

## THE STRUCTURES OF PAULO FREIRE'S CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

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### **Abstract**

*This work focuses on Freire's contentions on the pedagogy of the oppressed. It will begin with a brief expose of the life and works of Paulo Freire, the pedagogy of the banking system, and the theoretical structure of Freire's critical pedagogy. The critical and thematic approaches would be used. While earlier theorists tend to focus mostly on the impact of economic disparities in education, other writers and educators like bell hooks, Henry Giroux, and Ileana Jiménez have applied feminist, queer, and critical race theory to examine how existing classroom power structures marginalize women, people of color, and other learners as well, critical pedagogy does not end with theory but rather focuses on praxis, or translating knowledge into action. Critical pedagogy sees education as a tool for empowerment, a place where learners develop the knowledge and skills they need to undo oppressive structures and achieve liberation.*

**Keywords:** Paulo Freire, Pedagogy, Structures, Education

### **Preamble: Life and Works of Paulo Freire**

**Leslie Bentley**<sup>i</sup> narrates that Paulo Freire was born 19<sup>th</sup> September 1921. He grew up in the Northeast of Brazil where his experiences deeply influenced his life and work. The economic crisis of the world at his time forced him to know hunger and poverty at a young age. This aspect of his life is said to have been vividly articulated in Gadotti's *Reading Paulo Freire*: "I didn't understand anything because of my hunger. I wasn't dumb. It wasn't lack of interest. My social condition didn't allow me to have an education. Experience showed me once again the relationship between social class and knowledge."<sup>ii</sup>

According to Gadotti, Freire's arsenal of educational thought began to manifest with his appointment in 1946 as director of education at an employer's institution set up to help workers and their families<sup>iii</sup>. Here he began to see more disconnections between elitist educational practices and the real lives of the working class. For Gadotti, "a study of the language of the people was the starting point for the development of his work..."<sup>iv</sup> During this time Freire also

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participated in the Movement for Popular Culture, and supported the active exercise of democracy in lectures and in his doctoral thesis with the title "Present-day Education in Brazil," written in 1959. His convictions would paradoxically earn him the name of a "traitor."

As a result, in June 1964, Freire was imprisoned in Brazil for 70 days as a traitor. After a brief stay in Bolivia, he lived in Chile for five years working in the Christian Democratic Agrarian Reform Movement. In 1967, he published his first book, *Education at the Practice of Freedom*, bringing him acclaim and a position as visiting professor at Harvard in 1969. In 1968 he wrote his famous *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in Spanish and English in 1970, but not in Brazil until 1974.

Freire was invited to Geneva in 1970 where he worked for ten years as a special educational advisor to the World Congress of Churches. During this time, Freire traveled worldwide helping countries to implement popular education and literacy reforms. Some of his most influential work was in Guinea-Bissau (a West African country) where he advised national literacy efforts and consequently published "Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau."

Freire has been recognized worldwide for his profound impact on educational thought and practice. He received numerous awards including honorary doctorates, the King Balduin Prize for International Development, the Prize for Outstanding Christian Educators in 1985 with Elza, and the UNESCO 1986 Prize for Education for peace. In 1986, Freire's wife, Elza died. He remarried to Ana Maria Araújo Freire, who continued with her own radical educational work.

On May 2, 1997, Paulo Freire died of heart failure at the age of 75. Those who encountered Freire (whether as a lifelong friends, or from a distance through his intellectual writings) remember him with deep respect. Theatre artist David Diamond comments that he was stunned and relieved, and exuberant when he first read Paulo Freire; for, according to him, Freire was able to articulate what he knew and felt, but did not have the words for. So it is with many who have been touched in some way by Freire's work. He is most often referred to in the same sentence as the words love, compassion and hope.<sup>v</sup>

Other works of Freire, Paulo worth mentioning include: *Education For Critical Consciousness* (1993), "Letters To Christina: Reflections on My Life and Work" (1995), "Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guniea-Bisseau" (1978), *Pedagogy of*

*the City*(1993), *Pedagogy of the Heart*. (1997), *Pedagogy of Hope: Reviving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1995), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1994), *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation*,( 1985),*We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*, (1990).

Freire's work continues to be reinvented and re-clarified according to changing political and intellectual thought and social movements. In terms of hope, he has stated that "New forms of subjectivity and new strategies of emancipatory praxis" arising from globally oppressed groups create "struggles which will lead to new forms of political culture and structures of radical democracy."<sup>vi</sup> And in the era of globalization, he wrote, "Narratives of liberation must not ignore the cultural particularism of their roots, yet at the same time they must not abandon the opportunity to coordinate on a global basis."<sup>vii</sup> As long as the struggle for more humane educational practices, for deeper insights into constructions of power and oppression, and the impulse for people to invent their own identities and realities exist, Freirean praxis will continue to challenge every person towards personal and social liberation, both in thought and in deed.

