

## **"Re-inventing" Freire for the 21st Century**

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### **Abstract**

The focus of this article is to look closer to Paulo Freire's thinkings and concepts he used and to try to show their relevance for the contemporary educational sector. The readings of his work show, that he rejects the banking education, where the teacher is considered as the only source of knowledge and which stands for preserving the existing order. He emphasized dialogical education based on full participation of pupils and teachers. According to him dialogical education helps to develop critical thinking with a focus on transforming society. There are some critics to his work which he tackled accordingly on different occasions. In most contemporary educational systems to reach a pre-determined goals, without considering critical reflection, with a focus on high competition and keeping the status-quo are the standards. To challenge this neoliberal and conservative trends Freire's dialogical, problem based, critical and transformative pedagogy is more vital today than any other time.

Keywords: Banking education, Critical thinking, Conscientization, dialogue, Participation, Transformation.

### **Introduction**

Paulo Freire was one of the major educationalists of the last century. He is born in Brazil in 1921 and died in 1997. He is known for his involvement in literacy<sup>1</sup> work among the peasants of Brazil, Chile as well as other Latin American and African countries specifically Guinea-Bissau and Sao Tomé and Príncipe (Freire and Macedo, 1995; Kirkendall, 2004). Following a military coup d'état in Brazil in 1964, he was imprisoned for 70 days because of his involvement with the literacy program and after that he was in exile for 16 years. After five years stay in Chile, he was a visiting Professor at Harvard University and then moved to Geneva to serve in the World Council of Churches. He was also a guest Professor at the University of Dar es Salam in Tanzania before moving to the other African countries mentioned above (Sing, 2004). His philosophy of education and methodological thinking's are widely spread in other parts of the world. Pedagogy of the Oppressed which was first published in English in 1970, was the mile stone of his educational and philosophical thinkings.

His work covers a wide range of areas in education which emanates from his practice in literacy work as a teacher and researcher. It is beyond the scope of this article to try to cover a wide range of Freire's work. This article rather revisits Freire's thought which are mainly related to the teaching and learning process. By looking closer to some of his concepts, I discuss their relevance for the contemporary educational practices. Freire's voice are needed to transform the contemporary education systems which are fixed on transmitting pre-determined knowledge, pre-occupied in measuring results, obsessed in competition on the expense of co-operative learning, questioning and critical thinking.

Freire's dialogical<sup>2</sup> method, his concepts of banking, conscientization, critical thinking and transformation deserve closer consideration. Through dialogue with other academicians on many occasions he emphasized the need for the teacher and pupils to work together as partners to exchange knowledge and experiences but with a clear responsibility of the teacher. He emphasized the vitality of critical thinking in this mutual learning process and that education should consider as its goal the transformation of society (Freire, 1998b & 1998c).

### **The Banking concept**

The banking education is a traditional way of transmitting knowledge. It is commonly used in most countries of the world for transmitting knowledge from the teacher to the learners. Here the teacher is considered the source of knowledge and the pupils are considered less knowledgeable and passive recipients of what they get from their teachers. They are not invited to contribute to their own learning. "In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as process of inquiry..." (Freire, 1970: 72).

Freire further explains the banking education. The following are some of the attitudes and practices of banking education he wrote about.

- “(b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
  - (d) the teacher talks and the students listen-meekly;
  - (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
  - (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
  - (j) the teacher is the subject of learning process, while the pupils are mere objects;”
- (Freire, 1970: 73).

In this type of traditional education, the pupil is supposed to accept whatever comes from the teacher. The pupil is considered as a junior partner with nothing to contribute to the process of learning and teaching. She/he could be considered to get access to what is supposed to be "the truth" and expected to integrate to her/his life and pass it to the next generation.

