

# Parents as “Subjects”. Revisiting Parent-Adult Educator Relations in Viral Times

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Submitted: March 14, 2022 – Accepted: June 24, 2022 – Published: August 25, 2022

## I genitori come “soggetti”. Una rivisitazione della relazione genitori- educatori adulti in tempi virali

This paper invites us to reimagine parents as history makers and parenthood as a political space where parents and adult educators collaborate in reading and acting on the world that is, with a view to achieving a world that is not. The pandemic provides a backdrop to a fundamental understanding that while the virus may claim to be entirely democratic, the pandemic has failed the equity test. The asymmetrical world that is calls for a reinvention of adult education as a space in which the excesses of neoliberalism are resisted in preparation for a shift in consciousness that might promote collective action against today’s far-from-equitable reality. Parents as ‘Subjects’ is a *cris de coeur* for a liberatory parent-focused education that rehumanizes parents in a world that will be.

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Questo contributo ci invita a ripensare ai genitori quali fautori di storia e la genitorialità come uno spazio politico dove i genitori e gli educatori adulti insieme leggono e agiscono nel mondo così come è guidati da una visione del mondo che non è ancora. La pandemia fornisce l’opportunità per una comprensione fondamentale: mentre il virus può affermare di essere democratico, la pandemia non ha superato il test dell’equità. Il mondo asimmetrico chiede un ripensamento dell’educazione degli adulti quale spazio dove gli eccessi del neoliberismo sono combattuti in vista di processi di coscientizzazione al servizio di un’azione collettiva che intervenga per modificare una realtà attuale lungi dall’essere equa. I genitori riconosciuti come ‘Soggetti’ costituiscono un grido del cuore per un’educazione degli adulti liberatoria centrata sui genitori che riumanizzi questi ultimi in vista del mondo che sarà.

**Keywords:** Parents; Intersectionality; Liberation; Adult education; Covid-19.

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## 1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has devastated many communities, led to a dramatic loss of life, precipitated local, national, regional, and international gaps in wealth and power, threw millions into poverty, and shuttered opportunities for human encounters, including dialogues and interactions between parents and adult educators. Research indicates that while COVID-19 impacted the general population, migrant parents, those with a disability, single mothers, the poor, the homeless and those considered as off society’s radar, have been flagged as the categories hardest hit by the pandemic (Borg & Mayo, 2022). Employing a generative structuralist approach, where structures are viewed in relation to agency, and emphasizing intersectionality as a way of being and seeing, the first section of the paper will provide a theoretical framework to understanding the ‘care crisis’ and its concrete manifestation during the pandemic. This section will provide the backdrop to an understanding of how asymmetrical relations of power are mirrored in different levels of parental hope, participation and access (Acioly & Macedo, 2022).

The second part of the paper builds on the aforementioned reading of the parental world. It will source the literature from critical pedagogy and postcolonial education to build a case for an adult education space that resists neoliberal isolationism and power relations that are vertical and asymmetrical; productive relations that refuse to pathologize and essentialize distressed parents who live on the margins (Brown et al., 2022). The piece will argue for parent-focused relations that are informed by reciprocal empowerment for social change; a liberatory stance in the context of adult education for social change that is meant to provide an antidote to approaches that often reproduce passivity, chronic dependence, silence, fragmented interactions, and pseudo-dialogical communication (Borg, 2020).

The paper will conclude with an exploration of an adult education world that can be a context where parent-educator reciprocity becomes a concrete and permanent reality.

