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Curriculum on Fire: Fahrenheit 451, the Control and Silencing of Childhood

Currículo em chamas: Fahrenheit 451, o controle e o silenciamento da infância

Currículo en llamas: Fahrenheit 451, el control y el silenciamiento de la infancia

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How to cite: MOLINI, T. S. F.; BOECHAR, G. M. F.; LOUREIRO, R. Currículo em chamas: Fahrenheit 451, o controle e o silenciamento da infância. *Revista Diálogo Educacional*, Curitiba, PUCPRESS, v. 25, n. 87, p. 1978-1992, dez. 2025.
<https://doi.org/10.7213/1981-416X.25.087.DS12EN>

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the political and pedagogical foundations present in Ray Bradbury's dystopian novel Fahrenheit 451 and establish a dialogue between excerpts from the work and contemporary conceptions of curriculum and childhood. From Freire's critical perspective on education, the article discusses how the work denounces an educational model focused on silencing, denying critical thinking, and fostering conformist subjectivities. Drawing on authors such as Paulo Freire (1987), Miguel Arroyo (2013), and Theodor Adorno (2020), the article problematizes the use of school as an instrument of ideological control and the reduction of childhood to a time of capture and early standardization. The article also understands the curriculum not only as a prescriptive instrument of content and competencies, but also as a political territory of dispute. Listening is approached as a pedagogical practice that breaks with adult-centric logic and opens space for the recognition of children as subjects of language, knowledge, and rights.

Keywords: Curriculum. Childhood. Listening. Education. Fahrenheit 451.

Resumo

O presente artigo tem como objetivo analisar os fundamentos político-pedagógicos presentes na obra distópica Fahrenheit 451, de Ray Bradbury, e estabelecer uma interlocução entre os trechos da obra e as concepções contemporâneas de currículo e infância. A partir da perspectiva crítica freiriana da educação, discute-se como a obra denuncia um modelo educacional voltado ao silenciamento, à negação do pensamento crítico e à formação de subjetividades conformistas. Com base em autores como Paulo Freire (1987), Miguel Arroyo (2013), e Theodor Adorno (2020), problematiza-se o uso da escola como instrumento de controle ideológico e a redução da infância a um tempo de captura e normatização precoce. Compreende-se ainda o currículo não apenas como um instrumento prescritivo de conteúdos e competências, mas como território político de disputas. A escuta é abordada como prática pedagógica que rompe com a lógica adultocêntrica e abre espaço para o reconhecimento das crianças como sujeitos de linguagem, saberes e direitos.

Palavras-chave: Currículo. Infância. Escuta. Educação. Fahrenheit 451.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza los fundamentos políticos y pedagógicos presentes en la novela distópica de Ray Bradbury, Fahrenheit 451, y establece un diálogo entre fragmentos de la obra y las concepciones contemporáneas del currículo y la infancia. Desde la perspectiva crítica de Freire sobre la educación, el artículo examina cómo la obra denuncia un modelo educativo centrado en el silenciamiento, la negación del pensamiento crítico y el fomento de subjetividades conformistas. Basándose en autores como Paulo Freire (1987), Miguel Arroyo (2013) y Theodor Adorno (2020), el artículo problematiza el uso de la escuela como instrumento de control ideológico y la reducción de la infancia a un periodo de captura y estandarización precoz. Asimismo, el artículo entiende el currículo no solo como un instrumento prescriptivo de contenidos y competencias, sino también como un territorio político de disputa. La escucha se aborda como una práctica pedagógica que rompe con la lógica adultocéntrica y abre un espacio para el reconocimiento de los niños como sujetos de lenguaje, conocimiento y derechos..

Palabras clave: Currículo. Infancia. Escucha. Educación. Fahrenheit 451.

1. Introduction

This article analyzes the political-pedagogical foundations in Ray Bradbury's dystopian work *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), and establishes a dialogue between the literary narrative and contemporary conceptions of curriculum and childhood. Starting from Freire's critical perspective on education, the text discusses how the work denounces an educational model geared towards silencing, the denial of critical thinking, and the formation of conformist subjectivities. Underpinned by authors such as Paulo Freire (1987, 2020), Miguel Arroyo (2013), and Theodor Adorno (2020), it problematizes the use of school as an instrument of ideological control and the reduction of childhood to a time of capture and premature normalization. For a more focused analysis of the curriculum for childhood and listening, or the lack thereof, we present excerpts from the novel *Fahrenheit 451*, which depicts a dystopian society where books are forbidden and critical thinking is systematically repressed. In this context, formal education is transformed into a tool of domination and conformity, shaping obedient and apathetic subjectivities. As a means of social control, a discourse committed to hatred of books (literature) culminates in the movement of cleansing by fire (burning), promoted by firefighters. They no longer control the fires, but provoke them as a kind of "mission" to save and maintain peace and tranquility in society. The educational system in *Fahrenheit 451* prioritizes superficial entertainment and conformity to the detriment of critical reflection and the construction of ethical and human values. The society portrayed in the book values distraction and alienation instead of promoting true learning and human development.

A qualitative and theoretical-reflective approach was adopted, anchored in the critical-hermeneutic paradigm of educational research. The methodology relies on the bibliographic and dialogical analysis of reference works — *Fahrenheit 451*, by Bradbury, and texts by Freire, Adorno, and Arroyo — understanding them as epistemological devices capable of problematizing the concept of childhood and curricular practices. The analytical path is structured in three movements: (1) critical interpretation of excerpts from the novel, highlighting its educational implications; (2) theoretical articulation between the literary work and references from critical pedagogy; and (3) propositional reflection based on the pedagogy of listening and Brazilian normative documents — BNCC (2017) and DCNEIs (2010) —, aiming to propose a critical and emancipatory curricular horizon for Early Childhood Education. This proactive reflection is understood as the stage in which literary analysis and educational theory meet to construct concrete possibilities for curricular transformation. Grounded in the pedagogy of listening, this reflection proposes shifting the curriculum's focus from transmission to dialogue, from standardization to plurality, and from prescription to experience. Inspired by Paulo Freire, it understands listening as a political and epistemological gesture that inaugurates the encounter between subjects and the collective construction of knowledge. Thus, listening to children means recognizing them not only as recipients of the curriculum, but as co-authors of the educational process.

