



OLD EXPECTATIONS, NEW CHALLENGES:


the crisis of teaching authority in the theatrical training field

VELHAS EXPECTATIVAS, NOVOS DESAFIOS:

a crise da autoridade docente no campo formativo teatral

Martha Dias da Cruz Leite

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0144-3228>

 doi.org/10.70446/ephemera.v7i13.7658

**Old expectations, new challenges:
the crisis of teaching authority in the field of theatrical education**

Abstract: This article examines the impacts of the crisis of authority within theater education, drawing on Hannah Arendt's theories on authority and her insights on modernity. More than 50 years after Arendt's reflections on the authority crisis in education, contemporary factors—such as expanded access to information via digital platforms and the growing appreciation for diverse perspectives fostered by identity-focused agendas—introduce new and significant complexities to this discourse. Theater education, in turn, is not insulated from the effects of this broader political crisis, which permeates all areas of human life. While this article does not aim to provide definitive answers or solutions to the challenges facing educators today, it seeks to contextualize some of the critical junctures confronting the pedagogical field, especially in higher education. In response to these emerging dynamics, the article engages with educational philosophy to deepen the understanding of pedagogical practices in theater. The discussion advocates for a critical reassessment of beliefs and assumptions often regarded as foundational in theater pedagogy, highlighting the importance of re-evaluating traditional expectations imposed on theatrical educational practices.

Keywords: theater pedagogy; teaching authority; crisis of modernity; Hannah Arendt.

**Velhas expectativas, novos desafios:
a crise da autoridade docente no campo formativo teatral**

Resumo: O artigo reflete sobre os impactos da crise da autoridade no campo formativo teatral, fazendo uso das teorizações de Hannah Arendt sobre o fenômeno da autoridade e seus estudos sobre a modernidade. Após mais de cinquenta anos desde as considerações da filósofa sobre a crise da autoridade no campo educacional, acontecimentos contemporâneos, como a ampliação do acesso à informação por meio dos canais digitais e a valorização da diversidade de perspectivas, promovida pelas pautas identitárias, acrescentam novas e importantes camadas de complexidade a esse debate. O campo formativo teatral, por sua vez, não está imune aos efeitos dessa crise política mais ampla, uma vez que ela permeia todas as esferas da vida humana. Embora não tenha a pretensão de ofertar respostas ou soluções imediatas para os múltiplos desafios que acometem o cotidiano docente, o artigo contextualiza alguma das encruzilhadas às quais o campo pedagógico está submetido, especialmente no que diz respeito à formação de nível superior. Diante da conjuntura que se irrompe, o texto recorre ao diálogo com a filosofia da educação na compreensão da experiência pedagógica teatral, argumentando em prol da adoção de uma postura crítica em relação a crenças e pressupostos por vezes considerados intocáveis na pedagogia do teatro, e da importância de reavaliar a manutenção de expectativas recorrentes impostas à prática pedagógica teatral

Palavras-chave: pedagogia teatral; autoridade docente; crise da autoridade; Hannah Arendt.



1 Introduction: authority, education, and democratic modernity

There is no modernization or democratization without a crisis of power; yet, modernization also demands a deeper crisis of authority – even amid strong temptations to restore authority to powers undermined by democracy’s own logic (Renaut, 2004, p. 61).

In *La fin de l'autorité* (2004) (the end of authority), Alain Renaut examined how contemporary consciousness is shaped by deeply ingrained convictions, rooted in the major scientific discoveries of modernity. He argues that these convictions act as foundational assumptions that frame our worldview, suggesting that future knowledge will adhere to principles and norms already validated by existing knowledge. These convictions form an unnegotiable type of pre-understanding that guides our relationship with the world and influences what we still need to know.

Renaut posits that this pre-understanding guides not only our pursuit of new knowledge about the natural world but also our relationship with values, forming what he describes as the “a priori of democratic modernity”. He connects the evolution of these convictions – “[...] the major axiological and normative creations derived from modern reason” (Renaut, 2004, p. 24) – with the rise of democratic societies, which have evolved collectively since the Renaissance:

A world further illuminated by Enlightenment philosophy and the political revolutions of the eighteenth century, which brought forth new values in moral, legal, and political realms. Deeply embedded in our consciousness, these values of modernity also constitute, in their own way, the a priori through which we approach the human and inter-human world (Renaut, 2004, p. 25).

