

PAULO FREIRE'S IDEA OF LIBERAL EDUCATION AND CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: AN EXPOSITION

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Abstract

Paulo Freire, in his philosophy of education, aims to liberate people from educational banking system which seems to be traditional way of teaching, the teacher imposing knowledge on the learner. In order to achieve this aim, he offers problem-posing education. According to his method designed as an alternative to traditional education models, education should not be provided through one-sided imposition by teachers. This study provides information about problem-posing education model while it also compares this model with the most common traditional education method, which is called banking education by Freire. The work thus examines Paulo Freire's educational ideas-looking at the theoretical innovations of Freire, its impact on the development of educational practice and the development of critical pedagogy and critical literacy, showing that Freire's liberal Education is a prerequisite for critical consciousness. The study will use expository, analytic and evaluative method. This will help to give opportunity too to the learner to participate effectively in the process of teaching and learning through dialogue and consciousness

Key words: Education, Banking System, Traditional Education, Critical consciousness

Introduction

Literacy is about reading the world instead of reading the words only. The theoretical concept of empowerment that this statement embodies, can be traced back to the Brazilian humanitarian and educator, when he suggested a plan for empowering and liberating the oppressed people of the world through education. Paulo Regius Neves Freire has been called the greatest living educator, a master and a teacher and was a cosmopolitan intellectual, who never overlooked the details in everyday life of ordinary people and the connections these had to the broader and global world. Known mostly for his literacy campaigns in Latin America and Africa, and for his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

In most countries today, if not all, we are practicing what Freire calls Banking educational system which most people are not seeing as effect in this century. There is an idea of curriculum where the teacher follows to teach, which in most case does not raise critical consciousness in people because it is just being deposit. It does not permit liberal activities thus it does not create critical consciousness in students. The inability of

students and parents to see relevance in the curriculum is a curricular issue along with a classroom instructional problem. Jacobs posed a number of questions hinting that schools and teachers may not be preparing students for a changing world. She asked: What year are you preparing your students for? 1973 or 1995? Can you honestly say that your school's curriculum and the program you use are preparing your students for 2020 or 2030? Are you even preparing them for today? Jacobs asserted that most curriculum and content, in its current state, is outdated and will not challenge students to be successful in the twenty-first century.¹ Others, such as Pink and Wagner called for educators to focus on the instruction of critical thinking skills instead of focusing on outdated content and curriculum.² They suggested that essential skills include: agility and adaptability; effective oral and written communication; curiosity and imagination; initiative; leadership; collaboration; problem-solving; and critical thinking.

If our students and parents continue to provide feedback to school educators that the curriculum and instruction are not preparing students for the real-world, then why does curriculum and instruction continue to look as if is real? Are school educators connecting theory with practice? Can Freire's theory of problem-posing pedagogy help provide teachers with a framework for helping students believe the taught curriculum is relevant? These questions and others can find their answers in Freire's idea of education which has critical consciousness has its focal point and aim of any relevant and useful education, where both the teacher and the learner are allowed to contribute to education rather than banking system of education.

The broad objective of this research is to explore the concept and relevance of Freirean approach to education. The specific objectives are as follows:

- To assess the role of 'critical literacy' for social change;
- To examine Freirean presence in the new information age; and
- To consider Freire's relevance of liberal Education for critical consciousness.

Meaning of Education

Etymologically, the word education is derived from the Latin word “*educare*” which means to train or to form or from the related Latin words “*ē*” which is “out” and “*dūcere*” which is to lead, then bringing them together we get “*ēdūcere*” which literally means “to lead out.”³ According to Ayo Fadahunsi, education is a method through which people are lead out of ignorance. It creates awareness of what is not previously known in the mind of people. Fasanya defined education as the art of training the intellectuality, morality and physicality of a person.⁴ Education is a process of enrichment, acquisition of informed experience and skills for the realization of human potentialities and capabilities so as to confront meaningfully the challenges arising from human existence and society for adequate human development.

¹Jacobs, H. H., Curriculum 21: Essential education for a changing world. Alexandria ASCD, 2010, p.1.

²Wagner, T., Rigor, Redefined, Educational Leadership, 66 (2), 20-25, 2008, Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx>

³Randall Currew, “Philosophy of Education. Ethical and Political Issues in”, 360, in Donald M. Borchert (gen. ed.), Encyclopedia of Philosophy, VII, 2nd ed., New York: Thomson Gale, 2006, pp.360-364.