Thinking about the curriculum from the perspective of childhood requires theoretical and epistemological shifts that challenge the normative, linear, and universalizing logic still dominant in school practices. In the field of curriculum studies, many authors, such as Arroyo (2013), have argued that the curriculum is a political field, traversed by disputes, selections, and silences. Far from being neutral, it carries conceptions of subject, knowledge, and society that operate as technologies of regulation and production of identities. By stating, for example, that the curriculum is a social construction, Tomaz Tadeu da Silva (1999) points to a traditional view that considers the curriculum as a mirror of reality or a simple selection of what is considered the best available knowledge. Instead, he claims that the curriculum is the result of historical, cultural, political, and ideological decisions, that is, it is constructed by subjects and institutions in specific contexts. This means that there is no neutral curriculum; there are always interests, values, and worldviews embedded in curricular choices. Critical theories, such as those by Paulo Freire (1987), have contributed decisively to this change in perspective. They have shown that the curriculum can function as an instrument of social reproduction, but also as a possibility for emancipation and transformation.

In the case of early childhood education, prescriptive curricula often disregard the multiple ways in which children are and exist in the world. The *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação* – LDBEN (Brazil, 1996), states that early childhood education is the first stage of basic education, alongside elementary and secondary education. This means

that it is no longer considered a merely welfare or preparatory stage for formal education, but rather a legitimate and structuring phase of human development: “Early childhood education, the first stage of basic education, aims at the integral development of children up to 5 (five) years of age, in their physical, psychological, intellectual and social aspects, complementing the action of the family and the community” (Brazil, 1996).

The concept of holistic development is central and indicates that early childhood education cannot be limited to cognitive preparation or the anticipation of schooling (Brazil, 2010). Legislation provides for care in aspects such as health, nutrition, safety, language, thought, imagination, social interaction, and the building of bonds. This understanding aligns with contemporary pedagogical approaches that value the child as a subject of rights, powerful and capable of constructing knowledge from the earliest years of life. Educating, in this sense, also means listening attentively and sensitively to who the children are, what they think, feel, express, and desire. It is recognizing that holistic development is only possible when the child is treated with dignity, listened to in their uniqueness, and integrated into educational relationships of affection, care, and meaning.

Listening, in this study, is understood as a fundamental political-pedagogical attitude. This dialogical conception of listening is articulated with the assumptions of Paulo Freire's pedagogy. For Freire (2020), listening is a condition for true dialogue, an encounter between subjects who mutually recognize their unfinished humanity. Listening is, therefore, a practice of love, humility, and hope, which paves the way for the emergence of *unprecedented viable* possibilities — historical possibilities built from collective action and ethical commitment to the transformation of reality.

The concept of the *unprecedented viable* possibilities represents the concrete and achievable possibility of transforming social reality through education. This concept indicates that pedagogical action should be oriented towards the collective construction of new worlds, breaking with oppressive structures and offering learners the chance to lead their own process of emancipation (Freire, 1987).

The fire that destroys

Published during the Cold War (1948-1991), in the immediate aftermath of World War II, Fahrenheit 451 (Bradbury, 1953) metaphorically addresses the hardships of a society dominated by a State of Exception. The book's central argument revisits numerous historical episodes, particularly when, in Germany (1933-1945), the Nazis, upon seizing power, began burning books in public squares. This event was a symbolic and strategic act of cultural repression, serving as a prelude to the horrors perpetrated by the Nazi State. On May 10, 1933, Nazi students and authorities organized public book burnings in several German cities, including in Berlin. This action was guided by the regime's policy of cultural purification, which sought to eliminate ideas it considered dangerous or un-German, attacking Jewish, communist, liberal, and other authors deemed subversive. In Bradbury's novel, books are forbidden and reading is seen as a crime that threatens the maintenance of a state of pseudo-happiness, while access to electronic and image-based productions, materialized in large television screens and acoustic shells, is widely encouraged. Bradbury thus describes a world where books are burned to prevent questioning, and children are educated by screens, which replace critical thinking with ready-made answers. He presents an institutionalized education that prioritizes conformity and suppresses individuality and critical thinking. As citizens are taught to passively accept information without questioning, alienation and ignorance are perpetuated in society as a way of maintaining the status quo. In the society described by Bradbury, the school is represented as an institution aimed at neutralizing consciousness. Teaching is centered on the mechanical transmission of content, repetition without comprehension, and the suppression of questions. This model of education, in Paulo Freire's words (1987), reduces the subject to an empty vessel to be filled with prefabricated content. “The assumptions of this school bench education are based on alienated and alienating narration. That is, there is a perspective of educating for submission, for the belief in a static, well-behaved, compartmentalized reality,

for the vision of a finished, concluded subject” (Streck et al., 2010, p. 134). Bradbury, through fiction, like Paulo Freire, denounces this education and the curriculum it imposes, especially on children:

An hour of TV class, an hour of basketball or baseball or running, another hour of transcription history or painting pictures, and more sports, but do you know, we never ask questions, or at least most don't; they just run the answers at you, bing, bing, bing, and us sitting there for four more hours of film-teacher. That's not social to me at all. It's a lot of funnels and a lot of water poured down the spout and out the bottom, and them telling us it's wine when it's not (Bradbury, 2012, p. 50).