In this regard, the principle of treating all similar beings as equals functions as an a priori that shapes our initial understanding of the human world. This holds even in the presence of social, professional, and functional hierarchies, which, though real, are generally resisted by common sense. Renaut, for example, explores the defense of the caste system through the lens of a white, European philosopher. Emphasizing this perspective is crucial when examining contexts such as Brazil’s, which, as Paulo Freire observed, “[...] was born and developed under conditions adverse to democratic experience” (2011, p. 90). This awareness is crucial for understanding the challenge faced by Brazil’s constitutional project, launched amid a history of democratic inexperience and marked by violence and exclusion, as well described by Guilherme Perez Cabral:

The Brazilian constitutional project of 1988 was upon a history of profound disrespect for human rights and limited democratic experience—a legacy rooted in an authoritarian past. It aims to establish a democratic rule of law grounded in a coherent rights system within the framework of modern legal principles. [...] We set a low threshold for democracy: a few formal liberties, unrepresentative parties, periodic elections, isolated voting, with choices not formulated by the citizen. Brazilian democracy remains heavily burdened by the daunting task of consolidation (Cabral, 2016, p. 874-875).



Renaut's theory does not fully adapt to analyzing human relations in colonized countries shaped by pervasive racist and patriarchal structures. However, his observations resonate with the aspiration for equality embedded in Brazilian legislation, even if these ideals are not consistently achieved in practice. This reflects an effort to align, at least on a discursive level, with the humanist values rooted in Enlightenment philosophy, as widely recognized and promoted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNITED NATIONS [...], 1948). The principles and moral values of the Enlightenment are deeply embedded in Western discourse since the onset of modernity and are broadly accepted as universal measures across diverse facets of human life. Immersed in these humanist imperatives, we rarely feel compelled to debate or question the good intentions of those invoking them to justify various projects and actions. Consequently, these ideals subtly guide our attitudes and thoughts to varying degrees within each moment, relationship, or sphere of life:¹

Thus, these convictions derived from the major normative creations of modernity, gradually and profoundly reshape our relationships with others—whether in the city, institutions, workplace, or, as is often noted now, within the corporate sphere and more recently within the couple. This transformation has now extended to family and educational contexts, in which relationships with children are likewise embedded in the principles of recognition, freedom, and equality for all human beings (Renaut, 2004, p. 26).

In education, the entrenchment of democratic modernity as an a priori concept in our consciousness is particularly evident in how humanist ideals serve as self-legitimizing foundations for school practices: “[...] the alleged humanist compass [is] taken as a self-legitimizing justification for school action [...]” (Aquino, 2020, p. 194). This principle has become a common reference point for contemporary pedagogy, resonating through the prevalent language in educational documents—terms such as student freedom, school democracy, emancipation, and student autonomy. The core question underlying numerous pedagogical discussions is how to educate in alignment with the demands of modernity, an inquiry that stretches from Rousseau's ideas to those of prominent 20th-century figures like Alexander S. Neill, Carl Rogers, Ivan Illich, John Dewey, and Paulo Freire. At its core, this question explores how to recognize student's equal humanity and educate in ways that uphold the principles of freedom and equality inherent in humanist thought. This challenge intensifies within relationships marked by inherent and often unbridgeable asymmetries, such as those between parents and children or teachers and students. Here, the difficulty lies in balancing these foundational ideals with the practical realities of educational authority and responsibility.

1 There has been a notable decline in adherence to fundamental humanist values and the defense of rights and freedoms enshrined in the UDHR in recent years. This erosion is evident at the political level, where public policies and government actions often diverge from these values. Examples include the severe mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic under President Jair Bolsonaro, as well as the establishment of immigrant detention camps during the Trump era. This trend is also apparent in the micropolitics of everyday life, where social media commentary frequently reflects a disregard for human rights principles. This scenario highlights that the fundamental rights and freedoms articulated in the UDHR have never been fully realized in many parts of the world, especially among non-white and poor populations. Even in countries where the consolidation of these values once seemed assured, this foundational set of principles now appears seriously undermined and increasingly discredited.



In Brazil, this commitment is clearly reflected in movements like the New School movement, which emerged in the 1920s and continues to influence the national educational landscape. The *Manifesto of the Pioneers of New Education* has become a political cornerstone of modern Brazilian education, with its principles shaping key legal frameworks such as the *Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education* (LDB), the *National Curricular Guidelines for Basic Education*, and even the *National Common Curricular Base* (BNCC). However, the BNCC is frequently critiqued for what many view as a market-oriented approach, often seen as prioritizing corporate interests over educational ideals.

The pervasive presence of liberal and democratizing values in Brazilian educational legislation leads to a convergence of objectives across diverse educational projects, even those with significant theoretical and programmatic distinctions. José Sérgio Fonseca de Carvalho highlights the surprisingly widespread acceptance of “[...] ideals of fostering and cultivating freedom as central objectives of school education” (Carvalho, 2017, p. 78) in a field as theoretically and practically contentious as education. Carvalho attributes this acceptance, at least in part, to the pervasive influence of modernity’s values and the principles of equality across all dimensions of personal and social life.

