

Entry

Democracy and the Pedagogy of the Possible in Schools

Stelios Pantazidis 

Lab of Sociology of Education, Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Thessaly,
38221 Volos, Greece; spantazidis@uth.gr

Definition

The terms democracy and the pedagogy of the possible name an approach imagining schools as sites where more just, inclusive and participatory collective life can be practised, particularly in early childhood. The entry brings three traditions into dialogue. (a) Critical pedagogy, particularly in its post-structuralist, Foucauldian, and post-Marxist readings, engages with Rancièrian critiques of pedagogical mastery and offers a vocabulary for examining how power, knowledge, subjectivity, and hegemony are produced and contested within educational life. (b) Freinet pedagogy, extended through Fernand Oury's Institutional Pedagogy, contributes a politically grounded, practice-first repertoire of cooperative techniques, classroom institutions, and democratic forms of organisation. (c) Educational commons approaches frame knowledge, space, time, and pedagogical relations as shared goods, collectively produced, cared for, and democratically governed by a community of teachers, children, and families. In this perspective, the child is approached as a commoner and agent in the here and now. The educator, in turn, is understood as a fellow commoner and reflexive practitioner, capable of acting beyond the logics of both the state and the market. Together, they co-shape the everyday life of education. Eight shared dimensions, namely the relational, the political, praxis, agency, anti-enclosure, prefiguration, community, and the schoolized mind, traverse all three traditions, with care as their transversal thread. The framework is conceived as a hospitable theoretical and practical space, not as a self-contained doctrine. It is heuristic in orientation, bringing these traditions into conversation because each contributes a complementary layer to democratic educational life.

Keywords: critical pedagogy; educational commons; Freinet pedagogy; early childhood education; Foucault; schoolized mind; community; care; reflexive practice; prefigurative practice; social justice; teacher education



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1. Introduction

Contemporary early childhood education operates under intensifying pressures, including the standardisation of developmental outcomes, the marketisation of care and learning, and the expansion of audit-based quality assurance systems. These systems have been criticised for reducing the richness of early childhood experience to measurable and comparable indicators [1]. These pressures coexist with persistent social inequalities, exclusion, and discrimination that shape children's lives from the earliest years. In this context, revisiting critical educational traditions can help clarify how more socially just, inclusive, and participatory educational environments may be conceptualised and practised.

Three such traditions, namely critical pedagogy, Freinet pedagogy, and the educational commons, developed in distinct historical and intellectual contexts, converge around

a shared aspiration to transform educational spaces into sites of participation, critical inquiry, and collective agency. The entry does not offer an exhaustive genealogy of each tradition. Instead, it situates them historically and conceptually in order to read them relationally, with attention to their points of convergence, internal tensions, and implications for early childhood education and the preparation of early childhood educators. These traditions are not identical. They are brought together because each contributes a different layer to democratic educational practice. Critical pedagogy offers an analysis of power, knowledge, subjectivity, and inequality. Freinet pedagogy offers a historically tested repertoire of cooperative classroom practices. Educational commons approaches provide a contemporary framework for collective governance, shared resources, and democratic self-organisation.

Their convergence is therefore best understood as heuristic, not doctrinal. A concept that recurs throughout the entry, and that the three traditions illuminate from different angles, is the “schoolized mind” [2]. The term is used here as an analytic shorthand, not as a fully established theoretical category. It refers to a historically formed configuration of dispositions through which the dominant grammar of conventional schooling is internalised, normalised, and reproduced in everyday educational life. This grammar includes temporal routines, spatial divisions, hierarchies of authority, assessment expectations, and assumptions about legitimate knowledge, as well as expectations about who is authorised to know, teach, speak, or decide.

Understood in this way, the schoolized mind is not a matter of false consciousness. It is better approached as an effect of normalisation and institutional subjectification, through which particular ways of being a teacher, a child, or a family member in relation to schooling come to appear natural and inevitable. The concept is related to, but not identical with, established discussions of the hidden curriculum, the grammar of schooling, habitus, normalisation, and Freire’s critique of the bureaucratisation of the mind. It also helps name why participatory reforms may coexist with persistent expectations of authority, compliance, proper conduct and adult control. It therefore functions as a connecting lens for examining how critical pedagogy, Freinet pedagogy, and educational commons each respond to the sedimented habits of conventional schooling.