The absence of questions indicates a denial of reflective thinking and the collective construction of knowledge. The school, therefore, loses its formative dimension and becomes an instrument of ideological conformity. Clarisse, the young woman who speaks in the excerpt, is portrayed as a sensitive, reflective, and critical character in the face of the society in which she lives, unlike most people around her. She demonstrates genuine curiosity, a questioning spirit, and a strong sense of individuality. She expresses unease with the way education is structured, denouncing its superficiality and mechanization. Clarisse does not passively accept the imposed discourses and methods; she wants to understand the world, ask questions, and engage in dialogue. Bradbury's critique of education manifests the fear of a society where critical thinking is replaced by ready-made answers, where education does not liberate but lulls to sleep. Clarisse, as a character, functions as a mirror of silenced childhood, but also as a glimmer of hope: she is still young enough to question, resist, and see that the wine offered by the educational system is, in fact, just water, that is, symbolic emptiness. This shows her as a figure of resistance within the narrative, one that has not yet been completely captured by the conformism of dystopian society.

This frighteningly relevant metaphor invites us to reflect: what curricula have been produced for (and with) childhoods in our society? The curriculum in *Fahrenheit 451* reflects an authoritarian social project. Knowledge is carefully selected and manipulated to avoid conflict, dissent, and critical thinking. Plurality is replaced by artificial uniformity.

As in the novel, school curricula have historically been conceived as devices for controlling and normalizing educational experiences. To take the curriculum as it is given, technical and free from dispute, is precisely to reproduce a process of silent domination. What is considered the official curriculum today is the result of historical disputes in which certain knowledge and subjects were privileged, while others were silenced or excluded. By not problematizing the sociopolitical origin of the curriculum, there is a risk of legitimizing mystifications, that is, naturalizations that conceal the historical mechanisms of exclusion and control (Goodson, 2012).

Organized according to prescriptive logics, curricula still operate today in an attempt to mold subjects, fixing ways of learning, thinking, and acting. In the case of early childhood education, this curricular structure often presents itself in an even more restrictive way, constructing homogeneous images of childhood and child development, disregarding the cultural, social, affective, and subjective diversity of the children who inhabit educational contexts. This perspective, anchored in adult-centric and technocratic models, tends to silence children's voices and reduce the child to an object of teaching and control.

Arroyo (2013) denounces the negative connotation that the word *in-fans* carries — “without speech” — which refers to the exclusion of the child as a subject of knowledge, opinions, and rights. When this view is internalized in school spaces, the curriculum tends to be designed for children, and not with children. This reinforces the logic in which the adult is the center of attention, the reference for all things, and the source of all knowledge. Thus, the educator transmits ready-made content, underestimating the child's capacity for thought, language, and creation.

The social view is quite negative – either through negation, deficiency, or incompleteness. The term “in-fans,” meaning without speech, without verbs, without thought, has a long history and deep roots in social culture. All children are categorized in leveling imaginaries: they understand nothing, their speech and actions point to childishness, a term referring to childhood and loaded with negativity, puerile ways; because children do not yet

have clear features, defined identities, they have not matured; they are immature. They are at the beginning of life, of the long journey (Arroyo, 2013, p. 197).

Arroyo (2013) mentions that all children are categorized in leveling imaginaries, as if they were all equal in their lack and need for maturation. This homogenization of childhoods makes invisible the singularities of ethnic-racial origin, gender, class, and culture. The chronological perspective, which often underestimates the present of childhood in the name of what it will still be, projects childhood always into the future, disregarding the present as a time full of meaningful experiences.

In the early childhood education curriculum, this manifests itself when, for example, literacy is brought forward or formal school content is imposed prematurely. A curriculum committed to childhood values the children's own times and rhythms, organizing experiences that stem from daily life, play, listening, and interactions. A democratic curriculum must break with this homogenization, promoting the recognition of multiple childhoods and ensuring respect for differences. This means considering the children's cultural contexts, their knowledge, their times, their experiences of the world, and their own ways of being and existing (Brazil, 2010).

The Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil (DCNEIs, 2010) and the Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC, 2017) represent significant advances in recognizing the child as a historical, social, and rights-bearing subject, ensuring the principle of the inseparability of education and care, and the centrality of play, listening, and coexistence in formative processes. This vision is close to the pedagogy of listening, which proposes embracing multiple forms of language and children's expression. However, these documents also reveal tensions and ambiguities: while affirming the plurality of childhoods, they maintain a structure based on measurable competencies and skills, which can lead to the technicization of teaching and the naturalization of standardized practices. In Freirean words, this is a veiled form of school bench education, in which listening and dialogue are replaced by prescriptions and goals. Thus, a critical reading of the BNCC and the DCNEIs invites a reinterpretation of their normative statements as political forces, transforming them into projects of resistance and emancipation. Such a movement demands a pedagogical stance that rejects neutrality and recognizes the curriculum as a territory of dispute, listening, and collective creation. In this context, the Brazilian normative documents, BNCC (2017) and DCNEIs (2010), are taken not as limits, but as starting points for a curricular reinvention. Both affirm fundamental principles for early childhood education: respect for differences, the inseparability of care and education, children's protagonism, and the recognition of the child as a historical subject, a subject of culture and rights. However, these principles are only realized when they are traversed by pedagogical practices based on listening, sensitive observation, and openness to the unpredictable aspects of daily educational life.

The pedagogy of listening, in this sense, offers theoretical and methodological horizon capable of resignifying regulatory devices. Instead of mechanically applying prescribed skills and abilities, the educator understands them in dialogue with the context, with the experiences, and with the languages of the children. Listening becomes an instrument of emergent planning, which values the process over the product, the journey over the result. It is a gesture that opposes the technocratic logic and reaffirms the ethical and political role of teaching as a transformative action.

Thus, the critical and emancipatory curricular horizon proposed here arises from the articulation between legal principles and an ethical-political commitment to living and concrete childhood. This perspective demands that curricula become living experiences, open to unpredictability and creation. Listening, dialogue, and play become structuring axes of a pedagogical practice that recognizes the value of small narratives, everyday gestures, and the multiple languages of childhood. This theoretical proposal does not seek to replace official documents, but to re-enchant them with human, poetic, and political meaning, replacing early childhood education at the center of a pedagogy that emancipates and humanizes.