The same sparks that ignite democratic consciousness animate parents and educators and lead modern education to a crossroads expressed by the following question: How to instill values of freedom and equality in children if they are immersed in family relationships structured according to the natural hierarchy between parents and children? In the school setting, the inherent asymmetry between teachers and students—rooted in the responsibilities assumed within the pedagogical relationship—prompts educators to explore ways to structure this relationship without conflicting with the equality central to democratic consciousness. Faced with this scenario, two prevalent reactions emerge. One is a call to revive lost traditions and authority, and the other is a deep skepticism or outright rejection of all forms of hierarchy and authority. This creates a pendulum effect that fuels ongoing debate (Aquino, 2007), often focusing more on sustained controversy than on developing practical solutions within the educational field.

It is no different in the arts field, as values of democratic modernity structure Western life in all its dimensions. Their effects can be especially noted in the frequently cited objectives for art education within various theoretical approaches and artistic-pedagogical projects. In official documents, legislation, and academic publications in performing arts, theater is often seen as a promising tool for building a more just and egalitarian society, as prescribed by numerous artistic-pedagogical theories. Although varied, these theories share a search for emancipatory dimensions that shape the future critical and autonomous citizen. An example of this can be found at the beginning of the book *Pedagogia do Teatro: provocação e dialogismo* (Desgranges, 2006), one of the most popular Brazilian publications on theater pedagogy. In the words of researcher Maria Lúcia de Souza Barros Pupo:



If we consider the school as **the heart of the democratic project**, addressing this gap is more timely and, even more than that, urgent. In this sense, the book in the reader's hands undoubtedly reveals itself as a valuable critical mapping, perhaps a guide for choices in the face of the impasses to which the school inevitably leads us. The pages that follow unveil processes of theatrical appropriation that carry within them a **clear emancipatory dimension** (Pupo, 2006, p. 16, emphasis added).

Gilberto Icle (2009, p. 2) examines the rise of Theater Pedagogy, highlighting the prevalent view that “[...] teaching theater teaches one to be a citizen [...]”. He notes a shift from Actor Pedagogy, which focused on enhancing theatrical performance in the 20th century, to Theater Pedagogy, which responds to contemporary social needs for humanizing and transformative experiences:

One prominent claim in today's Theater Pedagogy discourse is the belief – expressed and practiced in various forms, written, spoken, and sometimes contradicted – that it is the pedagogical context itself, not the spectacle, which serves as the primary space for personal transformation and self-constitution. This pedagogical approach challenges the traditional cathartic function of theater. Rather than watching theater to undergo inner catharsis, one must now practice theater to enhance life. [...] In our contemporary world – in media, schools, churches, social movements – the learning of theater is seen as essential for deeper self-understanding and a more fulfilled life (Icle, 2009, p. 4).

Since Ancient Greece, thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle have explored the implications of both creating and witnessing theater. For this reason, Pupo (2015) considers the interconnection between theater and education to be timeless, rooted in the very origins of theater itself. Furthermore, even the introduction of theater in Brazil was influenced by pedagogical guidelines aimed at the catechization of indigenous peoples by colonizers. Thus, the understanding that theater can play a significant role in individual development is not just contemporary; it has deep historical roots. What has varied throughout history are the concepts and values underlying the relationship between art and pedagogy (Pupo, 2015).

Since Ancient Greece, thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle have explored the implications of both creating and witnessing theater. For this reason, Pupo (2015) considers the interconnection between theater and education to be timeless, rooted in the very origins of theater itself. Furthermore, even the introduction of theater in Brazil was influenced by pedagogical guidelines aimed at the catechization of indigenous peoples by colonizers. Thus, the understanding that theater can play a significant role in individual development is not merely contemporary; it has deep historical roots. What has varied throughout history are the concepts and values underlying the relationship between art and pedagogy (Pupo, 2015).

In the Enlightenment context, the pedagogical tendency inherent in theatrical creation acquires distinct contours, manifested through the application of humanist values in theater pedagogy. Consequently, the primary justification for theatrical practice becomes its presumed ability to cultivate the future emancipated, free, and autonomous subject-citizen. Based on these foundations, the meanings attributed to the notion of authority are profoundly shaped by the



values underpinning this particular way of thinking. This condition results in discourses that, by integrating the ideals of freedom and equality as supreme values to be nurtured in all interactions, can sometimes lead to unwarranted suspicions regarding the inevitable asymmetry present in pedagogical relationships.

From modernity onwards, the tension between the old and the new has taken hold, and desires for renewing power relations, along with the feeling that tradition's answers are meaningless (Arendt, 2014), profoundly disturb human relationships and, inevitably, relations of authority. After all, is the loss of authority “[...] the price to be paid by societies that traverse this irresistible dynamic of equality” (Renaut, 2004, p. 61)? That is the question.

2 The crisis of teacher authority in contemporary times: new dimensions of old uncertainties

Authority is a complex topic, with different perspectives and discourses reflecting its essentially contentious nature by highlighting conflicting, clashing, or even openly contradictory views (Carvalho, 2017). Keen theorist on this issue Hannah Arendt (2017), emphasizes the importance of distinguishing authority from political experiences like force, power, and violence. She notes that both liberal and conservative perspectives tend to equate violence with authority, reducing the latter to mere compulsion (Arendt, 2014).