### **The Pedagogy of the Banking System**

The Banking model of education is a term used by Paulo Freire to describe and critique the traditional education system. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.<sup>viii</sup> The name refers to the metaphor of students as containers into which educators may put knowledge. Freire argues that this model reinforces a lack of critical thinking and knowledge ownership in students, which in turn reinforces oppression, in contrast to Freire's understanding of knowledge as the result of a human, creative process.<sup>ix</sup> Freire describes this form of education as "fundamentally *narrative* (in) character"<sup>x</sup> with the teacher as the subject, that is, the active participant, and the students as passive objects. He argues that "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 others as absolutely ignorant, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, it negates education and knowledge as primarily processes of inquiry. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposites; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence.<sup>xi</sup> Consequently, Freire creates a list of questions that show how schools and classrooms could be evaluated; and any school or classroom that conforms to the category represents the banking system of education. In this system, the teacher is the one who prepares lessons and presents them to the students as secondary

knowledge. The students do not find out anything for themselves. Consequently, knowledge becomes an official product instead of a result of inquiry.<sup>xii</sup>

Freire conceives banking education as a system where students are considered empty bank accounts that should remain open to deposits made by the teacher. According to Freire, in this approach, the student is viewed as empty account to be filled by the teacher or the educator making 'deposits' in the learner. This concept is a strong support of the transmission of mere 'facts' as the goal of education.<sup>xiii</sup> In banking system of education the teacher talks about reality or fact as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized and predictable. The teacher expounds on a topic completely strange to the existential experience of the students. His/her task is to 'fill' the students with the contents of his narration.<sup>xiv</sup>

Freire is very critical of teachers who see themselves as the sole possessors of knowledge while they see their students as empty receptacles into which deposits of knowledge must be made. He likens their pedagogical approach 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. The banking method is a violent way to treat students because students are human beings with their own inclinations and legitimate ways of thinking. The banking method treats students as though they were things instead of human beings. In this system, teachers make deposits of information which students are expected to receive, memorize, and repeat.<sup>xv</sup>

Evident in Freire's revolutionary thesis is that the banking system minimizes the learners' ability to think critically. Hence, he proposes the critical or problem-posing method, which he believes, would help learners to think critically and challenge the world.<sup>xvi</sup> It suffices to hold that individuals will not be liberated if they are exposed to learning based on a system that engineers domination. The method of teaching and learning should therefore be based on the learner's experience. It should emphasize problem-solving than mere imposition or indoctrination. Giroux, quoting Freire, stresses that education is the practice of freedom. Liberal education often challenges domination by exposing the irrationality of life's reality.<sup>xvii</sup>

This banking education, which emphasizes the teacher's role as the active one and student's role as passive and the teacher-student relationship as anti-dialogical, is said to be worthless and anti-democratic. It serves the oppressor by denying the learner an active role in the learning. It does not engage students in critical

thinking which is compulsory in a democratic society. This is because it requires the students to be passive and to adapt, thereby serving the purposes of oppression. It inhibits creativity, it resists dialogue and it is laid-back in nature.<sup>xviii</sup> In reality, education either domesticates or liberates. Strictly speaking, the banking education, it appears, lies in the side of domestication. It deprives us of our ontological vocation of being fully human beings by denying us the chance of communicating through life meaningfully.

In banking education students do, perhaps, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store; but in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in the system. Freire points out that the banking system is as a result of the absolute dichotomy between teacher and student, between human beings and the world. This assumption treats persons as in the world, not with the world or others. It treats people as spectators and not as re-creators. It deprives one the opportunity of becoming a conscious being by making them mere possessors of consciousness.<sup>xix</sup> This system, as it were, seems to contradict the nature of the human person who is, at once, rational and critical. Little wonder then, why Freire employs this concept (critical pedagogy) to describe what he believes is most suitable for scholarship. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués where the scope of action allowed to students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits.<sup>xx</sup> Teachers are the epistemological authority in this system; students' pre-existing knowledge is ignored, aside from what was expected to be 'deposited' into them earlier. Freire also refers to a banking paradigm a system that regards students as "adaptable and manageable beings. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them."<sup>xxi</sup>

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. As was the case with the peasants with whom Freire worked, when a person's day-to-day experience is dominated by another person or group of people; most of the dominated people are not capable of developing the ability to think, to question, or to analyse situations for themselves. This cognitive pattern they developed through the un-interactive banking system of education to which

they were subjected. In this obsolete system, the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his/ her professional authority, which he/she determine as opposed to the freedom of the learners. The teacher is the main subject of the learning process, while the learners are mere objects.<sup>xxii</sup> It is a system where the more learners work to accumulate the deposits entrusted to them, the less they produce significant results that should arise out of a learning situation. The more they fully accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they adjust to the world in general and are immersed into a divisive social reality. Thus, they consciously develop to obey orders imposed on them.