In Fahrenheit 451, Bradbury denounces the intention to isolate children from family and cultural influences that could provoke a critical view of reality. This is a denial of childhood as a time of symbolic autonomy and sensitive experience. He exposes the project of capturing childhood from birth as a way to suppress the capacity to question,

imagine, and reinvent the world, anticipating a schooling that, far from emancipating, only domesticates: “The home environment can undo a lot you try to do at school. That’s why we’ve lowered the kindergarten age year after year until now we’re almost snatching them from the cradle.” (Bradbury, 2012, pp. 83-84).

Theodor Adorno (2020) emphasizes the centrality of early childhood as a decisive moment in the formation of consciousness, which directly relates to the project of early control described in Bradbury's work. By suppressing this stage of autonomous symbolic development, the society of Fahrenheit 451 prevents the constitution of critical subjects. The author highlights: “The importance of early childhood education, which, so to speak, for inferior behavior, for the consciousness of reality, places decisions in this early childhood that in past societies were possibly made unconsciously in a correct way” (Adorno, 2020, p. 158).

Adorno further reinforces the importance of an education that values, from an early age, both critical thinking and the free exercise of imagination and children's spontaneity. In contrast, the educational model portrayed in the dystopia negates both dimensions: consciousness is repressed and spontaneity is domesticated: “I think it is necessary that, from the beginning in early childhood education, the process of conscientization be developed in parallel with the process of promoting spontaneity” (Adorno, 2020, p. 160).

According to Adorno (2020), childhood possesses essential formative potential for human and democratic development, serving as the phase in which children develop their experiences, playfulness, creativity, dreams, and imagination. These experiences are fundamental for the formation of critical subjects capable of resisting the influences of consumer society and the culture industry.

Thus, childhood should be understood as a space of potential that contributes to emancipation and resistance to forms of social domination. He proposes a profound critique of the function of education in contexts of social conformity and reveals a concern about the effects of forced adaptation on children and young people. Adorno (2020) emphasizes that the fundamental task of education should not be to strengthen adaptation, but rather to strengthen resistance. He also denounces the mechanisms of naturalization of the status quo and argues that education should promote autonomy, critical thinking, and the rejection of conformity.

By stating that there is an “overvalued realism” among children and young people, which he more precisely qualifies as “pseudorealism”, Adorno (2020) denounces a type of premature and artificial maturity, resulting from the imposition of a hostile world on developing individuals. This emotional precocity, far from representing healthy development, would be a “scar,” that is, the mark of a painful process of denial of childhood and spontaneity. This “pseudorealism” manifests itself, for example, when children are exposed to adult pressures, deprived of the right to play, to create, and to question, being led to believe that the world is, and should be, only as it is — immutable, competitive, hierarchical.

Education through the family, insofar as it is conscious, and through school and university, would, in this moment of omnipresent conformism, have much more the task of strengthening resistance than strengthening adaptation. If I can believe my observations, I would even suppose that among young people, and especially among children, there is something like an overvalued realism—perhaps the correct term would be: pseudorealism—that resembles a scar. Because the adaptation process is so disproportionately forced by the entire context in which people live, they need to impose adaptation on themselves in a painful way, exaggerating realism in relation to themselves and, in Freud's terms, identifying with the aggressor. The critique of this overvalued realism seems to me to be one of the most decisive educational tasks, to be implemented, however, in early childhood (Adorno, 2020, p. 157).

Adorno (2020) draws on Freudian psychoanalysis to claim that, faced with the symbolic and material violence of the social world, children internalize the values of the aggressor as a form of protection and belonging. This psychic process is denominated as “identification with the aggressor” (Freud, 2006) — a form of defense in which the subject assimilates the oppressive power in an attempt not to be annihilated by it. In the educational field, this translates into the uncritical acceptance of school norms, obedience as an absolute virtue, the erasure of differences, and the

reproduction of authority without questioning. The curriculum, in this context, serves as a vehicle for forced adaptation if it is not critically considered.

The implication that formal education is not neutral but rather deeply rooted in the ideologies and values of the society that promotes it, establishes coherence between educational content and social values. Coherence with prevailing values can be a way of maintaining the status quo, while a critical education would seek to promote intellectual autonomy and the capacity of individuals to question and transform the society they live in. Thinking of education as a space of resistance is a radical gesture. This implies, as Adorno (2020) proposes, a critique of the forms of subjectivation forced by adaptive logic and the construction of pedagogical practices that restore to childhood the right to imagine, question, feel, and transform.

The formulation of educational content is also a political and cultural process, influenced by various social actors, such as governments, economic groups, social movements, and even international organizations. Therefore, the definition of school curricula reflects not only the prevailing values in an abstract way, but also the disputes and tensions surrounding which values should be promoted. Hence, education becomes a fundamental instrument in shaping mindsets that meet the demands and interests of the current society.

According to Arroyo (2013), childhood is a contested social and political period: between those who see the child as a subject of rights, creative and powerful, and those who see them as an incomplete being, to be molded according to the needs of the adult world. A curriculum that does not listen to children, that imposes standardized practices and ignores their cultures and knowledge, tends to reinforce social inequalities and normalize existing power relations, molding bodies and subjectivities to fit into adult-centric, productivist, and neoliberal logics.

If not critically reflected upon, the curriculum functions as a mechanism for reproducing interests, preparing children to occupy subordinate places in the social fabric (Arroyo, 2013). By prioritizing assessable competencies, normative behaviors, and standardized performance goals, preschool may neglect the development of critical, creative, and autonomous individuals, reinforcing the status quo and denying the right to a full childhood.

[...] the field of curricula and pedagogical proposals for early childhood education will be, or always have been, tense and contested. Childhood has always been a contested time in terms of how it is thought about and treated. Every pedagogical proposal for childhood will be political because it is a dispute over rights (Arroyo, 2013, p. 211).