However, Arendt's reflection does not aim to provide a general definition of authority but rather to draw non-arbitrary distinctions based on the long-standing role this concept has played in Western history, reassessing its sources of strength and significance. According to her, authority in Western societies was shaped by a real Roman political experience. For this reason, the author revisited the notion of *auctoritas*², since it was the Romans those who incorporated authority into the Western political tradition. Arendt argues that confusion arose because authority has disappeared in the modern world, making it impossible to refer to shared, authentic political experiences of authority. This has rendered the term opaque, allowing it to be used with diverse and often contradictory meanings (Arendt, 2014).

The complexity around the concept increases further if considered in the educational context. For Arendt, the crisis in education stems from the extension of the broader crisis of authority into pre-political areas, referring it as a political problem of the highest order

² *Auctoritas* derives from the verb *augere*, which means “to increase” or “to augment.” For the Romans, the object to be augmented was the foundation of Rome. Thus, those endowed with authority were the elders, the Senate, and the descendants of the city's founders, i.e., those responsible for passing down the legacy of the ancestors from generation to generation. In one word, it was tradition: “Authority, as opposed to power (*potestas*), had its roots in the past, but this past was no less present in the real life of the city than the power and strength of the living” (Arendt, 2014, p. 164).



The crisis of authority, evident since the start of the century, has political roots and characteristics. Its most striking symptom, revealing its profound reach and severity, is that it has spread into traditionally non-political realms, such as child-rearing and education, where authority in its broadest sense was long considered a natural necessity. Due to its straightforward, fundamental nature, this form of authority has historically served as a model for various authoritarian forms of governance. Consequently, the fact that even this foundational authority — governing relationships between adults and children, as well as between teachers and students — is now unstable suggests that all long-standing metaphors and frameworks for authoritative relationships have lost their credibility. Both practically and theoretically, we find ourselves unable to fully grasp the true essence of authority. (Arendt, 2014, p. 128).

Thus, there is no clear consensus on the meaning of authority. The intentions and meanings behind the term can vary greatly, often leaving room for interpretations that equate authority with coercive phenomena unrelated to its nature. According to Arendt (2014; 2017), *authority* differs from *force*, *power*, and *violence* in that it is founded on **trust**, **respect**, and a demand for **immediate and unconditional recognition**. It establishes itself within a hierarchy and implies an “obedience in which men retain their freedom” (Arendt, 2014, p. 144). In these bases, the source of authority lies not in the power of a person or position, nor in the capacity to use force or violence to ensure obedience, but rather in an:

[...] external and superior force to their own power; it is always from this source, this external force that transcends the political sphere, that authorities derive their ‘authority’ – i.e., their legitimacy – and to which their power can be confirmed (Arendt, 2014, p. 134).

Since traditional forms of authority have fallen into disrepute in contemporary times, educating in a world that is no longer structured by authority or held together by tradition becomes a huge challenge. This is because the crumbling of tradition has thrown the modern Western world into a deep crisis. The moral standards and political categories that have governed the historical continuity of the West for many centuries have become inadequate for understanding the events of the modern world and providing rules for action. The author refers to this phenomenon as “the breaking of the thread of tradition” in her writings (Arendt, 2014). It is important to emphasize that Arendt’s conception of the crisis of modernity cannot be confused with a conservative stance, which perceives the crisis as the decadence of the Western world. Instead, it is an invitation to think: “It is the opportunity, provided by the very fact of the crisis - which tears down facades and obliterates prejudices - to explore and investigate the essence of the matter in all that has been laid bare [...]” (Arendt, 2014, p. 223).

Due to recent social, cultural, and technological transformations, currently this old crisis has acquired new layers. The expanded access to information through digital channels and the emphasis on diversity promoted by identity politics have fostered profound reflections on leadership and power models within various educational settings. More than half a century after Arendt’s observations on the crisis of authority (Arendt, 2014), the problem has intensified. The



issues raised by the German philosopher have reached even greater levels of complexity than those explored in her last-century analyses, with additional nuances requiring reevaluation in light of current concerns.

One of the educational settings in which this crisis is currently most intense is higher education. The issue of teacher authority often appears as a focal point in heated debates indicating that, while authority is frequently subjected to analytical scrutiny, no comfortable consensus exists from which to deduce a set of reliable, consensual standards for the limits and contours of educational authority.

Professor Wilson Gomes, a PhD in Philosophy and professor at the Faculdade de Comunicação da Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA), discusses the current challenges faced by university professors, especially amid profound changes in the traditional understanding of teacher-student relationships. In an article titled “The University and the Identity Tribunal” (Gomes, 2023), published in the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, Gomes refers to a specific incident at UFBA³, asserting that universities are currently among the unhealthiest working environments. According to Gomes:

At the slightest contradicted interest or assertion of pedagogical hierarchy, even just a recommended reading list can be met with an accusation of a serious identity crime. A heinous crime, with an automatically enforced sentence. Not even Kafka could have foreseen something like this (Gomes, 2023).

