ON *PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED*: AN APPRAISAL OF PAULO FREIRE'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

Education is critical to human development. Scholars have always been concerned with the appropriate method or pedagogy to adopt for education. Usually two parties are involved in any learning process- the teacher and the learner(s). The contention on pedagogy has always been whether learning ought to be teacher centered or student centered. While the proponents of traditional pedagogue in education emphasize the experience of the teacher; most modern and contemporary scholars like John Dewey and Paulo Freire emphasize the experience of the learner. Paulo Freire rejected the traditional education system tagging it a banking system because it tends to impose the experience of the teacher on the learner; undermining the experience and personal total development of the learner. He proposed a critical pedagogue as an ideal; a pedagogue that is problem-posing with emphasis laid on the experience of the learner. This article studies Paulo Freire's critical pedagogue using the analytic method. It finds that Paulo Freire's pedagogue is emancipatory because it promotes freedom of thought, encourages innovation and is capable of molding people into active citizens with the ability to hold their leaders responsible for bad governance. In this sense, the pedagogue can be handy for political participation and nation building. The article also finds that the pedagogue can lead to anarchy in the learning environment with its seeming overemphasis on the freedom of thought of the learners; it can give learners undue control or influence over their teachers.

Keywords: Education, Pedagogy, Experience.

1. Introduction

Paulo Freire's book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is a product of its time and circumstances. It has its roots in the concrete social, economic and cultural reality of 1960s Latin America. Poverty and oppression were the outstanding features that punctuated that era of

that part of the world. Freire himself was no detached theorist. The book was written while he was in exile in Chile following the Brazilian military coup of 1964. Published in 1970, it was based on many years of direct experience of working with the poor of Brazil and Chile.

Freire was born in 1921 in Recife, Brazil. He taught Portuguese in secondary schools, and from 1946, he began developing adult literacy programmes. That work was brought to an end with the military coup. Following a brief imprisonment, he went into exile in Chile. After the Portuguese language publication of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he was invited in 1969 to Harvard as a visiting Professor. He later moved to Europe as a special education advisor to the World Council of Churches. He finally returned to Brazil in 1980 where he took up again his work in adult pedagogy. He was appointed in 1988 as Secretary of Education in Sao Paulo by the Brazilian Workers Party. Freire died in 1997.

We still live in a world where poverty and oppression remains a scourge to the human race. The book is a ringing invocation of the necessity (both empirical and normative) for human freedom. Throughout the text, Freire contrasts oppression and liberation. These are the two polarities of the human existential condition. On the one hand, the poor are oppressed by virtue of their poverty and are unable to be themselves as free, human subjects. Yet they may accept this situation as fated or unalterable. They may even fear freedom because it carries risk and the potential for conflict. In addition, in situations of objective oppression and mass poverty, the rich are not free either. They too live in fear and destroy their own humanity by their violent suppression of their fellow human beings.

Paulo Freire's background gives insight into his choice of the preferred method for teaching and learning. As an experienced teacher who grew up in a clime ravaged by poverty and oppression, Freire sees education as both a tool for liberation and problem-solving. Hence, for him, any pedagogue that undermines the learners' freedom of being and capacity for problem solving is unwarranted. This article studies Feire's critical pedagogy. Effort is made to expose the practicability, merits and demerits of his postulations.

1. Banking System of Education

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire states that traditionally education is framed as "an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor (Freire, 2000)." The task of the teacher, in traditional education, Freire argues, is to "fill the students with the content of his narration- content which is detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance (Freire, 2000)." This type of education, he believes, is "suffering from narration sickness" (Freire, 2000). He suggests that in such schools the task of the student is to "receive, memorize, and repeat." This, he believes, turns them into "receptacles to be filled by the teacher (Freire, 2000)." In such an environment, teachers are active while students are passive members of the classroom community. Freire argues that the interests of the two are different in such relationship; teachers promote the goal of the oppressors by depositing information into the students.