Arroyo (2013, p. 211) states that "childhood has always been a contested time in terms of how it is thought about and treated." In Fahrenheit 451, this dispute has already been won by the authoritarian logic of the State: childhood has been captured and molded to prevent dissenting thought, and children are schooled not to think, not to question, not to remember, not to dream. The school fulfills its role within a broader mechanism of ideological control: it prevents the emergence of conscious citizens, delegitimizes memory, devalues books, and promotes the immediate consumption of information without reflection. It is the most extreme form of an authoritarian curriculum, which serves as a tool for cultural and political domination.

The dialogue based on Adorno, Arroyo, and Fahrenheit 451 offers us a critical key to thinking about the early childhood education curriculum today. They invite us to resist the temptation of a technocratic, utilitarian, and standardized schooling — one that prepares the child to repeat, obey, and fit in. The curriculum in this educational model is the ultimate expression of a project of silencing and conformity.

Like Adorno, Bradbury denounces the pedagogy of adaptation, which eliminates the possibility of critical thinking from childhood and operates as a mechanism for reproducing a dominant power. He shows how the curriculum can be manipulated to produce docile subjects, incapable of perceiving or reacting to oppression. In the society of Fahrenheit 451, books are forbidden not only for their content, but because they represent the possibility of questioning and inner freedom.

The school contributes to this logic by neutralizing childhood, preventing children from engaging with complex, ambiguous, and challenging ideas. Instead, it offers an "easy," superficial, and distraction-oriented curriculum, which

also reveals the role of media and technology in shaping individuals. Although fictional, the scenario within Fahrenheit 451 resonates with real practices that reduce the role of the school to a control device. Censorship of content, curricular standardization, the emptying of the humanities, and the technocratization of education are persistent trends.

Childhood, in turn, is often subjected to a schooling that ignores play, listening, and free expression as central elements of development. Fahrenheit 451 allows us to understand that the curriculum, far from being merely a set of contents, is a field of political and subjective dispute. When instrumentalized for the maintenance of dominant power, it silences children and transforms the school into a space of training.

The fire that illuminates

Fahrenheit 451 is not just a dystopia about book censorship: it is a powerful critique of an educational model that denies humanity, avoids conflict, and eliminates the power of questioning. In contrast, education as a practice of freedom proposes a curriculum that listens to childhood, values critical thinking, and builds historical subjects capable of reading and transforming the world.

The novel Fahrenheit 451 serves as a powerful political and educational allegory, revealing the risks of an authoritarian system that, by controlling the means of access to information and the process of forming critical consciousness, molds conformist and apathetic subjectivities. Formal education is replaced by fragmented, technical, and uncritical instruction, which serves only to maintain the established social order and avoid confrontation with diversity of thought. This is a school bench education, in the terms of Paulo Freire (1987), in which the subject is not considered as an unfinished and autonomous being, but as a repository of manipulated information. The pedagogy prevalent in the work is profoundly ideological: it molds a conformist population incapable of questioning reality. Mass media and technologies are instruments of alienation—"the talking walls," for example, anesthetize emotions and replace human relationships with artificial interactions. The school, in turn, is structured to avoid debate, discourage reading, and encourage standardized and practical responses. Fahrenheit 451 warns us that the destruction of the book is only the surface of a much deeper project: the destruction of critical consciousness.

Ray Bradbury denounces an education based on obedience, homogenization, and standardization. This pedagogical model goes against contemporary conceptions that understand the curriculum as a contested territory (Arroyo, 2013), and childhood as a time for listening, imagination, and active participation in the world. If, in the dystopia of Fahrenheit 451, the curriculum is reduced to a mechanism of control, from a critical perspective, it should be a space of resistance and reinvention, a field open to dialogue between knowledge, cultures, and histories, especially those of the diverse and plural childhoods that inhabit the school.

Fahrenheit 451 presents an extreme portrait of silencing and alienation, where the school is transformed into an apparatus of conformity and the curriculum into a structure of obedience. It is precisely in the opposite of this—listening to children—that a powerful form of resistance and curricular reinvention resides. Listening, in the context of Early Childhood Education, is not merely an affectionate or sensitive attitude, but an ethical, political, and pedagogical stance that subverts the instrumentalized logic of education. It is affirming the child as a subject of language, rights, and cultural production, breaking with the idea of childhood as a simple preparatory phase for adult life. Active and responsive listening to children shifts the focus of the curriculum: from the transmission of normative content to the construction of shared experiences of meaning. Listening to children is, in this context, an act of resistance because it destabilizes the verticality of pedagogical relationships, de-automatizes school times and spaces, and reconfigures the very way we understand knowledge. Listening, as Paulo Freire points out, is an ethical gesture of encounter with the other, an act of openness to dialogue, to sensitive listening, and to the reinvention of the meanings of education: "The educator who listens learns the difficult lesson of transforming his discourse, sometimes necessary, to the student, into a conversation with him (Freire, 2012, p. 111)."

In the face of the authoritarian and silencing pedagogical model portrayed in Fahrenheit 451, listening emerges as a political and pedagogical gesture capable of breaking with the logic of domestication. In the dystopian society constructed by Ray Bradbury, silence is not the absence of sound, but the absence of dialogue. Human interactions are shallow, automated, and guided by a model of functionality and productivity that makes attention to the other impossible. In this scenario, listening, which is understood as an ethical disposition to welcome, be affected by, and consider what the other has to say, becomes a subversive gesture. Listening, in this sense, is not merely accepting words, but recognizing the other as a subject of rights, knowledge, and experiences.

You're not like the others. I've seen a few; I know. When I talk, you look at me. When I said something about the moon, you looked at the moon, last night. The others would never do that. The others would walk off and leave me talking. Or threaten me (Bradbury, 2012, p. 43).

