and the diversity of social debates are the expression of the relevance education has achieved in various planes. (Leiva & Diaz, 2018).

#### *Civic Values and Political dimension as a teaching and learning content in formal education*

Concerning the political dimension in formal education, Hakansson; Kronlid & Ostman (2019) have identified three approaches: a socially critical approach; a social learning approach; and a radical democratic approach. The article follows up by comparing these three approaches so as to discern how the political dimension emerges as an educational content by using conflict as part of the teaching and learning activities. The main results are that all three approaches tend to downplay the political and produce political sameness. Opposing that pessimistic conclusion, Tolstenko; Baltovskij & Radikov (2019) consider education the most important form of social

mobility, political changes and cultural creativity. This way of thinking makes it possible to optimize the process of education for the public sphere, which is destined to form an active citizen, to create a sustainable link between an individual and the social medium, and it is the most important tool of political communication. Educational institutions are integrated into the system of teaching future citizens and maintaining democracy.

An important article by Levy (2014) tries to decipher the cultural codes of schools in their relation to issues of peace, conflict and citizenship. The author discusses how schools in Israel are trying to avoid the "political education", and denounces how de-politicization is a masquerade for the hegemony of society's meta-codes; he also shows how the only kind of politics that isn't allowed in the school curriculum is actually that which opposes the state's politics. According to the author, under different circumstances and in relation to different conflicts, schools may employ their own particular approaches to education and conflict. In the case of teaching about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where the state seems to purposefully refrain from offering the means to teach this contentious issue, the result is that teachers, at best, go against the grain in finding their own ways of confronting it. (Levy, 2014)

Also discussing the role of political education in conflictive territories, Mirshak (2019a) analyses the roll of civil society organizations in the post-uprising Egypt and the need to adapt educational methods to survive and to educate under dictatorships and authoritarian realities. Denouncing that direct political education and explicit speeches about politics and rights are actually repressed, the author presents, in details, how the resistance forces are promoting an indirect political education, taking the forms of games and simulations that can appear to be apolitical, but could have numerous contradictory political implications.

Although in democratic countries many of the new curriculums subsequently emphasize 'active' engagement within the policy, Kennelly & Llewellyn (2011), supported by Foucault theories, demonstrate the role of the state in creating subjectivities. The authors argue that the *active citizen* of contemporary civics curriculum is, in fact, a deeply neoliberal subject. The language of the civics curriculum serves to camouflage the manner in which the *active citizen* of the twenty-first century is not a universally accessible model available to all people. While the neoliberal formulation of 'active' citizenship potentially alienates youth from public life, it is also implicated in a more specific set of exclusions. The authors have noted that the *good and active citizen* is represented as someone who works for the public, preferably through electoral politics, and takes seriously his duty to the nation. Rather than focusing on a range of public and private relationships that can build the capacity for social change, most part of civics curriculum reproduces the isolated, self-perfecting, neoliberal subject, focused on their responsibilities to the state. (Kennelly & Llewellyn, 2011).

#### *The Political formation in the concepts of popular, social or community education*

While official civic education programs are oriented towards the State's interest about *national education*, a pluralistic and vibrant civil society allows the hybridization and cross-fertilization of multiple discourses and practices to run parallel with the state project, either in a complementary or competitive way. Kwan-Choi Tse (2007) discusses how civic education launched by the democratic camps in civil society may be viewed as empowerment struggles for human rights and democracy vis-à-vis the domestication efforts made by the local government, as well as the tyranny of global capitalism.

Discussing strategies to improve conditions of life in local communities' through political education and collective actions, Piñeyro-Nelson (2013) argues that it is useful to break with the

dichotomous paradigm of the state and market as the only two existing ways of organizing society. The article demonstrates people's ability to organize themselves communally — in different places, throughout history, and in particular social-environmental conditions. It demonstrates, with facts, the possibilities and the usefulness of having democratic systems in which the participation of the people goes beyond voting for their representatives. Direct democracy has been exercised in many of the cases studied. As an example of political-administrative complexity of the indigenous population, there are the people of Chiapas; they are a real statement that a community very rarely operates and carries on without the intervention of the state in local, municipal and regional levels. The last level, however, is rarely seen in the governments of the commons. (Piñero-Nelson, 2013).

Maciel (2011) states that, the cultural approach of popular education is a fundamental element for the emancipation. The popular opinion helps us understand reality from the perspective of the oppressed in historical and social relations. It is in the dialectical practice of listening, reflecting, engaging, that Paulo Freire's theory finds its necessary pedagogical-political dimension as current and necessary, both in formal and non-formal spaces that aim for the emancipation of individuals and groups. Thal & Leal (2017) have applied these concepts to the Health professional's education as a determining factor for the implementation of the Public Policy for Popular Education. According to them, this approach requires a broader understanding of the social determinants of health, dialogue, collective construction, and the appreciation of popular knowledge. According to Medela (2018), the adult education policy appealed to the formation of the citizen, inspired by the foundational world of the national educational system through the construction of a transforming citizen of society with commitment and political participation and, also, a producer of culture and protagonist of his own history.