It is this manner of education that Freire describes as the 'banking system of education'. Thus, he writes:

> 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 an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge of processes of inquiry. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposites; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence (Freire, 2000).

Freire created a list of items that he says show how schools and classrooms can be evaluated. If a school or classroom can be defined by the following categories, then they represent the banking concept of education:

- The teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- The teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- The teacher talks and the students listen-meekly;

- The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- The teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- The teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- The teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects. (Freire,2000)

Freire claims that education based on this model which he calls the banking annuals "the students' creative power" and serves the interests of the oppressors (Freire, 2000). He further asserts that "education as the exercise of domination stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression." He explains that the banking concept assumes "a person [to be] merely in the world, not *with* the world or with others; the individual is a spectator, not re-creator." He suggests that the banking system does not see a person as a conscious being- which he calls *corpo consciente*; for the banking system, a person is rather "the possessor of a consciousness: an empty 'mind' passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside (Freire, 2000)."

2. Problem-Posing Pedagogue: Ideal Method of Education

Paulo Freire is widely known for his radical educational ideas called "critical pedagogy" or "critical theory." Critical pedagogy is described as an "educational movement guided by [the] passion and principle to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action (Giroux, 2010)." Arguing against the banking concept of education, Freire posits: "Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by

reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously or at the same time teachers and students (Freire, 2000)."

It is necessary, for Freire, that the "educational goal of deposit-making [is replaced] with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world Freire, 2000)." Education based on problem-posing ensures active teachers and active students within the classroom and the global community. The interests of both the teachers and the students, then, within the problem-posing classroom, become the same. In fact, Freire maintains that problem-posing education aims at the emancipation of those who have been "subjected to domination (Freire, 2000)." Freire claims that "to that end, [problem-posing education] enables teachers and students to become subjects of the education process by overcoming authoritarianism and alienating intellectualism; it also enables people to overcome their false perception of reality (Freire, 2000)." This overcoming of the false perception of reality is considered the true measurement of growth. It is thus obvious that, as Freire suggests, the banking concept entails intellectual alienation and prevents growth.

3. Dialogue: A Critical Tool in Ideal Education

Freire argues that this education- for freedom from alienation- is impossible without "dialogical relations" between the student and the teacher (Freire, 2000). It is only dialogue that ensures student-teacher relationship in which "the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach; they become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow (Freire, 2000)." The individuals who have been oppressed, he suggests, only through trumanization". Dialogue also promotes critical thinking because it is only through questioning the problems in our lives that we can take steps to remake them. Therefore, to be an active participant in the community, one needs to be in constant dialogue with the state and within the state, that is, with the other members of the state. It is through dialogue that we can attain *conscientização* or critical consciousness. *Conscientização* does not only include apprehending

the inequalities in one's life but also taking action in order to change them.

Conscientização, then, entails both consciousness and praxis- taking practical action to deal with (oppressive) realities in life. Freire suggests that only when dialogue succeeds, "these adults [can] begin to change society (Betz, 1992)." Therefore, Freire believes that the problem-posing method along with *conscientização* (critical consciousness) and *praxis* lead to "education as the practice of freedom(Freire, 2000)." In sum, the central theme of Freire's pedagogy is *conscientização* and praxis- the act of becoming aware of inequalities and taking action to change them.

4. Democratic Education

Freire believes that freedom from the authoritarian education leads to growth and hence the creation of a "true" democratic society. Societies and individuals can only grow where they are provided with such an opportunity. This growth does not favor the oppressor and therefore the oppressor tends to manipulate growth through intellectual censorship. Freire opines that the "authoritarian anti-dialogue violates the nature of human beings; their process of discovery, and it contradicts democracy (Freire, 1998)." Freire argues that "democracy is taught and learned through the practice of democracy (Freire, 1998)." Dialogue, for Freire, helps us "denounce the structures of oppression and seek a less-unjust, less cruel, more democratic, less discriminatory, less racist, less sexist [world] (Freire, 1973)." Antonia Darder points out: "Paulo [Freire] urged to strive for intimacy with democracy, living actively with democratic principles and deepening them, so they would come to have real meaning in our everyday life (Darder, 1998)."