## 2. Parenting and social inequality, in and beyond viral times

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the local and transnational mitigating measures that followed have disrupted family life and limited many parents’ ability to access services and resources which provide a lifeline out of precariousness. As they navigated through the uncertainties caused by the unpredictable nature of a virus which mutated rapidly and erratically into multiple versions, many struggling parents were isolated from the social, welfare and economic infrastructure of their communities. In an ironic twist to the usual flight-for-life associated with local and global disasters, lockdowns, perceived by health authorities as concrete and viable mitigating responses to the spread of different versions of the original virus, grounded the most vulnerable parents (Yang Hu et al., 2020). What was presented as a draconian measure to save lives had devastating effects on the least privileged parents, particularly those living precariously, from day to day. Such parents were locked in homes and shelters, when available, with limited space and erratic connectivity. As the world split into vaccination-enabled and non-vaccinated communities, the most vulnerable parents were relegated to a precarious life lived in fear of infection, isolation and death.

The spontaneous generosity that was sparked by the pandemic, while praiseworthy and commendable, tended to reinforce the image of precarious parenthood as a space for charity and ephemeral solidarity, further alienating communities from the permanent solidarity that characterizes what Freire (1972) refers to as ‘true generosity’, understood by the Brazilian intellectual and activist as the struggle to eliminate the underlying causes of oppression rather than tinkering with the symptoms, in an attempt to alleviate suffering rather than eliminate it. As a direct consequence of the lack of critical engagement with and concrete emancipatory action on the world, the viral times that we will hopefully leave behind will be conceptually, materially and relationally similar to the neoliberal, pre-Covid normalcy that had left many disenfranchised parents at its receiving end (Leher, 2022).

The present predicament, symptomatic of grave social injustices, calls for a deep understanding of the unjust economic order with a view to reclaiming humanity through concrete material action. Such a process, profoundly pedagogical in nature, may lead to long-term solutions beyond ‘false generosity’ (Freire, 1972): the charitable, short-term approach — assistentialism — in response to imminent crises, that reproduces the status quo. ‘True generosity’, the antidote to its false counterpart, starts with ac-

knowledging the importance of critical literacy, a reading of the world that ushers in new practices that contribute to genuine, permanent, democratic and emancipatory change (Freire, 1972). Naming the world in viral times, from the perspective of suffering parents, constitutes a viable start to adult education processes that enable oppressed parents to reclaim historical memory of personal and social suffering and to acquire the necessary critical tools to challenge selective and manipulated views of present realities while committing themselves to becoming ‘subjects of history’, read active agents of transformation. It is to this first stage of the journey of permanent liberation — reading and naming the present world, the world that is — that this paper now turns.

### 3. Understanding parenting in the ‘care crisis’

The pandemic exposed the ‘care crisis’, the weakness of market-driven solutions to health challenges, and the fragile solidarity that had characterized the pre-Covid ‘normal life’ for millions of parents around the world. Given the multiple social and economic locations of parents, and streams of data that show that social and economic disadvantage correlates positively with higher mortality rates, corona virus contagion and limited access to quality health care, the path to cognitive solidarity with the plight of struggling parents is firmly rooted in the understanding of parenthood from an intersectional standpoint. The devastating effects of the virus ought to be perceived as a complex social phenomenon; a ‘social pandemic’ (Maestriperi, 2021) as much as it is a global epidemiological challenge.

As the intersectionality of parents, as social actors, is laid bare, it will become readily apparent that the nature, volume and quality of parenting in pre- as well as in viral times can be correlated with social location and the parents’ ability, informed by their economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), to access resources, power and status within societies that have the potential to facilitate access as much as they can structurally generate and perpetuate unequal access to common goods.

Intersectionality acknowledges the narratives of oppressed parents as opportunities for a deep understanding of how aspects of a person’s multiple identities (gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc.) combine to create different oppressions and privileges.

The power of parents to act in the world is located on a continuum that moves between agency and structural oppressions; a journey that is economically, socially, culturally and symbolically mediated. Bourdieu (1984) contends that the ability of (parents) to act is directly proportional to their ‘habitus’, described by the French sociologist and public intellectual as socialized norms and expectations that are unconsciously acquired by parents inhabiting social locations, and which guide parental self-image, self-efficacy, thinking, feeling, acting and access to resources, power and status within a given society.