2. Critical Pedagogy: From Structural Critique to Post-Structuralist Depth

Critical pedagogy emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s as a broad family of educational approaches concerned with the relationships between schooling, power, knowledge, and social reproduction. Its foundations are plural, drawing on the Frankfurt School, Gramscian hegemony theory, Latin American liberation theology, anti-colonial thought, and traditions of emancipatory education. Within this wider field, Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* [3] offered an emblematic vocabulary, including dialogue, conscientização, praxis and the critique of banking education. Freire’s work, however, should not be treated as synonymous with critical pedagogy as a whole. Later contributions by Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, Michael Apple, bell hooks, and others expanded the field toward questions of cultural reproduction, official knowledge, race, gender, class, voice, embodiment, and classroom relations. Taken together, these perspectives examine how schools reproduce social inequalities, while also showing how education may become a site of critique, democratic agency, and social transformation [3,4].

More recent postcolonial and decolonial approaches, including Andreotti’s work on actionable postcolonial theory [5] and Sacré’s deconstructive reading of heritage-language loss and reclamation [6], further unsettle Global North assumptions in educational theory. For the purposes of this entry, these debates are acknowledged as part of the wider horizon

of critical pedagogy, while the analysis that follows focuses mainly on the strands most directly connected to Freinet pedagogy and educational commons.

As Grollios [7] has shown, Freire's pedagogical project is not simply a method but a curricular politics. It contests both elite humanist traditions of curriculum and social-efficiency models that treat curriculum as a technical apparatus detached from social, political, and ideological conflict. In this reading, the curriculum itself becomes the point of entry, raising questions about what counts as legitimate knowledge, how it is selected, by whom, and on whose behalf.

Recent reappraisals suggest that critical pedagogy is not exhausted by an economistic or class-only register. It has long worked at the borders of modern and post-structuralist discourses, integrating concerns with discourse, identity, difference, gender, race, and subjectivity into its emancipatory project [8,9]. Kruszelnicki [8] reads this as an "updated" critical pedagogy that retains the modern aspiration to emancipation while incorporating attention to discourse and the contingency of knowledge, while Sousa and Rossi [9] argue for a non-classificatory rapprochement between "critical" and "post-critical" curriculum pedagogies. For the purposes of this entry, two strands are particularly relevant. One concerns the cultural-political analysis of curriculum, while the other draws on Foucauldian analytics of educational power. Both are useful for examining early childhood education, where what is at stake is not only the distribution of resources, but also the production of subjects, norms, and legitimate forms of knowledge.

By "official knowledge", in Apple's sense, is meant the curricular content selected, legitimised and presented as neutral or universal by dominant social groups, even though it reflects particular interests, omissions, and silences [4]. In early childhood education, official knowledge may take the form of approved storybooks, developmental milestones, assessment categories and everyday assumptions about what counts as "proper learning". The second strand is a Foucauldian reading of educational power. Here, power is not understood only as repression or as authority imposed from above. It is also productive, operating through discourses, institutional routines, classifications, norms, and everyday pedagogical practices that shape what can be recognised as normal, appropriate, and educationally legitimate [10]. Schools are therefore not merely reproductive machines. They are sites where subjectivities are constituted, normalised and differentially valued. In early childhood settings, routine practices such as circle time, free-play monitoring, observation grids, arrivals, snack and rest may operate as micro-techniques through which the "developmentally appropriate child" is produced and through which families are positioned as proper or improper [11].

This post-structuralist inflexion does not displace earlier emphases on ideology, hegemony, and class but it situates them within a broader inquiry into how discourse, identity, difference, and subjectivity operate in pedagogical relations. Freire's own intellectual legacy can also be read in this broader register. Freire's thought addresses the constitution of the subject, the conditions of voice and the ethics of encounter in ways that resonate with post-structuralist and decolonial concerns, even though they remain rooted in a distinct emancipatory tradition [12].

This orientation carries significant implications for how teacher identity and childhood are understood. Biesta's distinction between qualification, socialisation and subjectification [12] is useful here because it shifts attention from education as preparation for existing roles to education as the emergence of the child as a subject capable of responding to the world. This relational understanding of subjectification is especially relevant to early childhood education.