Education for democracy requires, for Freire, freedom from the authoritarian relationship. It can only happen if we, through dialogue and critical thinking, challenge the oppressor and in so doing create a democratic society where people willingly engage in never-ending dialogues, listen to each other, ask questions, critically think, take positions in regard to these questions and in so doing oppose the inequalities in their lives. This is what Freire considers to mean active learning.

5. Appraisal of Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy

Freire's methodology of teaching and learning describes the class as a meeting place where knowledge is sought, not transmitted. Freire argued for an educational approach which enables people to discuss and intervene courageously in the problems of their context. For him, education should enhance students' confidence and strength to address their own problems, instead of accepting solutions or decisions offered by others. The main principle of his approach is to present knowledge problematically in a problem-posing dialogue which offers more opportunities for students to participate actively and to reflect critically.

Freire's approach utilizes students' prior knowledge and daily life experiences to empower them to construct their own knowledge. Developing a participatory discourse of a critical language with the language of possibility enables teachers and students realize that they can significantly contribute in changing their schools, lives and societies. This model of teaching would ensure students' active participation and would enable both teachers and students develop their critical attitude (Freire, 1973). Moreover, it stimulates students' creativity and triggers their curiosity which could be only triggered by an approach of questions, not of answers.

The best way to maintain reflective and meaningful communication inside classrooms is problematizing knowledge. Freire's methodology of teaching comprises three interrelated stages. In stage one 'generating themes', the teacher poses a problem derived from students' own context and encourages them to put forward their ideas freely. This is a continuous stage of listening as new ideas may emerge during the discussion. It is characterized by the equal opportunities for all participants to generate topics and themes as far as they are relevant and meaningful. The teacher's role in this stage is to encourage all the students to participate and, most importantly, to keep the discussion relevant. Through this stage, students' participatory, cooperative skills and their self-confidence could be enhanced.

Students' previous knowledge serve as the raw material forthe discussion and as an instrument for acquiring new knowledge. The effort to relate students' prior knowledge and experience with the new knowledge and experience is a very important technique in

this stage. Students' awareness and consciousness of problems existing in their environment is enhanced. When the issues of the discussion, particularly the existing problems is revealed, subsequent discussions can follow on the subject matter. This stage is technically referred to as codification. The openness of the teachers and their collaboration with the students can offer the students opportunity to discover the dangers within their circumstances. This is what he calls 'decodification' stage. Both the teachers and the students will engage in debate on how to tackle problems. The result of the debate will lead to more discussion and encourages more criticism. The more involved students are with their context, the more they achieve their critical consciousness. "As they participate in all the stages of addressing their problems, students will feel empowered, and thus, become more responsible" (Darder, 1998).

In Freire's approach, the teacher is no longer an information giver, but a co-communicator actor with students in the dialogue. The teacher and students share the responsibility of managing and directing the learning process. The teacher should employ his/her authority to encourage students' participation, criticism and thinking, not to impose ideas upon them. As Freire puts it, the teacher's authority in this process serves students' freedom, not against it (Freire, 1973). The role of the teacher in Freire's approach is important as it aims to make students autonomous learners. He helps students achieve their critical consciousness by engaging them in problem-posing dialogues.

However, teachers should be aware that only dialogue that requires critical thinking is capable of generating critical thinking. To Freire 'conscientization' is a basic dimension of reflective action which should "continue whenever and wherever the transformed reality assumes a new face (Freire, 2000)." Teachers should be aware also that the dialogue is not to invade, or to manipulate, but to exchange thoughts with students on equal rights of accepting, criticizing or rejecting all or some of these ideas. Teachers also need to be aware of the characteristics of critically transitive consciousness as described by Freire (1973):

- Depth in the interpretation of the problems;

- Substitution of casual principles for magical explanations;
- Testing of one's findings by openness to revision;
- Refusing to transfer responsibility;
- Rejecting passive positions;
- Soundness of argumentation;
- Practicing dialogues rather than polemics;
- The receptivity to the new for reason beyond mere novelty and by the good sense not to reject the old only because it is old;
- And accepting what is valid in both old and new.