Freire justifies why this method of education should be rejected:

Those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concepts in its entirety, adopting instead a concept of women and men as conscious beings, and consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world. They must abandon the educational goal of deposit –making with the world. "Problem-posing" education, responding to the essence of consciousness-intentionality-rejects communiqués and embodies communication. It epitomizes the special characteristics of consciousness: being conscious of, not only as intent on objects but as turned in upon itself in a Jasperian "split"- consciousness as consciousness of consciousness (Freire, 1970: 79).

To understand Freire's reference to liberation, it is also necessary to consider his wider definition of operation. He writes, "Any situation in which "A" objectively exploits "B" or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression..." (Freire, 1970: 55). In the earlier citation he is considering that one side's dominance as wrong. He emphasized the need for rejecting "communiqués" which indicates a flow from one source only in one direction, while positively considering the relevance of communication which allows participation between different parts.

## **The dialogical method**

The concept dialogue could be understood in different ways. One way of understanding it is just considering it as a way of conversation with the focus on individual's experience. The other way of understanding it is "as a process of learning and knowing" (Freire and Macedo, 1995), reflecting on and transforming reality.

Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it. Something else: To the extent that we are communicative beings who communicate to each other as we become more able to transform our reality, we are able *to know that we know*, which is something *more* than just knowing... Through dialogue, reflecting together on what we know and don't know, we can then act critically to transform reality (Shor & Freire, 1987: 13).

In the dialogical method the teacher and the pupil are participating in the learning teaching process<sup>3</sup>. "Authentic education is not carried on by "A" for "B" or by "A" about "B," but rather by "A" with "B," mediated by the world-a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it" (Freire, 1970: 93). This process will be successful and leads to critically investigating something when it is based on "love, hope and mutual thrust" between the dialogue partners (Freire, 1974/2012).

The teacher who is involved in the teaching-learning process could have a prior knowledge of "the object to be known" and takes responsibility to prepare the necessary material that she/he will put forward for discussion with the pupils. The theme is not transmitted by the teacher to pupils; it is rather commonly elaborated, discussed and critically scrutinized. The "...knowledge brought to the course is challenged and rediscovered..." (Shor & Freire, 1987:17).

In the dialogical process, it is not compulsory that the teacher is coming up always with a theme. Based on the pupils' life experiences and interest it is possible to come up together with a theme for discussion. There are possibilities to have "generative themes", which could be produced as a result of "the human-world relationship" (Freire 1970: 106)

In the learning-teaching process, the teacher is not supposed to produce a theme and leave it for the pupil to discuss it by themselves. S/he is also an active participant of the dialogue. Paulo Freire explains the misconception about the teacher as a facilitator as follows:

...The true issue behind the act of facilitating remains veiled because of its ideological nature. In the end, the facilitator is renouncing his or her duty to teach-which is a dialogical duty. In truth, the teacher turned facilitator rejects the fantastic work of placing an object as a mediator between him or her and the students. That is, the facilitator fails to assume his or her role as a dialogical educator who can illustrate the object of study. As a teacher, I have the responsibility to teach, and in order to teach, I always try to facilitate... (Freire & Macedo, 1995: 379)

For Freire as we can see from the quotation above, the teacher should not exchange her/his active role in the teaching learning process to a mere facilitator role. On the other hand he clearly indicates, the teachers' activity in preparation for dialogic process could be considered as facilitation. The teacher facilitates, participates and show direction (Schugurensky, 1998) in the dialogical method.

## **Critical thinking and Conscientization**

In the process of dialogical method Freire gives a great deal of focus on the critical thinking and not taking things for granted. In the discussion of education, Freire explains that, the traditional banking system of education focuses on just giving students the already existing knowledge, its focus is preserving the past and the present. On the contrary in the dialogical method the main focus is allowing pupils to reflect in their own reality, giving them the skill that Freire calls "reading the word and reading the world" (Kahn & Kellner, 2007) and to help them also see their reality critically (Freire, 1970). The critical thinking will help them to see another or alternative world than the present.