Equipped with such an understanding of social inequality, one that refuses to blame the victim by steering away from attempts to psychologize and personalize access, Bourdieu (1986) contends that parental empowerment and efficacy are manifested in social arenas, which he refers to as ‘fields’. ‘Fields’ are the various social and institutional sites in which people express and reproduce their dispositions, and where they compete for the distribution of different kinds of capital.

With a good understanding of ‘habitus’ ‘capital’ and ‘fields’, Bourdieu’s theory can be used to explain how parents can be overpowered and dominated in ‘fields’ that are meant to enable them. For example, in the context of Covid-19, ‘fields’ help explain the differential power that women, socialized as caregivers, experienced in the public realm, as majority frontliners with limited protection, with grave consequences to their health status, professional development and career path.

Viewed within the above theoretical framework, research conducted in the last two years provides sufficient empirical indications that the global world order and the failures of the neoliberal state (Giroux & Filippakou, 2022), rather than Covid-19 itself, was largely responsible for the care crisis. It is to this empirical evidence that we now turn.

### 4. The impact of Covid-19 on parenting

The social-distancing metaphor is not only a safety measure endorsed by the medical world but also an appropriate metaphor to describe parental alienation and isolation that has plagued parenthood in gen-

eral and social cohesion in particular (Patra, 2021). The physical space advocated by health authorities as a preventive measure to limit the spread of the disease, and the policing, surveillance and symbolic violence employed in ensuring confinement and physical distance, can also be understood as attitudinal and political distance from the most vulnerable parents; a 'social disease' that left parents exposed to an opportunistic virus that parasitized on vulnerable communities, ethnically isolated and economically depressed areas, overcrowded urban spaces and rural geographies which are out of sight and beyond medical reach (Bajos *et al.*, 2021). The Covid-19 narratives that emerged from such environments exposed structurally-induced, parental vulnerabilities and stark inter-parental inequalities.

Covid-19 also underscored the international dimension of parenthood and the global, hegemonic reach of neoliberalism. In many instances, the national state not only confirmed its status as a reproducer of internal distributive injustices (Goodman & Chomsky, 2022), but also engaged as a player in selective empathy as nation states engaged in a fiercely competitive hunt for, and subsequent hoarding of ventilators, oxygen tanks, vaccination doses, and basic protective gear. 'Bio-political nationalism' (Maestriperi, 2021), resulting in scenes of army-protected transport and storage of medical deliverables, and compulsive warehousing of essential medical resources, contributed considerably to the misery and death of several parents, young and old, who inhabit countries where access to health services is uneven, erratic and limited by concentration of private wealth and power.

Covid-19 has challenged parenthood beyond the nuclear family. In societies which are heavily dependent on familial solidarity, the extreme physical isolation and death of grandparents dealt a heavy blow to the volume and quality of co-parenting offered during the pandemic (Yang Hu *et al.*, 2022). Co-parenting is crucial in societies where public services are unavailable, very expensive or low in quality.

Parental fortunes intersected sharply with the nature, quality and volume of employment and resulting income. With the closure of non-essential services, Covid-19 lockdowns on a global scale led to massive layoffs, dramatic reduction in working hours, and widespread cutbacks in part-time work. Such work, predominantly service-oriented, affected women, mothers and female care givers in particular, with a dramatic impact on young, low-skilled, low-paid lone mothers who, before the pandemic, were already amongst the poorest categories in Europe (Nieuwenhuis, 2020).

For parents with limited cultural and social capital, who are mainly working in the hospitality industry or in retail, work could not be carried out from home. Such parents were faced with a Hobson's choice: give up employment or, where work was still available, engage in outside-home work and risk infection and family contagion.

Various studies indicate that Covid-19 has reproduced, rather than challenged, gendered divisions of labour among parents (Landivar *et al.*, 2020). Collins *et al.* (2020) report that mothers, especially those mothering very young children, were more likely to exit the labour force during the pandemic. Such forced isolation, coupled with domestic and scholastic responsibilities correlated with increase in motherly stress and with mothers facing mental health issues.