Another interesting argument is Freire's rejection of 'assistencialism' (the tendency to always spoon-feed students with information) as an approach for teaching and learning because it does not lead to production of critical learners. Some teachers believe that by implementing banking education they assist students through offering them a packed content of knowledge to repeat and memorize. This is a false belief because this assistance will definitely lead to disempowering students and increasing their passivity. Freire believed that 'assistencialism' is based on more paternalistic dependency. By adapting this approach, teachers lead students to adapt to what they want, but never to encourage them to think or criticize. "…assistencialism is both an effect and a cause of massification..., it offers no responsibility, no opportunities for making decisions, but only gesture attitudes which encourage passivity... it never leads to democratic destination (Freire, 1973)." This approach to teaching will not help students acquire their critical consciousness, but will lead them to adaptation or manipulation by contrasting between the integrated and the adaptive person through considering the former person as a 'subject', and the latter person as an 'object'.

The most interesting argument of Freire, is his addressing of the tension between freedom and authority and his argument for seeking a balanced approach through which both could be respected. On one hand, Freire perceived "education as the practice of freedom (Freire, 1973)." On the other, he emphasized the necessity of establishing limits to this freedom. He claimed the possibility of joining freedom with authority because separating them leads to the infraction of one or the other. He argued "it is not possible to have

authority without freedom and vice versa (Freire, 2000).” However, Freire (1998) pointed out the challenge that democratic teachers need to encounter in transmitting a sense of limit that could be ethically integrated by freedom itself. He did not reject the authority of the teacher but rejected the authoritarian model of teaching. He argued that “there are moments in which the teacher, as authority, talks to the learners, says what must be done, establishes limits without which the very freedom of learners is lost in lawlessness (Freire, 1973).” This should be done in a humble way to admit that students could doubt or reject them.

The above argument defends the claim of some teachers who justify their tendency to implement authoritarian methods because of the need for authority to maintain discipline in classrooms. Freire argued that neither classes characterized by authoritarianism, nor those of unbridled freedom could maintain discipline. Discipline could be realized only in those classes or practices in which freedom and authority are found together. He explained that this is because the harmony between freedom and authority necessitates discipline. In his dialogical theory, Freire affirms the significance of organization and authority to keep classes neither authoritarian nor licentious. Organization is a highly educational process in which leaders and people together experience true authority and freedom. Both teachers and students should work together to maintain organization and discipline during the learning process.

Another aspect of Freire’s balanced approach is his acceptance of the role in which teachers offer knowledge to students through explanation in an ‘expository lesson’. However, he criticized the expository lesson which is vertical in nature with a teacher as the focal point and done in a spirit of authoritarianism. Teachers can explain during the lesson, but not with the belief that they know everything and their students know nothing. Freire addressed the misconception of some teachers of democratic teaching as a free practice in which the respect of their professional position might be lost. He stressed that the professional position of the teacher is highly respected in his approach because without his/her democratic intervention there would be no progressive education. He believed that teachers and students are not identical in

any dialogue, as "dialogue between teachers and students does not place them on the same footing professionally (Freire, 2000)." By being more democratic, teachers will enjoy more respect and appreciation. Democratic relationships between teachers and students are fundamental in democratic education. However, these relationships should be based on mutual respect and understanding.