Gomes reflects on how current prevalent identity issues among students have impacted pedagogical relationships in this context, critiquing what he describes as an “identity activism style.” In this same text, he outlines what he sees as three erroneous theses that underpin these mistakes, drawing on the incident that occurred at UFBA:

That the pedagogical relationship is an egalitarian picnic in which students and teachers each bring their own contributions and share equally; that a student from a “historically subalternized” minority holds pedagogical privileges that place them above the teacher, including the right to independently “curate” the sources used in the course, rejecting white and European authors included in the syllabus; and that any challenge or critique of the student’s interpretation or “curation” lacks pedagogical purpose and, instead, constitutes an unacceptable offense against the minority student (Gomes, 2023).

The viewpoints expressed by Gomes received widespread support from public opinion but also faced resistance. Some critics interpreted his stance as a conservative reaction against the struggles of historically disadvantaged minorities. Another faction argued for a broader view of identity-based struggles, cautioning against reducing them to the prejudiced or offensive actions of isolated individuals within marginalized groups. As political analyst Celso Rocha de Barros explains in his article, “*Movimentos ‘identitários’ querem conquistar coisas, não cancelar pessoas*” (2023), these

3 The incident under analysis involves a discussion between a student and a teacher, the details of which were documented in a report by the Brazilian news portal G1, titled “Teacher accused of transphobia against student in the state of Bahia claims to be a target of slander and defamation” (Alencar, 2023).



movements seek substantive gains rather than personal retribution, published in the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*.

The controversies raised by Gomes echoed a similar debate that unfolded in 2021 surrounding the article “*Parece revolução, mas é só neoliberalismo*”, written by a professor at a public university in São Paulo under the pseudonym Benamê Kamu Almudras. Almudras’ article detailed situations he claimed to be experienced by himself and his colleagues, denouncing, as he put it, “virulent neoliberal offensives” targeted at university professors, especially those working in public institutions:

I suspect this is partly due to the distorted way some students view the inherent asymmetry in education, imagining the faculty and students as social classes – on one side, the exploiting class; on the other, the exploited. They assume that professors hold an essential superiority and that the student role is involuntary and permanent. They forget that no one is born a professor and that classroom asymmetry is contextual and temporary. The professor is simply someone with more experience and knowledge in a specific area, not a social figure endowed with inherent power or more general knowledge than students are. Moreover, many students in public universities who display the attitudes I have described intend to pursue an academic career themselves, making it all the more unreasonable to equate the professor with an oppressor (Almudras, 2021a).

As with Gomes, Almudras’ text received intense reactions, both supportive and critical. One of the most forceful critiques came from the article “*Uma visão nebulosa e conservadora*” (Toledo et al., 2021), which accuses Almudras of using the term “cultural neoliberalism” not to critique capitalist forms of domination, but as a “moral condemnation of struggles for the democratization of public universities.” The authors see his position as a reflection of discomfort with the changes in the academic environment over the past decades, especially regarding the newfound diversity achieved through social and racial quotas. They conclude that Almudras’ arguments invert the oppressor-oppressed dynamic and argue that responses supporting Almudras are, in fact, negative reactions from conservatives uncomfortable with recent progress in fighting social inequalities, especially those related to racial inclusion policies (Toledo et al., 2021).

In a rejoinder in the same publication, Almudras defends himself, asserting that his text should not be interpreted as an attack on affirmative action policies or as opposition to university democratization. The core of his critique centers on the ethical defense of professors’ responsibility to teach and assess, concluding with a pointed challenge to his critics: “To colleagues who believe professors are inherently oppressors and that teaching authority is, by definition, authoritarian, I ask: why remain in a profession they find so detestable?” (Almudras, 2021b).

The debates stirred by these articles highlight a widespread disagreement regarding the nature and role of authority in teaching practice. This dissonance has acquired new dimensions and intensities following the democratization policies implemented in Brazil over the past two decades, particularly between 2003 and 2016. At the core of these questionings lies the suspicion that inevitably arises from the asymmetry of social and institutional positions between professors and



students. It is precisely this skeptical perspective that fuels the debate over what may be considered a legitimate exercise of authority or a manifestation of authoritarianism.

Silvio Luiz de Almeida condemns the simplistic approach that often marks the debate on identity, emphasizing the crucial need to distinguish between identity and identitarianism. He authored the preface to the Brazilian edition of *Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump* (2019) by Asad Haider, highlighting the book's core insight: identity becomes a trap when transformed into *identity politics* or *identitarianism*. This means that while a priori rejection of identity is harmful to emancipation struggles, it is equally problematic to address identity in isolation, i.e., detached from concrete social relations:

The “trap” Haider discusses is not in considering identity in social analysis, but in analyzing it as if it were external to the material determinants of social life. Removed from its social dimension, identity becomes simultaneously a starting point and an endpoint, placing thought in an endless loop of pure contradiction. Thus, intellectual debate on identity never transcends itself, unable as it is to project itself into the concrete relations that sustain social identities (Almeida, 2019, p. 9).