When Clarisse says that he — Guy Montag¹ — looked at the moon after she mentioned it, she is naming something that goes beyond cordiality or casual interest: it is a sensitive listening that considers not only the content of the speech, but the sensitive world it evokes. Listening, in this context, is part of a shared experience. It is refusing the isolation imposed by the culture of spectacle and speed that characterizes that society. It is affirming presence, contemplation, and connection, aspects systematically excluded from the educational daily life presented in the novel. In this sense, listening is not only a relational virtue, but a fissure in the prevailing order. By listening to Clarisse, Montag begins to see the world through different perspectives. He initiates a process of deconstructing the certainties imposed by the dominant ideology. This shows that listening, contrary to what it appears to be — passive, docile — is a profound political act: it destabilizes, provokes, and decenters the subject from their alienated condition.

In the field of education, listening breaks with the school bench model of education criticized by Paulo Freire (1987), the one based on the unilateral speech of the educator, the imposition of content, and the denial of the learner's experience. In Fahrenheit 451, this model is radicalized to the point of suppressing even the desire to ask questions. Listening, therefore, symbolizes the recovery of dialogue, curiosity, and the joint construction of knowledge. By listening to Clarisse, a curious, observant young woman connected to the sensible world, Montag connects with what society tried to erase: independent thought, imagination, and feeling. Through listening, he becomes a subject in the process of de-alienation. Thus, listening is not merely a rupture in the way of relating; it is the key that initiates the transformation of a conformist subject into a critical subject.

When Clarice recognizes in Montag someone who truly listens to her, she is naming a way of relating that breaks with the relational pattern of her society: inattention, emotional detachment, haste, and fear of genuine human contact. In the universe of Fahrenheit 451, where bonds have been replaced by screens and words by commands, listening to someone genuinely is equivalent to disobeying. Listening, therefore, establishes a space for ethical and political insurgency. It re-humanizes. It interrupts the cycle of institutionalized loneliness and paves the way for the construction of more just and affectionate educational relationships.

We can claim that Montag's gesture in listening to Clarisse anticipates another possibility for curriculum — a curriculum born from dialogue, from attention to the world of the other, from a living presence in the encounter. This is the pedagogy of listening, a pedagogy that, instead of shaping subjectivities for obedience, opens space for the joint creation of meanings, for the recognition of otherness, and for the exercise of freedom. Listening inaugurates another ethics of education, an ethics of presence, attention, and connection. Paulo Freire already stated that "no one educates anyone, no one educates themselves alone, men educate themselves in communion" (Freire, 1987, p. 39). Listening is the condition of this communion, it is Educate with, not for or about. Thus, it is an act of encounter, a collective

¹ **Guy Montag** is the protagonist of the novel Fahrenheit 451. He is a "firefighter" but contrary to what the word suggests in the real world, his job is not to put out fires, but to start them. He burns books, considered dangerous and subversive by the dystopian society he lives in. Montag is, therefore, initially an agent of the authoritarian system that represses critical thinking and promotes collective alienation through symbolic control and censorship of knowledge.

construction mediated by concrete reality. It is in this process that subjects become humanized, problematize the world, and construct knowledge as praxis, transformative action and reflection. Educating becomes a commitment to the other and to the world, an ethical, political, and profoundly emancipatory experience.

Listening in curricular practices for Early Childhood Education

The distinction between hearing and listening directly relates to Freire's vision of true dialogue. Listening is not merely capturing sounds or words, but being open to the presence of the other, with humility and a willingness to learn. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1987), Freire emphasizes that authentic dialogue only takes place between subjects open to the world and to others; listening, therefore, is a condition for encounter, affection, and recognition of the other as a subject. True listening requires humility; only those who open themselves with respect to what the other has to say are truly ready for dialogue (Freire, 2020). Listening is thus a gesture that goes beyond linguistic understanding, it is welcoming the other, weaving experiences from listening, understanding that education must be born from the encounter between subjects who mutually recognize their incompleteness.

Listening, in this way, presents itself as a movement that intertwines with the possibility of liberation. Freire (1987) further emphasizes that educating is an act of liberating oneself and liberating the other, through awareness (criticism), which requires listening deeply to the life experiences, knowledge, and contexts of the learners.

In the field of Early Childhood Education, this perspective has important implications: liberating childhood does not mean we should teach earlier, but rather recognizing children as subjects of knowledge, as valid interlocutors in the educational process. Listening to them means breaking with the silence imposed by adultcentrism, with the logic of childhood as deficit or future, and reaffirming their right to the present. Understanding that subjects are always under construction, and that childhood, as a multiple, fluid, and culturally situated field, demands plural and contextual listening. Therefore, listening to childhoods also means recognizing their differences and specificities, listening to the diverse ways of being, existing, feeling, playing, and learning. This listening needs to be daily, sensitive, and reflective, incorporated into teaching practice as a constant gesture of research and care.

The idea is that in everyday life, the verbs "to listen" and "to liberate" are lived. From this experience, possibilities emerge when teaching practice is reflective, sensitive, and committed to transformation. Listening to children is therefore a political and pedagogical commitment to building a more just, sensitive, and democratic world. The pedagogy of listening proposes a new ethic for pedagogical practice, based on the recognition of the child as a subject of rights, a producer of culture and meaning. Listening to childhood is recognizing its power of invention, thought, and protagonism. It is an educational approach that recognizes listening as a fundamental political, ethical, and aesthetic act in the pedagogical relationship, especially with children. It breaks with authoritarian and vertical models of teaching that have historically silenced subjects, especially children, in the processes of learning and curriculum construction.