Generally, the findings of this paper indicate that the problem-posing approach has useful implications on teaching and curriculum development. It can enhance changes in personal growth, social support, community organizing, policy and environmental changes and increases control over one's life in society. This approach is a useful tool for helping students and teachers to identify and reflect on societal problems and their effects; finding solutions through education. However, teaching through a dialogic problem-posing approach may represent a threat to traditional teachers who operate with the misconception of themselves as the only possessors of wisdom and knowledge. The tendency of students' memorization of their lessons is a common practice in banking education. Freire described those teachers whose teaching approach depends on memorization as 'anti-dialogical'(Freire, 2000). Overcoming the vertical patterns of banking education is a pre-requisite for problem-posing approach to get its way into schools, and then to fulfill its function of the practice of freedom. As these practices and patterns have been in effect for long time, eliminating them from schools could be very difficult, if not impossible.

What this implies is that critical pedagogue as proposed by Freire may never be ideally applied in majority of the contemporary schools, especially in Africa where the lust for power and control is almost cultural. Most traditional teachers will definitely find it very difficult to relinquish their 'total' control over their students/pupils. Most teachers too, will find it almost impossible to operate on the same level with their students so as to allow the process of dialogue in learning to gain ground. A good number of the teachers would consider such a proposition, a reduction of their status; a practice that would expose them to caricature from the students.

Implementing Freire's balanced approach in education seems interesting and practical. However, the difficulty of

integrating freedom and authority on honest ethical standards is still problematic. For example, the extent of limitation to be practiced on freedom is still not clear. Others might argue that once freedom is limited, it becomes meaningless. Another issue is the tendency of those in power obtained from their authority to dominate others. Such a tendency might lead students, if given the authority, to violate school regulations which are necessary for organization and discipline as a practice of freedom. Teachers also may not accept handing over the authority they used to enjoy easily. Despite the belief in the practicality of Freire's approach for teaching and learning, clear understanding of the concept of 'democratic education' need to be conceptualized by all involved in the learning process to ensure correct and effective implementation of this approach. Also, conceptions of freedom and authority need to be clearly understood in terms of their relation with learner's autonomy; else the whole enterprise of education will be reduced to a 'lawless jamboree' where the learners and students jostle for control over the other.

6. Impact of Paulo Freire on Education

Based on the discussions in the immediate past section, it is necessary we deduce precisely the contributions of Paulo Freire to education.

- His emphasis on dialogue has struck a very strong chord with those concerned with informal education. His method which is dialogical or conversational in form rather than a banking method, upholds that dialogue involves respect for human persons. In dialogical method one does not subjugate another, rather works with the other in collaboration. The implication here is that all involved in the teaching-learning situation are resourceful; teachers and students/pupils could learn from each other.
- His strong disapproval of the traditional system of education which he described as a 'banking system' is insightful. More importantly, his discussion on critical theory or critical pedagogue contains a lot of positives that can help Third World Countries enhance capacity building and the quality of human

resources through education. Broadly speaking, Freire's philosophy of education is a massive weapon for nation-building.

- Like Dewey, Freire's critical pedagogue has to the development and application of many child-centered teaching methods in contemporary centers of learning such as; problem-solving method, discussion method, questioning method, project method, games method, etc.

7. Conclusion

This article demonstrates that education is a critical aspect of both individual and national development based on the postulations of Freire on Critical pedagogy. Education develops the individual, if the right methods are employed, because it plants in the human person the capacity for critical consciousness. This capacity enables the individual to raise important questions about his state of affairs and the state of affairs within his immediate environment. It enables the person to be both a problem poser and a problem solver. According to Freire, the goal of an ideal pedagogy should be to instill this capability on the human person. The overall benefit of such a system is that it will lead to good governance because the masses will be armed with the requisite tools to oppose and depose any set of leaders that abuse the consent given to them to occupy leadership positions.

Freire's critical pedagogy is quite illuminating. There are, however, great problems with the proper means of actualizing his principles. This is because it places both the teacher and the student on the same level in the teaching and learning situation. This could lead to indiscipline and other forms of abuses from students to teachers since the teacher must always permit the students' opinions; not imposing theirs on them.

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