A further internal critique of critical pedagogy comes from a Rancièrian register. Drawing on Rancièr's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* [13], Pechteliadis and Kioupkiolis [14]

argue that some formulations of critical pedagogy risk reproducing a logic of dependence when emancipation is framed as the educator's act of revealing hidden structures of domination to learners. In this view, the figure of the master who already knows may be reinscribed even within emancipatory pedagogy. The Rancièrian challenge is to begin from the presupposition of equality of intelligences and from the capacity of learners, including young children, to think and act for themselves. In early childhood education, this requires pedagogical relations that take children's interpretations, questions, and decisions seriously, and do not reduce them to developmental subjects to be guided toward adult meanings.

A post-structuralist critical pedagogy, then, does not critique dominant structures only from the outside. It attends to how power operates within subjects themselves, that is, to how it produces the very desires, self-understandings and educational imaginaries through which teachers and children navigate institutional life. Its specific contribution to commons-based work is to equip educators with the analytical vocabulary needed to recognise the schoolized mind in their own practice and to begin to interrupt it [2].

3. Freinet Pedagogy: The Power and Limits of Practice-First Education

Célestin Freinet pedagogy is a historically significant tradition of cooperative and democratic schooling. Developed in early twentieth-century France in the context of working-class education, it is grounded in what Freinet called "pedagogical invariants", meaning principles derived from sustained observation of children's tendencies toward curiosity, expression and cooperative work [15]. Its practical tools include free writing, the school printing press, the cooperative council (school assembly), inter-class correspondence, and learning through authentic experimentation and project-based exploration. These tools have been adapted across different national contexts and educational levels. In early childhood settings, these practices may take the form of dictated stories collectively transcribed by the educator, picture-books made by the group, the "What's New?" technique as a regular space for children's voices and experiences, shared decision-making about materials and everyday routines, structured movement between classroom corners, collaborative care of plants and animals and reciprocal correspondence with other kindergartens. Through such practices, the broader Freinet repertoire becomes a set of age-appropriate experiences of cooperation, expression, and shared responsibility.

Freinet's pedagogy also had an explicit political dimension. As a member of the French Communist Party during the interwar period, and later expelled in 1953 over questions of pedagogical autonomy from Party doctrine, Freinet developed his work in dialogue with the workers' cooperative movement and with concerns about the education of working-class children. His major theoretical work, *L'Éducation du Travail* [Education Through Work], presented education as a tool of social transformation and not only as a matter of methodological reform. The cooperative school was conceived as a microcosm of cooperative society, where relations of production, decision-making, and knowledge could be reorganised. In this respect, Freinet's pedagogy was political from the beginning, since classroom practice and wider social purpose were closely connected.

The political and institutional ambitions of Freinet's pedagogy were later extended by Fernand Oury and Aïda Vasquez, who developed institutional pedagogy in dialogue with Freinet techniques, group analysis and the experience of urban classrooms [16,17]. Oury argued that cooperative tools were not sufficient on their own. They had to be embedded in a deliberate institutional architecture made up of councils, roles, mediating objects, and regulated transitions. These practices should therefore not be treated as additions to an otherwise "normal" classroom, but as classroom institutions in their own right. They give form, continuity, and legitimacy to another way of organising everyday educational life.

These structures allow children to become subjects within a shared institution and gave concrete daily form to the political horizon of Freinet's project. Subsequent francophone scholarship has further developed this institutional turn and applied it to early childhood and primary settings, treating the classroom as a network of instituted commons and not simply as a place for individual learning [18]. Read together, Freinet and Oury offer both a tested pedagogical repertoire and an institutional grammar through which this repertoire becomes politically meaningful. This francophone lineage is not always visible in anglophone discussions of Freinet, but it is important for understanding why Freinet pedagogy is more than a collection of techniques.

International Freinet networks have contributed to the dissemination and adaptation of this pedagogical repertoire. The Institut Coopératif de l'École Moderne (ICEM), founded in 1947, and the Fédération Internationale des Mouvements de l'École Moderne (FIMEM), established in 1957, supported the circulation of Freinet techniques through teacher exchanges, publications, meetings, training activities, and classroom experimentation.

Large national movements also developed in several countries, including Spain and Italy, where Freinet-inspired educators formed dense networks of cooperation, self-training, and pedagogical experimentation. In Spain, the Freinet movement was connected to teacher empowerment and pedagogies of resistance, particularly during the Second Republic and the Transition to Democracy [19]. In Italy, the Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa developed a distinctive cooperative tradition, reworking Freinet's popular pedagogy within the post-war democratic renewal of education [20]. These national developments show how Freinet-inspired cooperative pedagogy was reworked within different political, cultural, and institutional contexts. Recent scholarship suggests that the explicit political horizon of Freinet's original project varies across national networks and local groups. In some contexts it remains strongly foregrounded, while in others it becomes less visible under accountability pressures and through the everyday work of adapting a complex pedagogical repertoire to diverse classrooms [21].