⁴Ayo Fadahunsi, Philosophy. An Anthology, Ikeja: Ark Publishers, 1998, p. 300

Exposition of Paulo Freire's Idea of Education Freire conceptual understanding of Education

The social purposes of education are located in the long term, and oriented towards the construction and maintenance of a sustainable future. The philosophical end-point of education is the advancement of the frontiers of knowledge and thus the horizon for people. Education upholds self-development; rekindles self-identify and ignite the environment with sparks of change and progress.⁵ Education, therefore, is a process of socialization that equips members of a society for not just the reproduction of existing structures and patterns, but for forging new paths in facing social challenges.⁶

He took education out of the classroom and created the culture circle where learners used their own ways of speaking to articulate their shared understanding of how their world came to be like it was and how to act to change their future. From being a monologue process, education should be a process of dialogue in which educatees and educators engaged in mutually respectful learning.⁷

A core component of Freirean theory is that learning begins with action which is then shaped by reflection, which gives rise to further action. Learning is thus a continuous process, directed at enhancing the learners' capacity to act in the world and change it.⁸ This is not necessarily a materialistic understanding, but a cognitive one, whose importance is revealed in the liberation from oppression which is found in the interior of the consciousness of the individual who possesses it.

Freire offers in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* a detail analysis of the short coming of the prescriptive style of teaching. In prescriptive teaching teacher assumes an authoritarian role Freire refers to this as the banking system. In the banking system of education, the man's transaction is the act of transferring information from teacher head and depositing in student's heads. Here the students are the depositories and the teachers are the depositors. In opposition to this domesticating system Freire suggests a problem posing education which will break the vertical pattern characteristics of the traditional teacher students' relations by establishing a horizontal dialogue.

Aims of Education

According to Freire the function of education is to humanize individual through conscious action for the purpose of transforming the world. In such process education cannot be neutral. It can either be an instrument of domination or liberation.⁹ Educative process domesticates people there exists a dominant culture of silence. In this culture people taught to accept what is handed down to them by the ruling elite without questioning. Hence their understanding of their society reality is limited to what they are taught and told to accept and believe. The following are the important constructs of Freire's educational views.

- ❖ Education is a cultural tool for liberation from oppression. It must give learners the

⁵Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, New York: Penguin Books, 1972, p.2.

⁶Paulo Freire, *Education for critical consciousness*, 1974, London: Continuum, p.24.

⁷Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014, p.23.

⁸Kim Díaz, Freire, <https://iep.utm.edu/freire/>

⁹Paulo Freire, *Education for critical consciousness*, p.28.

tool to be creators of their own reality.

- ❖ Education is always political act. It cannot be politically neutral. It can either be an instrument of domination or liberation.
- ❖ Education is a communion (the state of exchanging thoughts and feeding) between participant in a dialogue characterized by a reflexive, reciprocal and socially relevant exchange rather than the unilateral action of one individual agent of the benefit of the other.
- ❖ Knowledge is not a set of commodity that is passed from the preachers to the students. Learners must construct knowledge from knowledge they already possess.
- ❖ Learning begins with action. It is a process where knowledge is presented to learner, then shaped through understanding, discussion and reflection.
- ❖ Students should not be viewed as an empty account to be filled in by the teacher. Teacher should know that students have life experiences and their own knowledge that is the key in shaping their education and learning.
- ❖ Education is a phenomenon in which educator and educatee educate each other through the act of education.
- ❖ Education is a critical understanding of reading. Reading the word cannot be separated from reading the world. Education should raise the awareness of the students so that they become subject rather than objects of the world.
- ❖ The method of education must start from the situation and reality of people. Their life situation is made into a problem posing situation.
- ❖ Educational practice is not an extension but a communication. Communication involves mutual dialogue whereas extension involves transplanting knowledge.¹⁰

Teaching Tools

For teaching to be effective there are certain tools that are needed and these include the following

Dialogue as a Pedagogical Tool: Freire accepted dialogue as a method of learning. Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to change the world. Dialogue is the principal tool of problem posing method. It is a talk with the other, instead of talking to the other. Dialogue requires a co-equal relationship between teacher and student. It begins with the experiences of learner.¹¹

Praxis as a Synthesis of Reflection and Action (Theory and Practice) in Learning

Process: Praxis means the use of a theory in a practical way. Freire considered praxis (informed action) as the goal of problem –posing education. He defines praxis as reflection and upon the world in order to transform it. It is a complex activity by which individual create culture and society an becomes critical conscious human beings. It involves development of critical consciousness combine with social action¹²

¹⁰Paulo Freire, Education, the Practice of Freedom. London:, Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative 1976,p.147.