Almeida underscores the importance of Haider's analysis in understanding identity-related challenges in Brazil, arguing that a significant portion of the left has fallen into this epistemological trap, which carries serious political consequences. He states, “The problem of identity is an urgent political issue, tied to the logic of capitalism's reproduction. Thus, it must be critically examined to effectively engage with a contradictory reality” (Almeida, 2019, p. 19).

3 Teaching authority in theater education: some reflections

Gilberto Icle (2010) observes that theater professionals are increasingly met with a range of demands, some of which are unusual or even unconventional, that assign numerous roles to theatrical practice within various human liberation projects. Social agents—including NGOs, government programs, corporations, and both formal and informal educational institutions—have been using theater as a tool for enhancing well-being and personal growth. Schools likewise frequently promote theater as a key component in students' journeys toward emancipation. Within this context, theater takes on a therapeutic role, positioned as a “remedy” for numerous issues in the educational environment. While Icle does not question theater's potential to meet these expectations, he raises an important consideration: “[...] What are the necessary conditions for this to happen? The Theater Pedagogy we see practiced today, in our surroundings, professes promises and offers what conditions for their fulfillment?” (Icle, 2010, p. 89).

In line with these promises, there is a prevailing tendency in theater pedagogy to view teacher authority as a potential threat to student freedom, ultimately oversimplifying the complexities of



pedagogical interactions. Such observations were highlighted in a doctoral research study titled “Autoridade na pedagogia do teatro: tradição e renovação no campo formativo teatral” (Leite, 2024). Following procedures inspired by archival research applied to education, this study investigates how the idea of authority has been incorporated into theater pedagogy in Brazil and the meanings the term acquires in this context. To this end, the research was conducted as a systematic review of Brazilian theoretical production on the subject, drawing from theater journals, books, and papers from academic theater event proceedings, to map the meanings that the idea of authority holds in the theatrical field.

The results showed that Paulo Freire and his concept of *education as a practice of freedom* have significant influence in theater pedagogy, with emphasis on the need of a democratizing approach by teachers in their interactions with students, reflected in the concept of *democratic teacher authority*. Additionally, prevailing discourses in Brazilian theater pedagogy are often opposed to the idea of authority, especially when the term is equated with power and coercion. In this regard, the contentious meanings that the notion of authority takes on in much of its theoretical production ultimately lead to a proliferation of discourses eager to overlook or disguise the intrinsic asymmetry of an authority relationship (Leite, 2024).

In light of this scenario, the core of the issue lies in the fact that, if authority is taken as synonymous with coercion, there would be no logical position, from the perspective of a subject aligned with the values of democratic modernity, other than to advocate for its weakening or even its end. However, this stance severely hinders the understanding of the phenomenon, as it closes off any openness to its inherent complexities. Furthermore, there is an extremely limited amount of material in theater pedagogy focusing primarily on the topic of authority. This could be seen as symptomatic of a subtle restriction on perspectives that do not align with an almost unanimous voice, one that echoes the slogans and catchphrases derived from progressive and liberating pedagogies. When linked to a superficial understanding of Paulo Freire’s theories (Leite, 2024), this is even more evident.

Flavio Henrique Albert Brayner (2017) reflects on the application of Paulo Freire’s ideas in Brazil, asserting that his followers have transformed the educator’s legacy into a fundamental repository of citations and commentaries that guide not only educational practices but also ethical, epistemological, aesthetic, political, and cultural actions. Brayner argues that this appropriation has resulted in a doctrinal and ideological movement, which he calls *Paulofreireanism*. This has weakened the subversive power of Freire’s original work and turned it into a caricature.

In Brayner’s view, the cult around Paulo Freire’s figure has led to the sacralization of his work, making an impartial and rigorous assessment of it something rare. This movement, he suggests, has fostered a form of doctrinal fidelity that prevents “[...] the faithful from transcending the mental boundaries imposed by that corpus [...]” (Brayner, 2017, p. 857). As a result, emotional and ideological clichés have proliferated in educational literature, with limited critical depth. Brayner



contends that this hinders the entry of new philosophical and pedagogical ideas, leading to pastoral and salvific pedagogies. He concludes that this *Freirean camaraderie* weakens the critical vigilance so strongly emphasized by Freire. One of the main manifestations of this would be:

[...] jargon, cliché, the overused phrase, whose function is to produce thinking automatism, preventing the detached and judicious evaluation of statements. In a word: what was, at the beginning, critical potential, here transforms into ideological operation, offering answers to questions in advance and avoiding the task of thinking (Brayner, 2017, p. 857).