There are many conceptions and practices of education, but if we recognize that all education is political and it is not neutral, it necessarily implies principles and values that shape a certain view of the world and society. Gadotti (2012) discusses how critical pedagogies have every interest in stating their principles and values, not hiding the political role of education. They are situated in the same field of pedagogical significance, the democratic and popular field. We cannot deviate from the focus, from the cause that unites us. First of all, we must discuss the education we want, the society we want. In fact, our task as social educators remains the same: to raise awareness, dis-alien, de-fetishize. Fetishism turns human relationships into static phenomena, as if they are impossible to change.

## Conclusion

### *The role of citizenship and political education against neoliberalism inequality in the 21st century*

The articles we have reviewed addressed the following aspects: the ability of students to have political and moral reasoning that can be fostered by citizenship education; conceptual and theoretical approaches to citizenship; critical approaches to studies in higher education: human values and democratic rights; political education related to popular education and citizen participation; Political dimension as teaching and learning content at formal education; positive relations between citizens and the state in contemporary societies and conflicts between the State and civil society.

Neoliberalism is at war with the principles of democracy, distorting the language of autonomy, solidarity, freedom and justice--the main instruments for making economic and social equality a viable political idea and objective. Neoliberalism produces a notion of individualism and anti-intellectualism that harbours violent disdain for the community and, in doing so, reinforces

the notion that all social ties and their respective social responsibility ethos are not to be trusted. In neoliberal states, shared notions of solidarity are erased along with institutions that harbor committed and critical sensitivity. This type of depoliticizing erasure raises several questions: can a democratic conception of politics arise? How would it happen? And what agents of change are available to take on the task of mass and collective resistance?

We live in a time when all aspects of society show symptoms of political, economic and ethical impoverishment. This condition extends from the workplace and education to the legal system and the larger culture; it is evident in the way our society becomes increasingly dominated by the language of extreme nationalism, racism, nativism and grotesque levels of inequality, and it is evident in the depoliticizing conditions of our social order that deprive individuals of critical thinking, self-determination and reflexive action. The lack of political participation is often seen due to a lack of interest or apathy or cynicism towards politicians. Citizenship is conventionally seen in terms of loyalty to a geographical or ethnic area, being whether the city-states of the ancient and modern world or the nation-states of the modern period. Globalization and the resurgence of interest in the '*local first*' have challenged this model worldwide. Supported by McCowan (2006) we do not appeal primarily to the global or the local, but to the community of people, where these people are defined as the society in which they live, rather than a specific ethnic or geographical group. This is significant since a conscious citizen is no longer someone who works for the glory of the nation, but someone who defends human rights, democracy principles and social equality.

In a survey that evaluated the effects and results of socio-educational projects on the human development of young people in favelas in Rio de Janeiro, Figueiredo, Weihmuller and Orrillo (2019) state that non-institutionalized educational actions have great potential for transformation. The authors observed that the projects influenced, to a greater extent, the individual aspects linked to personal development and the possibilities of carrying out future projects. In this sense, the indicators that obtained the highest evaluation were: personality and character development, behavioral changes, desire to learn, communicative traits, ethical and moral skills, intelligence, entrepreneurship, social skills, individual effort, dream management, future perspectives and possibilities, responsibility and personal motivation. However, the indicators corresponding to the socio-collective level of human development were less valued, such as: community support, family support, neighborhood association and political participation. The community approach offers the opportunity for activists and professionals to work at the grassroots and to engage with the state's contradictions and the competing and complex claims of social justice from different groups. That is why we reinforce Emejulu & Scanlon (2016) when they propose the development of critical spaces for community participation, intentionally designed to encourage debate, to improve community leadership and to organize strategies for collective actions. "*The ability to articulate needs, demands and problems, to learn how to engage in deliberate dialogue and decision making by consensus and how to use collective power promotes the type of environment in which individuals can experience themselves, sometimes for the first time, as citizens, agents exercising control over their lives, truly participating in their community*" (Id. p. 57).

Neoliberalism has become an incubator for growing authoritarian populism, fueled mostly by economic inequality. According to Giroux (2019), this was rooted in a deep discontent with the empty promises of a neoliberal ideology that made capitalism and democracy synonymous while claiming that market values were designed to not only drive the economy but all social relations. They mined a wide range of democratic institutions that extended from the media to public goods, such as public and higher education; this way, schools only transfer the necessary knowledge for work activities, turning teachers into providers and students into clients. Reducing education to training and letting instrumentation replace the perspective of integral and critical education goes against actual human formation, criticism and the concept of citizenship. That is

one of the results of an ultra-conservative and fascist wave, which tries to eliminate the discussion of philosophical, sociological and political thinking. Teaching has become more regulated and controlled, reducing teachers' autonomy.