¹¹Paulo Freire Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p.175.

¹²Paulo Freire Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p.176.

Paulo Freire's Methodology

The three basic steps of this methodology are:

- to see
- to analyze
- to act¹³

To see the situation lived by the participant experience.

- This describes situation,
- Defines the problem in situation,
- It makes the link between the participants and the problems.

To analyze situation, analyzing the root cause (socio-economic, political, cultural etc)

- Why did this happen?
- How is this perpetuated and/ or sustained?
- What are the immediate effects and the root cause of the problem?

To act to change the situation

- short term action
- long term action

There are no ready-made formulas to apply the Freire's methodology in the classroom and this is perhaps the biggest difficulty to many educators. They have to free themselves of the traditional concepts of the educational process where the educator is the sole origin of knowledge and the students are only the receptors of this knowledge and the only way they have to learn this is also the practice. Students have to practice the Freire's methodology in order to learn and become critical conscious in solving the problem for themselves and the society.¹⁴

The Roles of a Teacher and Learning situation

In learning process and for the learning to be effective and beneficial the teacher must play vital roles which Freire enumerate as follow:

❖ Egalitarian Teacher-students Relations:

A unique feature of Freire's pedagogy is the egalitarian, respectful relations between the teacher and the learner. The teacher –students' relationship is horizontal and democratic, flourishing in an atmosphere of mutual acceptance and trust. In problem posing method both the teacher and students teach and both learn. Equality among the participant of dialogue is the *sina qua non* condition for its success. In this system terms like teacher of the students and the students of the teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-students with students –teacher.¹⁵

❖ The Co-construction of knowledge:

According to Freire, new knowledge is produced in the classroom from the interaction between students' and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing inquiry learning pursue in the world, with the world and with each other. To facilitate construction of knowledge, teachers should respect students' knowledge and remain humble about the limitation of their own knowledge.¹⁶

¹³Paulo Freire, Education for critical consciousness,p.87.

¹⁴Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage. Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998, p.34.

¹⁵ Paulo Freire Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p.179.

¹⁶Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p.54.

❖ Learning Circles

The learning circle is non-hierarchical class model where participants can discuss generative themes which have significance within the context of their lives. This involves creating a democratic space where everyone's voice has equal weightage.

The Idea of Freire's Banking Concept of Education

In his most famous book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire talks about education becoming an act of depositing. He calls this the 'banking concept of education' which is his — admittedly bleak — way of saying that learners are not actively participating in their learning, in problem-posing or interacting, but are expected to receive, memorize, and repeat information. This approach has a disempowering effect on learners and can create misuse of power.¹⁷ In this scenario, the teacher is all-knowing, kindly bestowing their knowledge on to those considered ignorant. Freire criticized prevailing forms of education as reducing students to the status of passive objects to be acted upon by the teacher. In this traditional form of education, it is the job of the teacher to deposit in the minds of the students, considered to be empty in an absolute ignorance, the bits of information that constitute knowledge. Freire called this *banking education*. The goal of banking education is to immobilize the people within existing frameworks of power by conditioning them to accept that meaning and historical agency are the sole property of the oppressor.¹⁸ Educators within the dominant culture and class fractions often characterize the oppressed as marginal, pathological, and helpless. In the banking model, knowledge is taken to be a gift that is bestowed upon the student by the teacher. Freire viewed this false generosity on the part of the oppressor—which ostensibly aims to incorporate and improve the oppressed—as a crucial means of domination by the capitalist class.¹⁹

His Criticism of the Banking Model of education

Instead of the banking method, Freire proposes a reciprocal relationship between the teacher and the students in a democratic environment that allows everyone to learn from each other. The banking method of education is characterized as a vertical relationship:

teacher
student.²⁰

The relationship developed through the banking method between the teacher and the students is characterized by insecurity, suspicion of one another, the teacher's need to maintain control, and power dynamics within a hierarchy that are oppressive. The critical pedagogy that Freire proposes allows for a horizontal type of relationship:

teacher student.²¹

This relationship is democratic insofar as both the teacher and the student are willing and open to the possibility of learning from each other. With this type of relationship, no one is

¹⁷ Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Continuum, 1970, p.34.