Research on Freinet teacher networks in Greece also illustrates this contemporary picture. The Pedagogical Group "To Skasiarxeio" (The Truancy) has played a central role in disseminating Freinet pedagogy and supporting local networks across the country. These grassroots communities create spaces of professional solidarity, democratic organisation, and critical reflection, while also facing challenges of scalability and sustainability that an explicit political vision could help address [22].

What circulates today as "Freinet pedagogy" is therefore a developed cooperative methodology whose relation to Freinet's systemic political project is more or less explicit depending on context. This variation shows how pedagogical traditions are reshaped as they move across institutions, countries and professional communities. One of Freinet pedagogy's most important and undertheorised strengths is its practice-first orientation. Freirean approaches often ask educators to develop critical consciousness before transforming their practice. Freinet reverses this sequence. The educator begins with concrete cooperative tools, and critical awareness emerges through the lived experience of doing differently. This is one reason why Freinet pedagogy can be compelling for working educators and pre-service educators. It does not require prior ideological formation or theoretical initiation, but opens conceptual horizons from within practice itself [22].

This practice-first orientation is not pedagogically naive. It reflects an understanding of professional transformation as something that often begins through embodied experience. Educators do not always change because they are first persuaded by theory. They may also change because a different form of classroom life becomes possible in practice and gradually unsettles taken-for-granted assumptions.

The historical and political dimensions of Freinet pedagogy also show that these practices were never merely methodological. They were connected to broader questions of democratic organisation, working-class education, and the social purposes of schooling. A balanced account of Freinet pedagogy also requires attention to its historical tensions. Its emphasis on work, production, and cooperative organisation has been interpreted both as emancipatory and as carrying productivist ambiguities. The institutionalisation of Freinet movements across different national contexts has also produced uneven relations to discipline, political radicalism, nationalism and school reform. These tensions do not diminish Freinet's contribution, but they caution against a purely celebratory reading. They suggest that Freinet pedagogy should be treated as a historically situated and internally contested tradition, not as a ready-made democratic solution. In this entry, it is therefore approached as a repertoire of cooperative practices whose democratic potential depends on how it is interpreted, institutionalised and connected to wider struggles over education.

Freinet's cooperative school can also be read, retrospectively, as an early form of commons-based educational space. Children and teachers co-produce knowledge and co-manage the conditions of their learning [23]. Through all these techniques is provided a practice-level realisation of principles that the literature on the commons has since theorised more explicitly, as discussed in the next section.

4. Educational Commons: A Field of Convergence

The idea of educational commons draws on the broader commons tradition, which gained renewed theoretical significance after Ostrom's *Governing the Commons* (1990) [24]. Ostrom's work challenged the assumption that people are naturally individualistic, self-interested, and antagonistic when they share resources [24]. Drawing on diverse local and community-based cases, including non-Western and Indigenous forms of resource governance, she showed that cooperation, reciprocity, and collective rule-making can emerge when institutional conditions support them. Later political theories of the common further expanded this insight by arguing that enclosure, competition, and individualisation are historically produced social arrangements. Educational theorists have since extended the concept of the commons to knowledge, pedagogical relations, institutional space and democratic participation [25].

In education, this perspective concerns both shared educational goods and the practice of commoning. This means the ongoing collective production, care and governance of educational life [26–28]. In early childhood settings, the rug, the corners, the books, the rotation of responsibilities, the rhythms of the day, and the shared materials of the room are not treated merely as institutional property. They become common goods whose use, care, and meaning children, families, and educators progressively learn to govern together.

This field is best understood as a space of convergence and not as a self-contained paradigm. It brings together contributions from critical pedagogy, sociology of education, philosophy of education, autonomist political theory and alternative pedagogical traditions, including Freinet and Reggio Emilia pedagogy. These traditions are not reduced to a single doctrine. They are connected by a shared concern with the enclosure of education and by a commitment to the democratic and collective reorganisation of educational life. The field also connects educational debates to the wider commons literature, including Kioupkiolis's analysis of the common and counter-hegemonic politics [29] and the account of peer-to-peer production and commoning developed by Bauwens and colleagues [30].