Beyond the learning-teaching process Freire remind us the necessity for critical thinking:

In mass society, ways of thinking become as standardized as ways of dressing and tastes in food. Men begin thinking and acting according to the prescriptions they receive daily from the communication media rather than in response to their dialectical relationships with the world. In mass societies, where everything is prefabricated and behavior is almost automatized, men are lost because they don't have to "risk themselves." They don't have to think about even the smallest things; there is always some manual that says what to do in situation "a" or "b." Rarely do men have to pause at a street corner to think which direction to follow. There's always an arrow that deproblematizes the situation. Though street signs are not evil in themselves, and are necessary in cosmopolitan cities, they are among thousands of directional signals in a technological society that, introjected by men, hinder their capacity for critical thinking (Freire, 1998b: 517).

Conscientization is beyond critical thinking. It is a process of being aware of reality and knowledge of the possibility to act up on it for changing it. To be able to reach this level of understanding one need to consider oneself as a subject which is capable of knowing and the capacity to transform reality (Freire, 1998b & 1974/2012).

## **Transformation**

As Freire clearly indicates in his writings, the new rightist academicians would like to keep status quo and would like to keep the existing order as it is. They are as a part of the oppressive structure would like to keep the dominative relation in the society. Their main goal is that pupils adapt to the existing systems of thinking and doing things.

On the other hand the dialogical, problem posing education method helps pupils to see the present, the past and the future. The teacher listens, problematizes realities and helps its pupil to consider reality in a critical way. The aim of teaching and learning here is not just knowing what happened in the past and what is happening at present, it is rather to critically investigate the events with the aim of proposing or working for the better future. Pupils are on the base of their experiences and present reality encouraged to continue questioning to be able to discover and rediscover the potential of “uncompleted beings” and “unfinished reality” (Freire, 1970 & Girox, 2010).

## **Remarks on the critics of Freire**

There are some critics on Freire both within the proponents of critical pedagogy<sup>4</sup> and those who are against the thinking's of critical pedagogy (Gottesman, 2010). Some of the critics to Freire's work within the academic left were the use of sexist language (for example using the term he as inclusive to all humanbeings), the neglect of addressing ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation, etc. related questions. There is a strong criticism from feminist academicians for his reference to the oppressed as male peasants and workers (Weiler, 1996).

He is also criticized for being dualistic. These critics focus on his using the concepts of the oppressor vis-à-vis the oppressed, dialogical vis-à-vis the anti-dialogical. He is accused by some liberals for his determined knowledge of the oppressor and the oppressed, and speaking on behalf of the oppressed. Some right wing academicians were also attacking him for using a difficult language, for introducing propaganda in the field of education, for being socialist, etc., (Freire & Macedo, 1995).

As can be understood from his different works, he was not deliberately ignoring any oppressed group in his work. In his later works he tried to avoid use of sexist terms in his writings, he also tried to address the ethnicity, gender and race questions. He also gave at different times the necessary reply for the right wing critics. His reply was that his work was not so difficult to understand as they claim, if they are not trying to deliberately

misunderstand him. He also explained to them, he is not introducing propaganda in education but rather he is emphasizing the relevance of critical thinking. On many occasion he made it clear that education is not a neutral activity and politics have a close relationship with education.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

A move from the banking method to dialogical method, from a just sitting and listening object to a critical subject, from conservative and traditional keepers of the status quo to a social transformer, etc. is important for a modern education system. There is a need to think of some possible areas of misunderstanding of Freirian pedagogy, the first one is to think that critical dialogical teaching is against teaching of some specific subjects through teacher orientation. Freire recognizes the importance of the different subjects but he mainly emphasizes on the need for pupils participation in all the courses given (Freire & Shore, 1987). The other misunderstanding that should be avoided is even if a considerable emphasis is on transformation, that education is not supposed to negate the need for keeping some positive elements that were/are in the local culture of a society. It needs also to be understood, that the dialogic method does not encourage a teacher to be mere facilitator who gives a theme and material to pupils to go and do the work by themselves. The teacher is an active participant with her/his pupils.

