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Paulo freire philosophy of education pdf

Paulo Reglus Neves Freire was a Brazilian educator whose revolutionary pedagogical theory influenced educational and social movements throughout the world and whose philosophical writings influenced academic disciplines that include theology, sociology, anthropology, applied linguistics, pedagogy, and cultural studies. He was born to a middle-class family in Recife, in the state of Pernambuco in the northeast of Brazil. His early work in adult literacy--the most famous being his literacy experiments in the town of Angicos in Rio Grande do Norte--was terminated after the military coup in 1964. That year he went into exile, during which time he lived in Bolivia; then Chile where he worked for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Chilean Institute for Agrarian Reform, and where he wrote his most important work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970); Mexico; the United States where he held a brief appointment at Harvard University's Center for Studies in Development and Social Change; and Switzerland where he worked for the World Council of Churches as the director of their education program. He also served as an adviser for various governments, most notably the government of Guinea-Bissau. In 1980 he returned to Brazil to teach and later to serve as secretary of education for São Paulo. He worked as a consultant for revolutionary governments such as the New Jewel Movement in Grenada, the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, and the government of Julius K. Nyerere in Tanzania. From 1985 until his death in 1997, Freire served as the honorary president of the International Council for Adult Education. Freire's conception of education as a deeply political project oriented toward the transformation of society has been crucial to the education of revolutionary societies and societies undergoing civil war, as well as established Western democracies. Freire's work has exercised considerable influence among progressive educators in the West, especially in the context of emerging traditions of critical pedagogy, bilingual education, and multicultural education. Freire's revolutionary pedagogy starts from a deep love for, and humility before, poor and oppressed people and a respect for their "common sense," which constitutes a knowledge no less important than the scientific knowledge of the professional. This humility makes possible a condition of the educational situation in order to help the student to overcome those aspects of his or her social constructs that are paralyzing, and to learn to think critically. In a similar fashion, Freire validated and affirmed the experiences of the oppressed without automatically legitimizing or validating their content. All experiences--including those of the teacher--had to be interrogated in order to lay bare their ideological assumptions and presuppositions. The benchmark that Freire used for evaluating experiences grew out of a Christianized Marxist humanism. From this position, Freire urged both students and teachers to unlearn their race, class, and gender privileges and to engage in a dialogue with those whose experiences are very different from their own. Thus, he did not uncritically affirm student or teacher experiences but provided the conceptual tools with which to critically interrogate them so as to minimize their politically domesticating influences. Conceptual Tools Banking education. 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. 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. The indispensable soil of good teaching consists of creating the pedagogical conditions for genuine dialogue, which maintains that teachers should not impose their views on students, but neither should they camouflage them nor drain them of political and ethical import. 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. 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 (or conscientization) 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. In order, however, to undertake this process, the oppressed must challenge their own internalization of the oppressor. The oppressed are accustomed to thinking of themselves as "less than." They have been conditioned to view as complete and human only the dominating practices of the oppressor, so that to fully become human means to simulate these practices. Against a "fear of freedom" that protects them from a cataclysmic reorganization of their being, the oppressed in dialogue engage in an existential process of dis-identifying with "the oppressor housed within." This dis-identification allows them to begin the process of imagining a new being and a new life as subjects of their own history. Culture circle. The concrete basis for Freire's dialogical system of education is the culture circle, in which students and coordinator together discuss generative themes that have significance within the context of students' lives. These themes, which are related to nature, culture, work, and relationships, are discovered through the cooperative research of educators and students. They express, in an open rather than propagandistic fashion, the principle contradictions that confront the students in their world. These themes are then represented in the form of codifications (usually visual representations) that are taken as the basis for dialogue within the circle. As students decode these representations, they recognize them as situations in which they themselves are involved as subjects. The process of critical consciousness formation is initiated when students learn to read the codifications in their situationality, rather than simply experiencing them, and this makes possible the intervention by students in society. As the culture circle comes to recognize the need for print literacy, the visual codifications are accompanied by words to which they correspond. Students learn to read these words in the process of reading the aspects of the world with which they are linked. Although this system of codifications has been very successful in promoting print literacy among adult students, Freire always emphasized that it should not be approached mechanically, but rather as a process of creation and awakening of consciousness. For Freire, it is a mistake to speak of reading as solely the decoding of text. Rather, reading is a process of apprehending power and causality in society and one's location in it. Awareness of the historicity of social life makes it possible for students to imagine its re-creation. Literacy is thus a "self-transformation producing a stance of intervention" (Freire 1988, p. 404). Literacy programs that appropriate parts of Freire's method while ignoring the essential politicization of the process of reading the world as a limit situation to be overcome distort and subvert the process of literacy education. For Freire, authentic education is always a "practice