Several intellectual routes have shaped this scholarship. De Lissovoy approaches the commons through critical pedagogy and his analysis of education and emancipation in the neoliberal era [31]. Ford approaches it through radical pedagogy, autonomist theory, communist study, and the commons as a site of collective becoming [32]. Korsgaard offers

a philosophical reinterpretation of the commons as a framework for rethinking educational relations [33]. Ball and Collet-Sabé draw on Foucauldian analyses of normalisation, audit, and institutional power in order to question the inherited form of modern schooling and to imagine education beyond its dominant institutional assumptions [34–36]. Pechtelidis and Kioupkiolis further develop the argument through post-structuralist and radical democratic theory, conceptualising children not only as learners or future citizens, but as commoners capable of participating in the collective production and governance of educational life [14,28].

Empirically, the commons framework operates as a practice-based ground rather than a merely theoretical horizon. The Horizon 2020 SMOOTH project [37] documented, across approximately fifty case studies in eight European countries, how practices of care and sharing, peer learning, co-creation of knowledge, and collective decision-making through assemblies and student councils can take root in formal and non-formal educational settings, including kindergartens, generating meaningful democratic transformations even within the constraints of public schooling. In three educational settings in Greece, including a public kindergarten, the project showed how the everyday governance of shared materials, time, and space can reorganise the relational life of an educational community [23].

Beyond SMOOTH, classroom-based action research has shown how commons-based pedagogy can be sustained over an entire school year. In these cases, peer learning, the collective co-creation of knowledge, and weekly class assemblies functioned as daily organising principles of school life [38,39]. Children took on rotating roles in the governance of the classroom, decided collectively on the use of common materials and time, and produced shared knowledge through projects in which the boundary between those who teach and those who learn was deliberately softened. The class assembly emerged as the central institution of the classroom. It offered a regular space where conflicts, proposals, and questions could be brought, discussed, and decided as a community. These studies suggest that democratic agency develops through sustained participation in everyday collective practices [22,38,39].

Two complementary tools deserve particular emphasis. Pedagogical documentation, in the Reggio-inspired tradition adapted to Greek kindergartens, makes children's thinking and the daily life of the group visible to children, families, and educators. It therefore helps the community share, revisit, and reinterpret its own experience [23,40,41]. Conflict resolution skills in the tradition of Thomas Gordon, including active listening, I-messages, and the no-lose method, give early childhood communities a non-coercive language for negotiating disagreements that might otherwise return the group to adult-centred discipline [42]. Documentation and conflict resolution are not techniques added on top of communing. They are part of what makes the daily practice of community possible.

5. Three Traditions in Dialogue: A Comparative Framework

The preceding sections suggest that critical pedagogy, Freinet pedagogy, and the educational commons share several concerns, while also differing in their conceptual vocabularies, historical trajectories, and pedagogical strategies. Comparing them is useful because it shows how each tradition approaches power, cooperation, agency, care, and democratic organisation in a different way. The aim is not to merge them into a single framework, but to clarify their points of contact and their tensions. Care is treated as a transversal concern because it runs through the relational, political, and practical dimensions of all three traditions. Community is also central, since learning, governance, and care are understood as taking place within a collective of children, educators, families, and practitioners. The “schoolized mind” is included more cautiously as an analytic lens. It

helps show how each tradition responds to the sedimented habits of conventional schooling. These comparative dimensions are synthesised in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparative framework of critical pedagogy, Freinet pedagogy, and the educational commons across eight shared dimensions, with care operating as the transversal thread.