In the present education systems with the dominance of Neo-liberalism in the academic world, it is not uncommon to hear that education must be neutral and has nothing to do with politics. As opposed to this thought, Henry Giroux writes, "...Pedagogy is a political and moral practice that provides the knowledge, skills and social relations that enables students to explore the possibilities of what it means to be critical citizens..." (Giroux, 2011:155). There are also some academics who believe that teachers must focus only on teaching subject matter (Freire, 1998a & Freire and Macedo, 1995).

Both categories need to consider their positions. In the first place education does not exist in isolation from society. The historical, political, economic and social systems of a country influence the education system in general and a subject matter thought in schools in particular. Not relating education with the existing reality of a country is ignoring the unignorable. If one likes it or not the existing reality of a country influences once work in the school and classroom.

It is true the major work of the teacher is to enable pupils to gain knowledge of the specific subject or content of the subject matter. But it is also a part of teachers'

responsibility to prepare pupils to look at reality critically and to question some of the facts presented to them. In addition to that a progressive and rational teacher should recognize that pupils have also their own life experiences and view of the reality they experience.

It is through dialogue with their pupil that progressive and rational teachers contribute to learning and development of knowledge. Paulo Freire's dialogical method was, is and will continue to be relevant in the teaching and learning process. He is writing, it is the teachers responsibility to "Re-invent" him to be usable in the specific context. In a discussion with one of his colleagues Donaldo Macedo about importing or exporting his methodology, he expressed himself by saying, "Donaldo, I don't want to be imported or exported. It is impossible to export pedagogical practices without reinventing them. Please tell your fellow American educators not to import me. Ask them to re-create and rewrite my ideas" (Freire, 1998d). I would like to conclude my text with another quotation from Paulo Freire, "the progressive educator must always be moving out on his or her own, continually reinventing me and reinventing what it means to be democratic in his or her own specific cultural and historical context" (Freire in McLaren, 1999: 52).

## Notes

- 1) According to Freire, "...Acquiring literacy does not involve memorizing sentences, words, or syllables-lifeless objects unconnected to an existential universe-but rather an attitude of creation and re-creation, a self-transformation producing a stance of intervention in one's context." (Freire, 1998c: 43).
- 2) The concept dialogue was used by others before Freire. Plato considered dialogue as a continuous process and Bakhtin discussed about relational dialogue. Olga Dysthe based on Bakhtin's ideas and other related theoretical perspectives promoted dialogue as a relevant working method in the Swedish school context.
- 3) "Dialogic relations presuppose a commonality of the object of intention (directionality). Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another I with equal rights (thou)..." (Bakhtin, 1984:292-293).
- 4) Joe L. Kincheloe in his chapter on a book on critical Pedagogy writes, "Emerging from Paulo Freire's work in poverty-stricken northeastern Brazil in the 1960s, critical pedagogy amalgamated liberation theological ethics and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School in Germany with progressive impulses in education..." (McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007: 12).

Henry Giroux in his book, *On Critical Pedagogy* presents his view as follows:

"...My view of critical pedagogy developed out of a recognition that education was important not only for gainful employment but also for creating the formative culture of beliefs, practices, and social relations that enable individuals to wield power, learn how to govern, and nurture a democratic society that takes equality, justice, shared values, and freedom seriously..." (Giroux, 2011: 4).

"...central to any viable notion of critical pedagogy is enabling students to think critically while providing the conditions for students to recognize "how knowledge is related to the power of self-definition" and to use the knowledge they gain both to critique the world in which they live and, when necessary, to intervene in socially responsible ways in order to change it. Critical pedagogy is about more than a struggle over assigned meanings, official knowledge, and established modes of authority: it is also about encouraging students to take risks, act on their sense of social responsibility, and engage the world as an object of both critical analysis and hopeful transformation..." (Giroux, 2011: 14).

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