Gender often intersected with parental ethnicity to devastating effects in terms of Covid-19 transmission, morbidity and mortality. A study conducted in the UK reports that 'individuals from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups who, as indicated earlier, are more likely to hold working-class jobs with a higher risk of COVID-19 exposure, were over-represented in the infected and deceased categories (PHE, 2020).

Migrants, particularly temporary, seasonal and those working in the grey economy, were among the hardest-hit parents (Borg & Mayo, 2022). The latter's informal and increasingly self-employed status caught them socially unprotected by a welfare net that seems to operate almost exclusively within what is perceived as the legitimate economy.

Studies that zoomed in on student academic progress throw further light on differentiated parental realities during the pandemic. A variable that had a dramatic effect on the quality of parenting, when countries experienced multiple lockdowns, is the differentiation between parents who engaged in at-home work and those whose work is not technologically-mediated and could not transfer their work to their private space. Social-class location clearly played a role in such predicament, with working-class jobs rarely benefitting from the stay-home, flexi-policies that followed from the restrictions imposed by central or local governments. Middle-class parents, with access to technology at home, and the cultural

capital needed to self-manage technological environments, were less likely to lose their jobs and could continue with the same stream of income. In-home presence meant that middle-class parents, more than their working-class counterparts, could be present while children were at home, could possibly cushion their children from the stress of lockdown, while providing in-house, quality environments that enabled learning (Borg & Mayo, 2022). Covid-19 played a crucial role in reproducing the scholastic achievement gap in relation to parental 'habitus' and, consequently, in perpetuating the social gap.

The pandemic reinforced the correlation between health and parental ethnicity. Using NHS data, Aldridge *et al.* (2020), found higher levels of risk among Black African, Black Caribbean, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian minority ethnic groups. Housing conditions constitute a major determinant of quality contexts for parenting, correlated with ethnicity in partially explaining asymmetrical spread of the virus. PHE (2020) reports an increase in COVID-19 transmission in overcrowded BAME communities.

Disability also intersected with parenting, at times with precarious effects (Mladenov & Brennan, 2021). Policies and practices during the pandemic confirmed the effects of neoliberal practices on access to healthcare by people with disabilities (Sakellariou & Rotarou, 2017). Writing in the 'Sociology of Health and Illness', a health-oriented journal, Mladenov & Brennan (2021) argue that responses to COVID-19 have generally excluded people with disability. Quoting various sources (e.g. Antova, 2020; Morrison & Mayhew, 2021), they list a number of disability injustices, such as inaccessibility of public information and communications and inequitable provision of health care, which deeply affected parents with disability and parents with children with disability, cutting parents and their children off from much-needed, routine health and other services, respite care and income opportunities.

The stark inequalities that informed parenting and parental access in viral times, directly related to parental intersectionality, habitus and capital, call for a deeper analysis of how the erosion of the culture of care came into effect, much earlier than March 2020, and the dire consequences of such a normalized conception of the world on parenting. The section that follows offers a preliminary understanding of parental isolation and disengagement in a world of plenty; a world that has been inflicted, in the words of Pope Francis (cited in National Catholic Reporter), by the 'virus of indifference'.

## 5. Resocialising Parenthood. Understanding parental isolation in and pre- and viral times

This section is premised on the conceptualization of vulnerability as symptomatic of social inequalities rather than a product of intrinsically individualistic characteristics (Storeng, 2013). The hegemonic neoliberal discourse of for-profit engagement with the material world, a value system that privileges private accumulation over the common good, has eaten into the ideal of permanent and collective solidarity, creating a normalized discourse that legitimizes the ongoing transitioning from public to private care and from communal to self-care, with grave consequences for those, including parents, whose material accumulation and social network border on the precarious.