Dimension	Critical Pedagogy	Freinet Pedagogy	Educational Commons
Relational	Dialogue as mutual humanisation; subjectification through encounter; ethics of encounter	Cooperative tools as relational practices: class correspondence, printing press, school council, “What’s news”	Commoning as an affective and convivial relational practice; the common is sustained through trust, care, reciprocity, and shared participation among different members of the educational community.
Community	Classroom and school as a critical community of dialogue and solidarity; teacher as transformative intellectual formed within a wider public	Cooperative school as community of practice; class council and inter-class correspondence as ties to a wider community	Community of commoners (children, educators, families) as the constitutive subject of educational life; agonistic and plural
Political	Social emancipation; critique of power and knowledge regimes; counter-hegemonic curriculum	Democracy of the school, historically rooted in working-class education; political horizon currently more implicit in international networks	Radical democracy; commons as counter-hegemonic horizon; alliance across critical traditions
Praxis	Theory informs practice through conscientização and critical reflection	Practice generates theory through cooperative experimentation and doing differently	Praxis as an ongoing process of co-managing learning, rules, and shared resources through action, reflection, and renewed experimentation; theory emerges from practice and returns to it through collective inquiry
Agency	Agency through conscientização, critical reflection, and collective action; learners and educators as historical subjects capable of reading and transforming their world.	Child as active learner and producer; educator as fellow worker	Child as commoner and active participant in the here and now; educator as fellow commoner, reflexive practitioner, and co-shaper of educational life.
Anti-enclosure	Critique of ideological reproduction; official knowledge as cultural politics	Resistance to bureaucratic and didactic schooling; authentic expression against standardisation	Knowledge as common good; resistance to commodification and standardisation
Prefiguration	Dialogical classroom as enactment of democratic relations	Cooperative school as model of democratic self-governance	Commons-based classroom as political prefiguration; democratic means enact democratic ends through shared governance

Table 1. *Cont.*

Dimension	Critical Pedagogy	Freinet Pedagogy	Educational Commons
Schoolized mind/Sedimented schooling habits	Analysis of normalisation, hidden curriculum, official knowledge, and the bureaucratisation of mind.	Cooperative practice and instituted classroom routines offer alternative experiences that may unsettle conventional schooling habits.	Shared governance requires mechanisms for recognising and reworking sedimented expectations of hierarchy, compliance and adult control.
Care (transversal)	Amor (Love) as foundation of dialogue; care for the Other as ethical condition of conscientização	Care of shared materials, spaces, and peers embedded in cooperative tools	Care and reciprocity as institutional principles; sharing as first form of commoning in early childhood

Several observations follow from this comparison. First, all three traditions understand learning, subjectivity, and agency relationally. Critical pedagogy emphasises dialogue and subjectification; Freinet pedagogy organises learning through cooperative tools and classroom institutions; and educational commons conceptualises the educational community as a plural community of commoners. Read together, they challenge both individualised models of educational achievement and romanticised notions of community as simple harmony.

Second, the three traditions differ productively in their understanding of praxis. Critical pedagogy often begins from critique and conscientização; Freinet pedagogy begins from cooperative techniques and the experience of doing differently; and educational commons treats theory and practice as intertwined in the everyday governance of shared resources, roles, and rules. This difference is especially relevant for teacher education, where practical experimentation can become an entry point into more explicit critical and political reflection.

Third, care is particularly significant in early childhood education. Empirical research in commons-based kindergarten settings suggests that care and sharing are not merely preparatory conditions for commoning, but among its primary manifestations at preschool age [21]. Noddings's ethics of care [43] and Dahlberg and Moss's ethics of encounter [44] help clarify why care is best understood as a political and ethical practice through which the child is recognised as a subject worthy of genuine response.

Fourth, the schoolized mind, understood here as an analytic lens, points to the difficulty of sustaining participatory pedagogies within institutions shaped by conventional expectations of authority, compliance, assessment, and adult control. Critical pedagogy offers concepts for analysing normalisation and official knowledge; Freinet pedagogy and Oury's institutional pedagogy offer cooperative practices and classroom institutions through which alternative habits can be experienced; and educational commons frames this as a continuing problem of shared governance. Commoning therefore requires not only democratic intentions, but also institutional forms through which communities can recognise, discuss, and rework inherited schooling habits.

6. Implications for Early Childhood Education

The concepts examined in the previous sections have specific implications for early childhood education, a field that has long negotiated between developmental normativity and democratic aspiration [44,45]. These traditions support a view of young children as capable participants in the everyday organisation of educational life. This does not mean treating children as already fully autonomous political actors, but recognising that

democratic dispositions can be cultivated through age-appropriate forms of participation, care, reciprocity, and shared responsibility.

In commons-based early childhood settings, participation is enacted through ordinary pedagogical arrangements such as assemblies, shared care of materials, rotating responsibilities, collective projects, peer narration, pedagogical documentation, and the negotiation of rules and conflicts. Such practices allow children to encounter questions of fairness, inclusion, ecological responsibility and collective care in concrete and lived forms rather than only as abstract values. Empirical evidence from preschool commons-based practice suggests that young children can contribute meaningfully to the governance of shared spaces and can develop dispositions of care, reciprocity, and collective responsibility through sustained commoning practices [23,46].