Reflecting on Paulo Freire's legacy within the context of teacher authority in theater pedagogy (Leite, 2024), it becomes urgent to consider whether *Paulofreirianism* has also permeated the theater education field. This is a crucial point to prevent the spread of rhetoric filled with dubious slogans regarding student-teacher interactions in theater settings – rhetoric crafted from a demagogic humanism that, in the end, may undermine essential prerogatives of the teaching role.

Thus, it is necessary to courageously assess, with absolute honesty, the relevance of longstanding expectations placed on theater pedagogy in light of new challenges. It is essential to be ready to challenge long-established, sacred ideas within the theater field. Although noble in their declared purposes, these ideas may hinder the incorporation of fresh philosophical perspectives that provide answers and pathways for a world in crisis. If this crisis is not met with true thinking (Arendt, 2014), it could result in severe consequences for theater education and pedagogical practice. For instance, there is the difficulty of precisely defining boundaries that separate fundamental teaching prerogatives – such as a fair demand for study and discipline – from violent or abusive practices disguised as teaching methods.

Thus, it is crucial to recognize that authority, when correctly understood, differs substantially from oppressive, violent, or coercive attitudes, constituting an essential distinction in the debate on pedagogical experience. Particularly within a context full of traps, stemming both from a lingering colonial and patriarchal heritage and from the spread of gross simplifications of theoretical concepts on identity and disconnected attempts at application from social reality.

On the one hand, it is impossible to overlook a tradition that has long turned a blind eye to various forms of abuse perpetrated by teachers of all kinds. On the other hand, the simplistic approach of categorizing teachers and students as oppressors and oppressed has proven to be both detrimental and ineffective in addressing violence within educational environments. After all, if the roles of perpetrator and victim are predetermined and immutable, how can we maintain the essential confrontations between educator and learner without interpreting them as violations of rights? As Julio Groppa Aquino aptly notes:

[...]Education can only exist where generations are in confrontation. On one side, the older generation strives to impose a perspective rooted in the past – a slow, detail-oriented view of the surrounding world that becomes deeply ingrained in



our consciousness. On the other side, the younger generation passionately fights to preserve its fresh and vibrant outlook on life, a perspective that is almost always shaped by the present and its pressing urgencies. (Aquino, 2014, p. 183).

Reassessing the role of teacher authority in today's world is no easy task. Social media has amplified discussions on essential human life topics. However, such discussions often devolve into mere shouting matches that mask a lack of genuine dialogue, especially in a setting prone to the histrionic radicalization of positions, fueled by the dopaminergic addiction to likes and engagement. These current modes of communication, rather than fostering thought, exacerbate a prevailing cognitive anorexia.

Despite the increasing tensions surrounding teacher authority, educators remain entrusted with the inherent task of reconciling the endless demands of the world with the authority they are expected to embody in the classroom. Yet, in this moment, both the knowledge passed down by tradition and modern educational theories prove insufficient. Immersed in this dizzying movement, the teaching profession often finds itself paralyzed, perplexed, and disoriented. As Kafkaesque protagonists trapped in an inescapable and incomprehensible system, educators are compelled to navigate a multifaceted crisis, paradoxically both ancient and unprecedented. Deprived of any secure guidance for traversing the new dimensions of old uncertainties, they walk a tightrope, teetering on the edge of a knife – always and at every moment.