As loneliness and physical and social distance bit into the general mental well-being of many parents, as difficulties faced by families were increasingly turned into objects of spontaneous charity, distant from structural solidarity of the permanent kind, the ideology of state-induced, mutuality and reciprocity, continues with its decline, rendering sustainable, state-guaranteed and participatory initiatives more difficult to commence and maintain.

While increased social spending is being promoted as crucial to achieving an inclusive recovery from the social ravages of the pandemic, countries, particularly those in the low- and middle income brackets, continue to underspend in the social realm, with the aforementioned countries spending (on average) only one-third of their GDP in health, education and social protection (UNICEF, 2022). Meanwhile, the sustainability of the two-year hiatus in cutbacks and the Covid-related increase in social spending is being challenged by a war in Ukraine that, in general, threatens to weaken the State's appetite and capacity for further investment in the social sphere, intoxicating parental social ecologies through food insecurity, high energy prices, displacement and debilitating inflation.

The post-Covid human condition, characterized by further deterioration of sociality and the recent construction of solidarity as part of the war effort, offers engaged educators with an opportunity to critically engage with a world that is stubborn in transporting a dehumanizing socio-economic model that is obsessed with profit, accumulation, consumption as a measure of wellbeing, aggressive privatization of the common good, de-unionization of workers; increasing digitalization and roboticization of work and services, and the conflation of democracy with freedom to choose anything from the global market, accessible from private spaces of individuals who are becoming ever more privately self-sufficient. As a result of a global arrangement that privileges individuality over the collective, relegating communality largely to charitable initiatives, more parents are becoming alienated from society and from their own humanity.

Informed by an ideology of consumption, where private accumulation is the desired benchmark, and the images of the perfect parent and the ideal family are combined, and therefore co-modified, with the marketing of a range of consumable products, the scenario is set for the blaming of millions of parents who fall short of the ideal image portrayed by the marketeers and the consuming public. Against such a backdrop, largely informed by the desired image of the perfect parent, parents who fall short of such an image, the marginalized and disenfranchised parents, are often blamed for their predicament. The more distant the parents are located from the legitimized norm, as glamorized by the corporate media (Giroux & Filippakou, 2022), the more they are blamed for their condition. While blaming the victim is normalized, the symbolic violence generated in the process continues to fuel the State's structural discrimination and oppressive practices, increasingly characterized by a life of uncertainty, a career of definite contracts, programmed redundancy and the inability to visualize one's life on a long-term basis; existential uncertainty and loneliness that divides the sufferers and turns life into a relentless struggle for survival.

The privatized human, existing between a competitive world and a network of virtual bubbles, construed as viable social spaces, combined, in Covid times, with the added suspicion of infection, not only makes it difficult for parental encounters of solidarity to materialize, but also facilitates predatory encroachments, in the form of scapegoating the most vulnerable, easier to infiltrate organically the institutions of civil society and to reproduce asymmetrical parental access to social solidarity. In the area of health, for example, Pavolini *et al* (2018), analyzing the intersection of health provision and access, conclude that while healthcare systems resistant to populism are generally well-equipped and humanly resourced, promote participatory governance and enable multiple professions to actively engage in policy-making, health systems that are more susceptible to populism tend to be poorly resourced, with vertical management that promotes constant monitoring and surveillance, and new-management approaches that are informed by low levels of trust in healthcare providers. When Covid-19 knocked on the health systems' door, histories of normalized populism made the difference between health systems which reached out effectively to the general public and those which failed miserably when the pandemic travelled the world. With reference to health related discussions of Brexit in the UK, Albertazzi & McDonnell (2008) noted how particular migrant groups (East Europeans, for example) were 'othered' as a result of incessant and overt displays of 'welfare chauvinism', anti-intellectualism, border controls and outright racism.