Loris Malaguzzi, creator of the Reggio Emilia approach in Italy after World War II, advocates for the child as a protagonist, competent, powerful, and a producer of culture. He emphasizes that listening is a tool for understanding the hundred languages of the child, their multiple forms of expression (Edwards et al., 1999). Like Malaguzzi, Carla Rinaldi, one of the main representatives of the Reggio Emilia pedagogical approach and who worked with Malaguzzi, expresses the foundations of the pedagogy of listening and its radicalism in relation to educational models centered on the transmission of content and the imposition of ready-made answers:

We are talking about an approach based on listening rather than talking, in which doubt and fascination are welcome factors, along with scientific investigation and the deductive detective method. It is an approach in which the importance of the unexpected and the possible is recognized, an approach in which educators know how to "waste" time or, better yet, know how to give children all the time they need. It is an approach that protects originality and subjectivity without creating isolation for the individual, and offers children the possibility of confronting special situations and problems as members of small groups of peers. This approach requires adults —

both teachers and parents — to offer themselves as role models to whom children can (and want to) turn. The task of these people is not simply to satisfy or answer questions, but instead to help children discover answers and, more importantly, to help them ask themselves relevant questions (Rinaldi, 1999, p. 114).

Learning is conceived as an investigative experience, not as a reproduction of established truths. Doubt and wonder are welcomed, not repressed, breaking with school bench models of education centered on absolute certainties and student passivity. Instead of teaching focused on content and correct answers, a pedagogy is proposed that values questioning as an act of thought and autonomy. Teaching, here, is not about transferring knowledge, but about arousing questions, nurturing the desire to know. The education envisioned by Carla Rinaldi, by protecting subjectivity, valuing the child's time, cultivating listening and investigation, is fertile ground for the materialization of Freire's concept of the "*unprecedented viable*". Both perspectives break with determinism and the prescriptive curriculum, and bet on education as a practice of freedom, capable of transforming the child from an object into the subject of their own history. In Rinaldi's view, listening is an ethical, aesthetic, and political act; in Freire's view, it is a foundational gesture of dialogue and awareness. Thus, both conceptions converge in defending a pedagogy that recognizes learning as a living, relational, and creative process.

The expression "*unprecedented viable*," coined by Paulo Freire (1987), is one of the most powerful formulations of his liberating pedagogy. It relies on the creation of the new through listening, critical reading of reality, and collective action. It is unprecedented because it breaks with what is already given, the established, the repeated. And it is viable because it emerges from the concrete conditions of life and human relations; it is not a utopia detached from reality, but a radical hope rooted in everyday life.

In early childhood education, the *unprecedented viable* reveals itself with particular force, precisely because children, in their imaginative power, in their own ways of narrating and inhabiting the world, constantly challenge the adult logic of control and predictability. When the school opens itself to listen to children, it engages in dialogue with the possibility of constructing unprecedented meanings, not only for the curriculum, but for life in the community itself. When considered in dialogue with the curriculum, the *unprecedented viable* points to a dynamic and dialogical conception of it, which distances itself from the traditional and rigid curriculum, marked by the uncritical reproduction of content.

The notion of learning as experience (Larrosa, 2002; 2018) radically shifts the modern conception of teaching centered on the transmission and accumulation of information. Experience, the author advocates, is not something that the subject "has," but something that "happens to them," that traverses and transforms them, implying affect, sensitivity, and time. In this sense, learning is living a journey: an event that suspends routine, opens thought to others, and produces subjectivity. Experience is, therefore, an act of listening and affectation, an openness to otherness that destabilizes already established knowledge. From this understanding, learning as experience becomes the foundation of an education that listens and welcomes uncertainty as part of knowing. The pedagogy of listening, inspired by Loris Malaguzzi and Carla Rinaldi, translates this ethical stance: listening is being available to the unforeseen, to what children bring as novelty and invention. Rinaldi (1999) emphasizes that listening is not just a method, but a form of knowledge that recognizes the child as a subject of a hundred languages—creative, critical, and capable of theorizing about the world. In this context, the act of learning is always investigative, situated between enchantment and doubt, and never reproductive. Experience, therefore, is the genesis of creation, a space-time when the possible announces itself.

It is at this point that the concept of the "*unprecedented viable*", developed by Paulo Freire (1987), finds its profound correspondence. The *unprecedented viable* designates the historical horizon of possibility, the transformative power that arises from the contradictions of the present and feeds on active hope (to hope). For Freire, educational action is not limited to the transmission of content, but constitutes praxis, action and reflection on the world to transform it. The conceptual bridge between Larrosa and Freire is established in the understanding that all authentic learning is an experience of creating the new, and that every *unprecedented viable* arises from lived and shared experience. While Larrosa emphasizes the existential and aesthetic dimension of learning, the knowledge that shapes

us, Freire accentuates its ethical and political dimension, the knowledge that emancipates us. Together, these perspectives underpin a pedagogy that is simultaneously aesthetic and political, sensitive and transformative. In other words, experience is the place where the unprecedented becomes viable. When the subject is affected by something that challenges them, they are called upon to reinterpret the world and act upon it. This movement of interpretation and action is Freire's own gesture of conscientization. The *unprecedented viable*, therefore, does not arise from an abstract ideal, but from the encounter between subjective experience and objective reality, mediated by critical reflection and listening to the other.

Childhood, from a critical perspective, is a field of unprecedented viable potentialities, where the creativity, imagination, and protagonism of children must be respected and fostered. The intersection between the *unprecedented and the viable*, the curriculum, and childhood configures a pedagogical project that bets on social transformation through a dialogical, inclusive, and creative education. The curriculum, in this sense, should be conceived as a collective praxis that incorporates the voices of children and aims at building new possibilities for living and learning. The pedagogy of listening, by recognizing and legitimizing its multiple forms of expression, creates the conditions for the childhood experience to become unprecedented and viable, into new ways of thinking, feeling, and living in community. In this horizon, the school ceases to be a space of training and becomes a space of collective invention, where the curriculum is co-authored and not prescribed. The curriculum as experience (Larrosa, 2018) and the curriculum as liberating praxis (Freire, 1987) thus converge in a critical proposal for Early Childhood Education: a curriculum that is built through dialogue, listening, and experience; a living curriculum that reinvents itself by welcoming the voices and gestures of children. This conception breaks with linear time and rationalist control, establishing a temporality of encounter: the time of listening, playing, and creating.