This perspective also reframes the role of the educator. Critical pedagogy provides a lens for examining how power, knowledge, and normalisation operate in early childhood settings; Freinet and Oury offer cooperative and institutional tools for organising classroom life; and educational commons frames curriculum, space, time, and knowledge as shared goods. Together, these traditions suggest that inclusive and participatory early childhood education is not simply a matter of adding child-centred activities to an existing curriculum; it requires rethinking the everyday architecture of pedagogical life. In particular, who speaks, who decides, how materials are used, how conflicts are addressed, and how the classroom becomes a shared world.

7. Implications for Initial Teacher Education

The framework also has implications for the preparation of early childhood educators. Pre-service teachers often approach practicum through sedimented imaginaries of schooling, shaped by their own experience as students and by dominant expectations about teacher authority, transmission, assessment, and developmental normativity [2]. These expectations may persist even when prospective educators explicitly endorse child-centred, democratic, or inclusive values.

A practice-first encounter with Freinet and Oury can help address this difficulty. Cooperative tools allow prospective educators to experience democratic pedagogy before approaching it only as theory. Such experiences can unsettle habitual assumptions about classroom order, authority, children's agency, and the organisation of learning. Critical pedagogy then provides the analytical vocabulary for interpreting what these experiences make visible: how power operates in seemingly neutral pedagogical choices, how childhood is constructed through institutional practices, how official knowledge is selected, and how care may be both supportive and disciplinary. The educational commons, in turn, offers a framework for understanding democratic pedagogy as the collective governance of educational life rather than simply as a set of participatory techniques.

In this sense, the triadic framework can support teacher education programmes that combine practical experimentation, critical reflection, and collective inquiry. It also suggests that teacher educators themselves need spaces for collaborative reflection on their own assumptions, institutional constraints, and pedagogical decisions. As Avgitidou and colleagues show, university teaching can become a site of professional learning when teacher educators work as a professional learning community engaged in systematic inquiry into their own practice [47]. Such work is particularly relevant for sustaining commons-oriented approaches, since the habits of conventional schooling shape not only children and pre-service teachers, but also teacher educators and university programmes [48].

8. Conclusions

The conversation staged in this entry is, in the end, less about pedagogical technique than about educational purpose. It asks what early childhood settings are for, and who is recognised within them as able to know, speak, decide, and care. Brought together, critical pedagogy, Freinet pedagogy and the educational commons do not produce a new model to be installed in classrooms. They offer a stance toward the everyday life of education. This stance treats space, time, materials, knowledge, and relationships as shared goods, produced, cared for, and governed by the children, educators, and families who make up the educational community. This is why the framework has been presented as hospitable, not doctrinal. Its purpose is to keep a question open, not to settle it.

Several insights follow that are worth carrying beyond the entry. The first concerns sequence. Freinet's practice-first orientation suggests that democratic dispositions are frequently grown through the experience of doing differently before they are named in theory. This reversal has direct consequences for how early childhood educators are prepared and supported. The second concerns care. In the earliest years, care is not a gentle preamble to democratic life but one of its first and most demanding forms. Learning to share a rug, a box of materials, or a turn to speak is already an apprenticeship in commoning. The third concerns difficulty. The notion of the schoolized mind explains why this work is never complete. The habits of hierarchy, compliance, and adult control are sedimented in institutions, in adults, and in children's own expectations, and they reassert themselves even where participatory intentions are sincere.

None of these elements resolves into a method that could guarantee its own success. Commoning remains contested and fragile, dependent on material arrangements, shared rules, pedagogical documentation, conflict-resolution practices, and communities of educators able to sustain reflection over time. What counts as legitimate knowledge in the classroom, including children's questions, family memories, local languages, drawings, and narratives, must be continually defended as a resource for collective inquiry, instead of being displaced by predetermined outcomes [49]. Yet the pedagogy of the possible lives precisely in this fragility. To treat a kindergarten as a shared world, cared for and governed by those who inhabit it, is to refuse to postpone democratic life to a future citizenship and to begin practising it, however imperfectly, in the here and now. The most promising directions for future work, including feminist, decolonial, Indigenous, and posthuman perspectives on childhood and community, are worth pursuing not in order to complete this framework, but to keep it open, plural, and unfinished, as democratic education itself must remain.

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