The role of the State in moving capital, in policing geographies of resistance, in socializing private financial crises, in legislating for worker flexibility and in facilitating the legitimacy of the economic, social and cultural dimensions of transnational capitalism in a context marked by the retreat of social solidarity as a guaranteed feature of the State, calls for an urgent revisualization of the current social contract and the potential contribution of the parent-adult educator dialogue to social change. This paper provides signposts for authentic parental activism and for adult education to serve the liberatory cause of disadvantaged parents; the concept of the rebellious parent with a clear cause, that of resisting concentration of wealth and the privileging of individuality, competition and privatization while reclaiming community, solidarity and collective emancipation.

## 6. The Rebellious Parent

The protests and occupations witnessed in Europe in the wake of the assassination of George Floyd in the US threw light on the contemporary nature of systemic oppressions. The monuments pulled down by the angry crowds were not attempts at erasing history but an angry reminder that slavery in its multiple forms is still with us today. Monuments of the colonizers, even if disguised as philanthropists, are not relics from the past but living reminders that democracy in Europe and beyond is continuously distancing itself from social justice. Protestors reminded the State of its reluctance to reclaim the social contract that had once narrowed the socio-economic gaps. Covid-19 revealed the power of the State to discipline, punish (Foucault, 1975), and watch over citizens whose medical and life fortunes were heavily dependent on their social location. It also highlighted the close connection between global modes of production, climate change, transport systems and patterns of consumption. Parental vulnerability is the sum total of all these aspects, which explains why pathogens are experienced differently when they hit society. Against such a backdrop, parental 'vulnerabilities' (sic) are understood as a function of hegemony; asymmetries that are reproduced structurally through the State's ideological infrastructure, which includes visions, policies, strategies, legislations, the media and other facets of the State's apparatus.

Understanding the pandemic as a social event will help construct a counter-hegemonic agenda that builds on the protests, rebellion and resistance of millions of people around the world and on the spectacular solidarity shown in viral times. The millions on the streets, in protest and solidarity, indicate that hegemony is never complete, that consent and normalization do experience cracks, and that the legitimization of current economic practices and consequent asymmetrical relations of power is in crisis mode. Such consciousness allows us to conceive of the cracks in hegemony as potential spaces of hope; pedagogical moments of resistance and rebellion that can be genuinely transformative, liberating and emancipatory. Such resistance not only locates parental alienation and marginalization in the larger picture of exploitative social and economic relations, but can potentially transform parents into active citizens and 'resources of hope' (Williams, 1989).

Liberatory Parent-Centered Education (LPCE) is being proposed as the radical adult education's response to a predatory world; a politico-pedagogical response that welds reflective engagement with the world with action on the world. An elaboration of the foregoing vision will now follow.

## 7. Liberatory Parent-Centered Education (LPCE)

LPCE builds on the dialectical relationship of reflection and action; reflection which is firmly rooted in quotidian experiences and which builds on the realization that our interpretation of the world is always mediated. A realization that defines us all as intellectuals, theory-makers, and bearers of ideology (Gramsci, 1971). LPCE does not introduce parents to intellectual life but seeks to imbue existing conceptualizations with criticality and complexity. LPCE oscillates between the practicality of living in an action-oriented world and the imperative of theorizing as an act of illumination.

LPCE responds to the realization that transformation cannot be achieved through pedagogical relations that are essentially transmissive and prescriptive in nature. Such pedagogy, based on a deficit-oriented approach to relating with parents is antithetical to the LPCE's vision of creating democratic, participatory, inclusive and hopeful spaces, where the struggle is lived in reflection and action. LPCE resists pedagogical moments that reinforce, directly through transmission and indirectly through an educational process that avoids critical consciousness-building, a dominant world order that is 'fabricated' by privilege and power as normal, irreplaceable and worth aspiring for; a conception of the world that blocks visions of utopia and worlds that are not.

For such a vision to materialize, LPCE is tasked with reconceptualizing the process of knowledge production. LPCE situates knowledge within struggles, privileging intuition and experiential knowledge over inert, esoteric, abstract and detached knowledge. Such conception of knowledge production affirms quotidian knowledge as knowledge which is worth exploring, engaging with, interrogating, problematizing and questioning; knowledge production which dies as a moment of receipt to be reborn as an act of creativity, experienced in communion with others (Borg, 2022). LPCE encourages different

ways of knowing; alternative epistemologies can depart radically from the oral tradition of knowledge exchange.