of freedom" rather than an alienating inculcation of skills. Philosophy of Education Freire's philosophy of education is not a simple method but rather an organic political consciousness. The domination of some by others must be overcome, in his view, so that the humanization of all can take place. Authoritarian forms of education, in serving to reinforce the oppressors' view of the world, and their material privilege in it, constitute an obstacle to the liberation of human beings. The means of this liberation is a praxis, or process of action and reflection, which simultaneously names reality and acts to change it. Freire criticized views that emphasized either the objective or subjective aspect of social transformation, and insisted that revolutionary change takes place precisely through the consistency of a critical commitment in both word and deed. This dialectical unity is expressed in his formulation, "To speak a true word is to transform the world" (Freire 1996, p. 68). Freire's educational project was conceived in solidarity with anticapitalist and anti-imperialist movements throughout the world. It calls upon the more privileged educational and revolutionary leaders to commit "class suicide" and to struggle in partnership with the oppressed. Though this appeal is firmly grounded in a Marxist political analysis, which calls for the reconfiguring of systems of production and distribution, Freire rejected elitist and sectarian versions of socialism in favor of a vision of revolution from "below" based on the work of autonomous popular organizations. Not only does Freire's project involve a material reorganization of society, but a cultural reorganization as well. Given the history of European imperialism, an emancipatory education of the oppressed involves a dismantling of colonial structures and ideologies. The literacy projects he undertook in former Portuguese colonies in Africa included an emphasis on the reaffirmation of the people's indigenous cultures against their negation by the legacy of the metropolitan invaders. Freire's work constitutes a rejection of voluntarism and idealism as well as determinism and objectivism. The originality of Freire's thought consists in his synthesis of a number of philosophical and political traditions and his application of them to the pedagogical encounter. Thus, the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave informs his vision of liberation from authoritarian forms of education; the existentialism of Jean Paul Sartre and Martin Buber makes possible his description of the self-transformation of the oppressed into a space of radical intersubjectivity; the historical materialism of Karl Marx influences his conception of the historicity of social relations; his emphasis on love as a necessary precondition of authentic education has an affinity with radical Christian liberation theology; and the anti-imperialist revolutionism of Ernesto Che Guevara and Frantz Fanon undergird his notion of the "oppressor housed within" as well as his commitment to a praxis of militant anticolonialism. Freire's pedagogy implies an important emphasis on the imagination, though this is not an aspect that has been emphasized enough in writings about him. The transformation of social conditions involves a rethinking of the world as a particular world, capable of being changed. But the reframing proposed here depends upon the power of the imagination to see outside, beyond, and against what is. More than a cognitive or emotional potential, the human imagination, in Freire's view, is capable of a radical and productive envisioning that exceeds the limits of the given. It is in this capacity that everyone's humanity consists, and for this reason it can never be the gift of the teacher to the student. Rather, educator-student and student-educator work together to mobilize the imagination in the service of creating a vision of a new society. It is here that Freire's notion of education as an ontological vocation for bringing about social justice becomes most clear. For Freire, this vocation is an endless struggle because critical awareness itself can only be a necessary precondition for it. Because liberation as a goal is always underburdened of a necessary assurance that critical awareness will propel the subject into the world of concrete praxis, the critical education must constantly be engaged in attempts to undress social structures and formations of oppression within the social universe of capital without a guarantee that such a struggle will bring about the desired results. Criticism Since its first enunciation, Freire's educational theory has been criticized from various quarters. Naturally, conservatives who are opposed to the political horizon of what is essentially a revolutionary project of emancipation have been quick to condemn him as demagogic and utopian. Freire has faced criticism from the left as well. Some Marxists have been suspicious of the Christian influences in his work and have accused him of idealism in his view of popular consciousness. Freire has also been criticized by feminists and others for failing to take into account the radical differences between forms of oppression, as well as their complex and contradictory instantiation in subjects. It has been pointed out that Freire's writing suffers from sexism in its language and from a patriarchal notion of revolution and subjecthood, as well as a lack of emphasis on domination based on race and ethnicity. Postmodernists have pointed to the contradiction between Freire's sense of the historicity and contingency of social formations versus his vision of liberation as a universal human vocation. Freire was always responsive to critics, and in his later work undertook a process of self-criticism in regard to his own sexism. He also sought to develop a more nuanced view of oppression and subjectivity as relational and discursively as well as materially embedded. However, Freire was suspicious of postmodernists who felt that the Marxist legacy of class struggle was obsolete and whose antiracist and antisexist efforts at educational reform did little to alleviate and often worked to exacerbate-existing divisions of labor based on social relations of capitalist exploitation. Freire's insights continue to be of crucial importance. In the very gesture of his turning from the vaults of official knowledge to the open space of humanity, history, and poetry--the potential space of dialogical problem-posing education--Freire points the way for teachers and others who would refuse their determination by the increasingly enveloping inhuman social order. To believe in that space when it is persistently obscured, erased, or repudiated remains the duty of truly progressive educators. Freire's work continues to be indispensable for liberatory education, and his insights remain of value to all who are committed to the struggle against oppression. 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