A sensitive listening to a seemingly simple question such as one asked by a child, "Why does the wind move the trees but not carry away the ground?" can trigger a powerful curricular movement, based on collective investigation, interdisciplinarity, and enchantment with the world. By welcoming the question as a starting point, the educator sets aside closed planning to open space for the construction of a project that involves science, literature, sensory experiences, and interactions with the community. In this gesture, the curriculum becomes a place of research, imagination, and the production of shared meanings, where knowledge is not transmitted but co-constructed with the children.

Another example is recognizing that children's narratives can also reveal migratory experiences, longing, and a sense of belonging that often go unnoticed in the daily school routine. By listening to these stories, the school opens itself to the creation of spaces where objects, songs, photographs, and accounts brought by children and their families compose a curriculum that recognizes and values cultural diversity. These practices prevent childhoods to being treated as homogeneous and to begin being understood in their plurality, promoting belonging and listening as ethical principles of education. When listening extends to the political participation of children in school life, transformative practices can emerge. Listening thus becomes the foundation for fairer, more horizontal educational practices committed to civic education from the earliest years of life.

The educational system in Fahrenheit 451 promotes alienation and the breakdown of social bonds. Individuals live in isolation, disinterested in one another, deprived of meaningful interaction. Schools encourage forgetfulness and consumption, not thought. Childhood is treated as a threat to order and therefore must be silenced. In contrast to this model, the pedagogical approach advocated by Carla Rinaldi proposes a school where listening replaces command, and doubt has a privileged place in the educational process. She affirms the importance of small groups of peers as spaces for collaboration, listening, and collective thinking. She makes a provocative statement pointing to the need to restore to childhood the right to time for listening, contemplation, experience, and play. This qualitative time aligns with the conception of education as an act of hope, where the *unprecedented viable* emerges not from haste, but from attentive listening and presence in the other's time (Freire, 1987).

In this context, thinking about the curriculum as an emancipatory practice requires breaking with its traditional conception, understood as a list of contents to be transmitted and evaluated in a uniform and hierarchical way. The curriculum needs to be understood as a living, historical, political, and ethical experience, built from the realities, dreams, and voices of the subjects involved in the educational process. The emancipatory curriculum not only transmits knowledge but creates possibilities for being more, opening paths to the *unprecedented viable*.

Conclusion: Listening to resist and transform

Listening, as a political-pedagogical practice, is a radical counterpoint to the logic of control, standardization, and homogenization that permeate educational models such as the one present in the society described in Fahrenheit 451. When we truly listen to children, we challenge the curricular apparatus that have silenced them. By opening ourselves to what they say, feel, create, and ask, we illuminate curricular possibilities that do not serve conformity, but the invention of other possible worlds. In an educational scenario marked by setbacks, threats to teacher freedom, and attempts to depoliticize education, listening to children is an act of resistance and reinvention. It is to ignite another kind of fire, not one that consumes books, dreams, and questions, but one that illuminates unique trajectories, warms human relationships, and keeps alive the hope of a school made with and for childhood.

The reflections on the silencing of childhoods and the project of conformity present in Fahrenheit 451 find a worrying echo in many contemporary curricular practices, which, although distant from an explicitly dystopian regime, reproduce, through other means, logics of exclusion of listening, participation, and children's authorship. The analysis of Bradbury's novel allows us to identify the dangers of a schooling committed to standardization and the erasure of subjectivities. The metaphor of the fire that destroys, used to denounce the ideological control exercised by the State, offers us a powerful key to understanding contemporary curricular practices that often still insist on shaping childhoods according to utilitarian and authoritarian adult-centric logics. Despite legal and pedagogical advances affirming the child as a historical and active subject, daily practice planning is still frequently centered on the adult, focusing on the anticipation of literacy, inflexible routines, and standardized assessments. In this scenario, listening to the child becomes secondary or even disposable. Schools that organize children's days in a compartmentalized and accelerated way, with rigid schedules and little room for choices and explorations, applying diagnoses and reports that measure the child based on adult criteria, disregarding their own ways of expressing themselves and developing, are many of the contemporary curricular practices that may be reproducing, albeit in a disguised form, a project of conformity that is close to that envisioned by Bradbury.

Given this scenario, listening to children emerges as a political-pedagogical attitude capable of subverting the curriculum as an instrument of conformity. Listening is, in this sense, an act of ethical and epistemological resistance. It is recognizing the child as a subject of knowledge, rights, and culture. It is enabling the construction of curricula that not only speak about childhoods but are built with them, based on their questions, narratives, experiences, and ways of being in the world. The intersection between learning as experience and the *unprecedented viable* constitutes the epistemological core of the pedagogy of listening: a pedagogy that transforms the everyday into a space of experience and the possible into an event. It is about thinking of the curriculum as a passage between the lived and the dreamed, between what is and what can become; a curriculum that, instead of extinguishing the fire of thought, keeps it burning as fire that emancipates.

Pedagogical actions grounded in listening, such as group discussions, emergent projects, reorganization of time and space, and the effective participation of children, not only break with the prescriptive logic of the school bench model of education, but also illuminate possible paths toward a democratic, inventive, and diversity-sensitive curriculum. Listening, therefore, becomes the fire that illuminates and warms pedagogical practices committed to social transformation, the dignity of childhood, and the construction of *unprecedented viable* opportunities. In times of advancing technocratic discourses, control by results, and the silencing of children's voices, insisting on listening as the

central axis of the curriculum is to reaffirm education's commitment to freedom, creativity, and emancipation. The challenge is set: either we repeat the dystopia of an education modeled on Fahrenheit 451, or we dare to invent other ways of being with children, of building knowledge, and of democratically inhabiting the school.

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Editor Responsável: Alboni Marisa Dudeque Pianovski Vieira

Recebido/Received: 20.07.2025 / 07.20.2025

Aprovado/Approved: 03.11.2025 / 11.03.2025