¹⁸ Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p.34.

¹⁹ Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p.79.

²⁰ Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p.81.

²¹ Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p.86.

above anyone, and there is mutual respect. Both the teacher and the student acknowledge that they each have different experiences and expertise to offer to each other so that both can benefit from the other to learn and grow as human beings. Instead of tacitly promoting oppressive relationships through the banking method of education, Freire chooses the process of critical pedagogy as his pedagogical model. This is because critical pedagogy utilizes dialogue among human beings who are equals rather than oppressive imposition.²²

Another negative consequence of the banking method is that students are not encouraged, and thus do not learn how to think critically, or to feel confident about thinking for themselves. The relationship between a student and a teacher who uses the banking method is similar to that of a farmer who obeys the orders of his/her boss.

Problem-Posing method

Against the banking model, Freire proposed a dialogical *problem-posing method* of education. In this model, the teacher and student become co-investigators of knowledge and of the world. Instead of suggesting to students that their situation in society has been transcendently fixed by nature or reason, as the banking model does, Freire's problem-posing education invites the oppressed to explore their reality as a problem to be transformed.²³ The content of this education cannot be determined necessarily in advance, through the expertise of the educator, but must instead arise from the lived experiences or reality of the students. It is not the task of the educator to provide the answer to the problems that these situations present, but to help students to achieve a form of critical thinking that will make possible an awareness of society as mutable and potentially open to transformation. Once they are able to see the world as a transformable situation, rather than an unthinkable and inescapable stasis, it becomes possible for students to imagine a new and different reality.

Critical Pedagogy

Paulo Freire's philosophical views grew from his experiences as a teacher and the interactions he had with his students. Rather than continuing with the established cultural patterns of relating to people through a hierarchy of power, Freire's starting point in the classroom aims to undermine the power dynamics that hold some people above others. Freire emphasizes that a democratic relationship between the teacher and her students is necessary in order for the consciousness process to take place.²⁴ Freire's critical pedagogy, or problem-posing education, uses a democratic approach in order to reach the democratic ideal, and, in this sense, the goal and the process are consistent. He explains how the teacher who intends to hold herself at some higher level of power than that of her students, and who does not admit to her own fallible nature and ignorance, places herself in rigid and deadlocked positions. She pretends to be the one who knows while the students are the ones who do not know. The rigidity of holding this type of power dynamic negates education as a process of inquiry and of knowledge gained. Freire is very critical

²²Paulo Freire Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p.86.

²³Paulo Freire Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p.87.

²⁴Paulo Freire Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p.104.

of teachers who see themselves as the sole possessors of knowledge while they see their students as empty receptacles into which teachers must deposit their knowledge. He calls this pedagogical approach the banking method of education. This pedagogical approach is similar to the process of colonization, given that the colonizing culture thinks of itself as the correct and valuable culture, while the colonized culture is deemed as inferior and in need of the colonizing culture for its own betterment.

To promote democratic interactions between people, Freire suggests that teachers problematize the issue being discussed. When issues or questions are problematized by teachers who work through critical pedagogy, readily made answers are not available. Students realize that although some questions do have clear-cut answers, many of our deeper questions do not have obvious answers. When students learn that teachers are human beings just as everyone else, and that teachers do not know everything but that they are also learners, students then feel more confident in their own search for answers and more comfortable to critically raise questions of their own.²⁵ The banking method denies the need for dialogue because it assumes that the teacher is the one who possesses all the answers and the students are ignorant and in need of the teachers' knowledge.