While interrogating knowledge transfer as the dominant pedagogical act, LPCE makes a strong case for educational encounters informed by a pedagogical experience that is built collectively with adult learners (read parents) in a curricular context that encourages epistemological curiosity, doubt and dissent. Since LPCE is historically situated and materially contextualized, and parents are conceived as subjects of history or history makers, adult educators are ethically obliged to negate their status as the sole bearers of worthwhile knowledge. For LPCE-informed educators, parents are owners of knowledge and not simply receptacles of externally-imposed expertise.

LPCE is different from liberal stances of learner-centeredness, generally based on multiple forms of needs analysis, increasingly informed by big data, algorithms and artificial intelligence. LPCE embraces the concept of educators-parents generating themes which in the process of their investigation, theories are created, needs are clearly defined and action is taken with the radical intent of transforming the objective realities of the protagonists of the education process — the parents. Ultimately, the reflection-action dialectic, while serving parents first, has the power to transform educators, their teachings and their readings of the world. LPCE is rooted in mutuality and reciprocity and is engaged in an ongoing act of negotiation and renegotiation, dependent on levels of engagement achieved by those who occupy the educational space.

As the paradigm shifts to transformative encounters rather than opportunistic responses to parental wants, parents shift locationally from objects of interest to active subjects, from material for professional gaze to co-participants, problem-posers, co-investigators, creative and critical thinkers and co-discoverers of knowledge. LPCE creates opportunities for educator-parent encounters with a view to generating counter-intuitions and narratives to the popular perception that educational spaces should always be led by professionals, in an act of hospitality on the educators' terms. Freire's (1972) distinction between an authoritative and authoritarian educator should mark the boundary that adult educators are obliged to refuse to step beyond to avoid creating a culture of silence, where the educator speaks and parents listen. The LPCE space is open to multiple authorities that situates the educator-educatee relation, the educator and parents on a teacher-student-teacher continuum, with the educator retaining the directive role. Within such a framework, the teaching-learning process generates a high level of dynamism through negotiation.

LPCE's commitment to communality in reflection and action promotes dialogue as a viable pedagogical space. Genuine dialogues reject hierarchy, refuse pedagogical authoritarianism, embrace collectivity and block attempts at reducing parents to mere spectators of professionally-led spectacles. Authentic dialogues committed to liberation and emancipation promote critical consciousness by emphasizing problem-posing, foregrounding the pedagogy of the question, and making critical connections between the immediate need for literacy, personal experiences and the oppressive structures that perpetuate discrimination.

Moving into a situation characterized pedagogically by a dialogical approach may not be easy in the case of marginalized parents, whose realities have been exposed and highlighted in other sections of this paper. When the central issue of parental existence is 'staying alive' (Shiva, 2005), putting food on the table, and establishing stability in a context marked by chronic uncertainty, fluidity and displacement, and where the verticality of state-citizen relations is normalized on behalf of exploitative relations, educators operating within the LPCE vision need to create an emotional environment that allows for conflicting views, tension and contradictory visions of the world. In such a situation, the role of the educator is crucial in managing insecurity, vulnerability and voicelessness. Reclaiming self-respect and self-love cannot be achieved through hollow words of fake appreciation, but through a pedagogical encounter that affirms, valorizes and validates biographies and long-ignored if not forgotten, parental narratives, without tolerating the intolerable or romanticizing parental predispositions and intentions.