References

- ALENCAR, I. Professora acusada de transfobia contra aluna na Bahia diz ser alvo de calúnia e difamação; áudio revela discussão. *G1*, Bahia, 13 set. 2023. Disponível em: <https://g1.globo.com/ba/bahia/noticia/2023/09/13/professora-acusada-por-suposta-transfobia-denuncia-aluna-por-calunia-e-difamacao-audio-revela-discussao.ghtml>. Acesso em: 14 set. 2023.
- ALMEIDA, S. Prefácio da Edição Brasileira. In: HAIDER, A. *Armadilha da Identidade: raça e classe nos dias de hoje*. Tradução de Leo Vinicius Liberato. São Paulo: Veneta, 2019.
- ALMUDRAS, B. K. Parece revolução, mas é só neoliberalismo: o professor universitário em meio às cruzadas autoritárias da direita e da esquerda. *Piauí*, São Paulo, edição 172, jan. 2021a. Disponível em: <https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/materia/parece-revolucao-mas-e-so-neoliberalismo/>. Acesso em: 14 abr. 2021.
- ALMUDRAS, B. K. Pós-verdade e carteiradas de identidade: condenações e condescendências na universidade pública. *Piauí*, São Paulo, edição 175, abr. 2021b. Disponível em: <https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/materia/pos-verdade-e-carteiradas-de-identidade/>. Acesso em: 21 maio 2021.
- BRAYNER, F. H. A. “Paulofreireanismo”: instituindo uma teologia laica? *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, v. 22, n. 70, p. 851-872, jul./set. 2017. Disponível em: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1413-24782017227042>. Acesso em: 25 ago. 2021.
- AQUINO, J. G. *Instantâneos da escola contemporânea*. Campinas: Papyrus, 2007.
- AQUINO, J. G. *Da autoridade pedagógica à amizade intelectual: uma plataforma para o éthos docente*. São Paulo: Cortez, 2014.
- AQUINO, J. G. O mau encontro entre a escola e humanismo. In: SILVIO GALLO, S. (org.). *A escola: uma questão pública*. São Paulo: Parábola, 2020. p. 193-210.
- ARENDT, H. *Entre o passado e o futuro*. 7. ed. Tradução de Mauro W. Barbosa. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2014.
- ARENDT, H. *Crises da República*. 3. ed. Tradução de José Volkmann. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2017.
- BARROS, C. R. Movimentos ‘identitários’ querem conquistar coisas, não cancelar pessoas. *Folha de S. Paulo*, São Paulo, 30 set. 2023. Disponível em: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/colunas/celso-rocha-de-barros/2023/09/movimentos-identitarios-querem-conquistar-coisas-nao-cancelar-pessoas.shtml>. Acesso em: 3 out. 2023.
- CABRAL, G. P. Educação na e para a democracia no Brasil: considerações a partir de J. Dewey e J. Habermas. *Educação & Sociedade* [on-line], v. 37, n. 136, p. 873-889, jul./set., 2016. Disponível em: <https://doi.org/10.1590/ES0101-73302016153431>. Acesso em: 14 fev. 2022.
- CARVALHO, J. S. F. *Educação, uma herança sem testamento: diálogos com o pensamento de Hannah Arendt*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, FAPESP: 2017.
- DESGRANGES, F. *Pedagogia do teatro: provocação e dialogismo*. São Paulo: Editora Hucitec: Edições Mandacaru, 2006.
- FREIRE, P. *Educação como prática de liberdade*. 14. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 2011.
- GOMES, W. A universidade e o tribunal identitário. *Folha de S. Paulo*, São Paulo, 26 set. 2023. Disponível em: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/colunas/wilson-gomes/2023/09/a-universidade-e-o-tribunal-identitario.shtml>. Acesso em: 24 set. 2023.



ICLE, G. Da Pedagogia do Ator à Pedagogia Teatral: verdade, urgência, movimento. *O Percevejo Online*, [s. l.], v. 1, n. 2, 2009. Disponível em: <http://www.seer.unirio.br/opercevejoonline/article/view/525>. Acesso em: 2 nov. 2021.

ICLE, G. *Pedagogia Teatral como cuidado de si*. São Paulo: Editora Hucitec, 2010.

LEITE, M. D. C. Autoridade na pedagogia do teatro: tradição e renovação no campo formativo teatral. 2024. Tese (Doutorado em Educação) – Faculdade de Educação, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2024.

ORGANIZAÇÃO DAS NAÇÕES UNIDAS. *Declaração Universal dos Direitos Humanos*. Paris, 1948.

PUPO, M. L. de S. B. *Para Alimentar o Desejo de Teatro*. São Paulo: Hucitec, 2015.

PUPO, M. L. de S. B. Abraçar e ser abraçado. In: DESGRANGES, F. *Pedagogia do teatro: provocação e dialogismo*. São Paulo: Editora Hucitec: Edições Mandacaru, 2006.

RENAUT, A. *O fim da autoridade*. Lisboa: Instituto Piaget, 2004.

TOLEDO, D. *et al.* Uma visão nebulosa e conservadora. *Piauí*, São Paulo, edição 174, mar. 2021. Disponível em: <https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/materia/uma-visao-nebulosa-e-conservadora/>. Acesso em: 14 abr. 2021.



Academic biography

Martha Dias da Cruz Leite - Universidade Estadual de Maringá (UEM)

Assistant Professor in the Graduação em Artes Cênicas - Licenciatura em Teatro, Universidade Estadual de Maringá (UEM) Centro de Ciências Humanas, Letras e Artes (CCH) Departamento de Música e Artes Cênicas (DMC) Maringá, Paraná, Brasil.

E-mail: mdcleite@uem.br

Funding

Not applicable

Ethics Committee Approval

Not applicable

Competing interests

No declared conflict of interest

Research Context

No declared research context

Copyright

Martha Dias da Cruz Leite

Copyright of the translation

Celso Rimoli and Leonardo Maciel

Contribution of authorship (CRediT)

Not applicable

License

This is a paper distributed in Open Access under the terms of the License Creative Commons Attribution 4. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/deed.pt-br>

**Evaluation Method**

Double-Blind Peer Review

Editors

Marcelo Rocco

André Magela

Peer Review History

Submission date: 30 April 2024

Approval date: 08 October 2024