Governments are increasingly prioritizing the acquisition of practical training and skills; however, Bertolin (2018) alerts that the integral education in higher education, especially by means of substantial positive externalities, can facilitate economic growth. Under such circumstances, democratic narratives, values and modes of solidarity, which exchanged shared responsibilities and hopes, were replaced by a market-based focus on a regressive notion of hyper individualism, ego-centered values and a view of individual responsibility that eviscerated any notion of social, systemic and corporate responsibility. Ways of imagining society through a collective ethos have fragmented, and a comprehensive understanding of politics as inclusive and participatory has become an anti-politics, marked by an investment in the language of individual choice and in the power of individuals with rights.

Neoliberal language is written in the discourse of economics and market values, not ethics. Under such circumstances, superficiality becomes an asset and not a liability. The language of liberal democracy is getting weaker and weaker, due to its excessive emphasis on individual rights and its neoliberal spoofing of the financial elite, which has given way to a regressive notion of the market society by growing authoritarian tendencies. Not only did liberal democracies around the world seem disconnected from the misery and suffering caused by neoliberal policies, they also produced an insular and arrogant group of politicians who considered themselves an enlightened political formation. One consequence was that legitimate political claims could only be sought by individuals and families, and not by social groups. In that case, power was removed from the social sphere and placed almost entirely in the hands of corporate and political demagogues who used it to enrich themselves for their own personal gain.

According to Medela (2018) the political education of citizens is related to the ability of increase activism through a political-educational project that sought ambitious changes in the living conditions of the popular sectors. Levy (2014) has demonstrated that when schools invite politics to their playground, the result is that students become petitioners for rights. They have also learned that conflicts are learnable and that learning about them generates actions, which requires taking sides. For them, this was also what meant being a citizen. If schools are built in isolation from society, either by surrounding students within bounded structures or by regulating what penetrates them from outside, schools are only state institutions. The question is: who determines what is political and therefore what is considered political and learnable? If we want schools to effectively teach citizenship and political education, then it is necessary to let them teach about conflict or, in other words, to be political.

The strategy of struggle as a process of political education appeared in several statements as an antipode to school training. Against the truculence of the State, in addition to blockades, distortions and the spectacular logic of the mainstream media, according to Catini & Melo (2016), the struggle of high school students seemed to experience strong criticism of some pillars of the educational institutions against which they administered: hierarchies; fragmentation of knowledge; heteronomy; cleavage between planners and executors; crystallization of functions; the monopoly of information and so on.

As a rule, this education is opposed to the dominant school forms, under strict state control; however, a more rigorous conception of popular education, translated as "political education", gained prominence in this discussion. In this perspective, the working class would have to self-educate and all education would emerge from popular struggles, from real movements of defying the order, and, for this reason, some of its defenders would empathize with denying the

possibility of reconciling popular education with schooling. It seems that the struggle of high school students affirms and denies this conception: it develops in the school space and refers to it in its demands, but it also explains its limits and points to its subversion. It is undeniable that these struggles have considerable complexity and training potential, but the article highlighted, mainly, the planning and daily self-management of the occupations themselves. (Catini & Melo, 2016).

Again, in agreement with Emejulu & Scanlon (2016) ideas, we conclude that community development can be a social welfare incubator, because of the space that community development creates, its potential practices in relation to participatory democracy, and its ability to support the political education of local people. The most important thing about community development, though, is the ability for different types of people to come together and create a space to articulate and take action on the issues that are dear to them. Within this perspective, a community development process that fosters social solidarity and collective action is a critical and dissenting space whereby local people learn or reaffirm the politics and citizenship practices.

There is also a consensus that educational processes permeate the entire life of human beings. From birth, learning is essential for survival, it allows us to adapt to the environment in which we live, it helps us develop our intelligence and gives us the possibility to create new conditions of existence. Pedagogy is the context in which individuals become self-reflective about themselves, their relations to others, and the larger world. Human formation is, therefore, a much broader and older social process than the formal education we receive at school or university. However, within the neoliberal populist political formation, language works to suppress any sense of moral decency and connection with others. As a result, individual communication rooted in democratic values and dialogue loses its meaning, social agency is seen as dangerous and is hampered by the neoliberal education. The pedagogical machinery of neoliberalism largely rooted in dominant cultural apparatuses manufactures ignorance, and reproduces forms of political repression. Neoliberal pedagogy only recognizes commercial values, undercuts a compassion for others, and is rooted in a survival-of-the fittest ethos that emulates a savage form of social exclusion. Nevertheless, many pieces of research are arguing that education must empower citizens to engage in their communities as a method to learn, in action, how to participate in political struggles and public affairs. Political education can be an important social movement against socio-economic inequalities. That seems to be crucial for building direct and participative citizenship in contemporary democracy.

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Received: 02/09/2020

Accepted: 19/0/2020

Published online: 21/09/2020