LPCE-driven programmes incorporate research into the learning process. Radical participatory action research allows educators to work with parents in research projects that feed into only within the radius of a given project but also in alliance with movements advocating for wider social change. Multiple struggles can come together through a network of LPCEs that help understand the complex nature of hegemony and the multi-layered approach to counter-hegemony. Engaged research, perceived as in-



tegral to LPCE, seeks collectively-driven answers to collectively-posed problems while adding another dimension to participatory democracy in action, democracy by doing — research as pedagogical practice of democracy. Such research reflects aspirational since it serves the world that can be as much as it understands the world that is. Freire (1972) provides us with one possibility for understanding parental engagement as co-researchers in search of self- as well as communal understanding of what he refers to as the thematic universe of a community. Freire's five stages include: specialist encounters with volunteers aimed at mapping and decoding a community space; ongoing reflections on co-investigated findings; creation of cultural circles where themes that emerge from the co-investigation are named and selected for deeper understandings; interdisciplinary study of the themes selected for further, in-depth investigation; and recodification of the studied themes in preparation for dissemination and exchange.

In conclusion, LPCE challenges the concept of serialized, individualized protected and distant leadership, opting, instead, for shared leadership. The unidirectional dynamic of leader and led is transformed by the LPCE process into a pedagogical relationship that foregrounds mutual understanding, cognitive justice, co-initiating and facilitation of purposeful learning; a pedagogical site where parents are transiting into leadership position by virtue of the fact that they are now co-responsible for education and engaged in reciprocal leadership where the way forward is heavily reliant on interdependence rather than exclusive dependence on expert directionality, and where the adult educator is open to multiple contributions and interested in developing the leadership skills, read participative skills, of parents. Leadership within the LPCE space is organic, tied to an ongoing process of consciousness-building, a process which is never neutral, objective or apolitical, and firmly embedded within broad conceptions of a just world and emancipatory communities.

## 8. Conclusion: Parents as makers of history in a world that is not

This paper invites us to reimagine parents as history makers and parenthood as a political space where parents and adult educators collaborate in reading and acting on the world that is, with a view to achieving a world that is not. With this adult-education vision leading the parent-adult educator engagement, each encounter becomes a reciprocal moment of mutual transformation.

Similar to the paper's agenda, such parent-educator collaboration in the realm of adult education provides an opportunity for such an educational space to reach out beyond the biological and reflect why so many parents are in crisis and why Covid-19 has hit certain geographies and social groups more than others; why are we experiencing the 'pandemic injustice', a visibly racist and unequal pandemic (Sanchez in Katu, Sanchez & Camargo, 2022).

The inconclusiveness and transitionality of the scientific knowledge produced in response to the unpredictable nature of Covid-19 brings to the fore the importance of critical engagement with knowledge, informed by the understanding that there is no knowledge that is finite, no knowledge on which one can build dogmas, and that intuitive and experiential knowledge, knowledge borne out of the quotidian, is worth exploring and engaging with. It is through such an understanding of knowledge production, and through the acknowledgement of cognitive justice as an indispensable liberatory predisposition, that adult education space can contribute to collaborative history making and, therefore, to a world that can be.

Reconnecting the disconnected, reclaiming the appetite for collectivity and communality, reimagining education beyond employability, revisioning disadvantage and vulnerability, reassessing knowledge production, and revisualising the 'other' beyond assistentialism, constitute some of the challenges that need to be confronted in the process of building an adult-education space that truly enables 'disadvantaged parents' to become protagonists in recovering their lost humanity, in reclaiming their dignity and in shedding off their traditional role as spectators of a spectacle that immerses them in the culture of inferiority and passivity.

In the struggle to re-exist (Katu, Sanchez & Camargo, 2022), being with and in the world constitutes a major departure from a media-driven approach to superficially know about the world. In viral times, immersion in the world is defined by the realization that 'while the virus is democratic the pandemic is unequal' (Katu et al., 2022). That fundamental realization should set the tone for an adult education process that is intended to unveil social injustices, uncover asymmetrical social relations, and name in-

equities and oppressions. A deep realization that stems from total immersion in the world constitutes the first major act of resistance before parents reclaim their words as well as their capacity to act.

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