Characteristics of Freire's Pedagogy

The central premise of Freire's theory is that no education is neutral. It can be used for domination or liberation. His pedagogy calls for collective action and continuingly struggle on the part of the oppressed to liberate themselves from all forms of domination. The important features of revolutionary pedagogy include:

- **Education for Liberation**

Freire's Pedagogy is an educational plan to liberate those who are oppressed. The existing system of education is an education for domestication which denies people the power to think for themselves and become architects of their own destinies. Liberating education provides the learners with a critical perception of their own social reality which would enable them to know their democratic right to participate in social transformation.²⁶

- **Education for Consciousness**

Freire's pedagogy aims to cultivate critical consciousness in the learner. Conscientization is the ability to critically perceive the cause of social, political and economic oppression and to take action against the oppressive elements of society. It is a state of in-depth understanding about the world and resulting freedom from oppression.²⁷

- **Problem Posing Education**

Problem posing is an alternative method of education suggested by Freire instead of the existing authoritarian method which he ironically called banking education. In the banking model of education the teacher owns knowledge and deposits it in students. The problem posing method is based on the principle that a student learns better when he creates knowledge and when the knowledge is created for him. This method starts from the life situation and reality of learners. Their life situation is made into problem posing offers all subject matter as historical products to be questioned rather than as central bank

²⁵Paulo Freire Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p.104

²⁶Paulo Freire, Education for critical consciousness,p.82.

²⁷Paulo Freire, Education for critical consciousness,p.83.

wisdom to be accepted. It encourages students to become active in thinking about and acting upon their world.²⁸

▪ **Transformative Social Justice Learning**

Freire's pedagogy is essentially transformative learning as it fosters and develops capacities that invite people to live more meaningfully. It helps the people to question their own assumptions, beliefs, feelings and perspectives to reach a deeper and richer understanding of themselves and their world.²⁹

Conclusion

From the research, it is crystal clear that the role of education is to build the nation in which knowledge enhances empowerment of people and brings critical consciousness. Paulo Freire wanted the individual to form himself rather than be formed. To this end, he proposed that educational content be derived from the daily experiences the individual encounters. He proposed that one 'problematize' his/her own life in a way to realize change to a different status. Freire recognized that the practices he suggests can encounter 'limiting situations' that block them, and that these situations are the product of resistance on the part of the oppressing classes to any change in the status they so closely guard.

The ideas of Freire on education reveal a new way of looking at education and critical consciousness which can bring about social change in the society. He has given literacy and education in general the mission of awakening in people a critical conscience which enables them not only to know what needs changing but be fully human, which is the right of every person and not only of the privileged few.³⁰

It is this consciousness that creates the will and the motivation in people to struggle for social change. Therefore, the education system as a whole has to follow the philosophy of openness – open to the people, place, methods and ideas. To realize this potential of openness in learning, the advances in communication and learning technologies, which Freire did not have at his disposal in his time, open new possibilities for learners, teachers and the educational system.

To challenge the banking education model, Freire proposed problem-posing education. His ideas are on empowering and democratizing education. Freire addressed the education system through proposing a methodology (problem-posing education); contrasted with the traditional authoritarian approach (banking education). In this education model (problem-posing education), the teacher and learner discuss and analyze their experiences, feelings and knowledge of the world together. Education is a liberating practice, because reform itself is an educational task, and educators are the politicians. In other words, in this education, the educators can expose their critical consciousness, unlike banking education, which constrains people. Freire argued that education needs to be viewed as a cultural forum, for which teachers need to possess the cultural-critique ability that frees them the constraints of social values so as to construct a democratic dialogue context in which students are free to express their own cultural experiences and viewpoints.³¹ Such a context is able to help students develop independent and critical

²⁸ Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p.180.

²⁹ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage*, p.145.

³⁰ Carlos Mota, 'Freire', http://www.utad.pt/en/department/hss/educational_sciences/teaching/staff, Accessed 01/12/2023.

³¹ Paulo Freire, *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who Dare Teach*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998, p.158.

values, functioning to move society toward democracy.

In conclusion this work has tried to point out some educational points of Freire's critical pedagogy and its educational implications. The educational implications are as follows:

- ❖ The individual can be in dialogue with the other person in a critical vision,
- ❖ Practicing freedom-based educational practice. Teachers must not hold grudges when a student disagrees or criticizes or questions critically in the classroom. Teachers should stay open and active and convey messages or grievances to students freely.
- ❖ Curriculum planning is a fully People-oriented process. Curriculum is often one of the main concerns in the educational field. What kind of curricula should we offer to learners? Educators and teachers are concerned about what choices are made during curriculum planning. Most importantly, curriculum planning should be a fully people-oriented process. It is hoped that the above exploration can bring some inspiration and benefit to the development of education. Thus, liberal education as proposed by Freire is paramount to critical consciousness in a person which can bring changes in the society.

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