Banking education follows the transmission model of education. This model views education as a specific body of knowledge that is transmitted from the teacher to the student. It emphasizes teacher-centric learning where students are passive absorbers of information and that the purpose of learning is memorization of facts.<sup>xxiii</sup>

One possible alternative to the banking model is the problem-based learning model (similar to what Freire called problem-posing education), in which students are encouraged to think and actively solve problems presented to them by the teacher.<sup>xxiv</sup> Worthy of note is that 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, he aims at undermining the power dynamics that hold some people above others.

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. The teacher 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.

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 relationship developed through the banking method between the teacher and the students is characterized as a vertical relationship, with mutual suspicion, insecurity, teacher's control, and power dynamics of

hierarchical oppression. This model views the student as a person with prior knowledge that may be capitalized upon to reach greater results than a banking model that fails to take advantage of this capital.<sup>xxv</sup> The critical pedagogy that Freire proposes allows for a horizontal type of relationship. 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 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.

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. 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. In order to problematize a subject, the teacher assumes a humble and open attitude. Given the teacher's personal example, the students also become open to the possibility of considering the different positions being discussed. This promotes a dynamic of tolerance and democratic awareness because critical pedagogy undermines relationships where some people have power or knowledge, and some do not, and where some people give orders and others obey without questioning. Problematizing promotes dialogue and a sense of critical analysis that allows students to develop the disposition for dialogue not only in the classroom but also outside of it. This is of utmost importance because the disposition and value of dialogue spills over in a positive way to the students' other relationships, at home, in the work place and in the community.<sup>xxvi</sup>

In response to the banking view of education, Freire suggests a very different model that tends to remove some of the power vested in teachers, and in the system, and gives it instead to the students. Freire recommends a more equal relationship between teacher and students, in which learning is negotiated

between them, rather than decided by the teacher or imposed by the system. He contrasted the banking model of education with a problem posing education, or in other words, a rejected a learn-and-repeat approach and recommended with a questioning approach. The first approach accepts the status quo, while the second approach challenges it. It is important to note that "Freire uses the term 'problem posing' rather than 'problem solving' since, in his view, the latter term still accepts the status quo."<sup>xxvii</sup> Hence, defining the nature of the problem is a crucial element in critical pedagogy, because this re-sets the starting point for any debate, and permits different understandings to be included from the beginning.

Since banking education begins with an illusion about human as objects, it cannot encourage development. According to Freire, banking education suffers from narrative illness. So the remarkable feature of this narrative education is the richness of the sound of the words, no longer their changing power.<sup>xxviii</sup> Banking education creates a situation of oppression in society and acts as a means of oppression. In this system learners are handled like a blank slate and information is accumulated by the instructor. Instead of tacitly promoting oppressive relationships through the banking method of education, Freire chooses critical pedagogy as his pedagogical model. This is because critical pedagogy utilizes dialogue among human beings who are equals rather than oppressive imposition.

Burbules and Berk, observe that the focal point of Freire critical pedagogy on critical thinking is predicated on the objective realities within the person's life.<sup>xxix</sup> In contrast to different strategies, the posed-problem method presented by Freire requires exchange of thoughts and beliefs through dialogue in which both instructors and learners have critical cooperation in research. Freire states that education must begin with resolving the paradox of the instructor-learners, including the poles of contradiction that both the instructor and the learner belong together. He accepts that cognizance is the indication of progress and advancement. Such a progress and advancement is the main output of good critical instruction plan.

According to Freire, individuals who knowingly or mistakenly use a banking approach fail to acknowledge that deposits themselves are logical anomalies about reality. Accordingly, Freire refers to the metaphor of the traditional way to deal with education as the banking model of education since it resembles saving cash in a bank. This model reflects the structure of an oppressive society wherein the oppressed and the oppressors are divided. So it is a vehicle for dealing with the



political mistreatment and the neutralization of freedom.<sup>xxx</sup>Freire emphasizes that a democratic relationship between the teacher and the students is necessary in order for the *conscientização* process to take place.<sup>xxxi</sup>

### **The Role of Conscientization in Critical Pedagogy**

Freire sees banking education as a way of dehumanizing people; hence, he advocates for a more authentic education, which aims at conscientization. 'Conscientização', as coined by Freire, entails both consciousness and praxis; taking practical action to deal with (oppressive) realities in life.<sup>xxxii</sup> Conscientization as a key concept in Freire's pedagogy, means the ways in which individuals and communities develop a critical understanding of their social reality through reflection and action. Action is fundamental because it is the process of changing the reality. This involves examining and acting on the root causes of oppression as experienced in the here and now. Conscientization is, therefore, a path to liberation that seeks the humanization of life. This process presupposes the elimination of oppression and also the overcoming of limiting situations in which human individuals are reduced. Paulo Freire says that we all acquire social myths which have a dominant tendency, and so learning is a critical process which depends upon uncovering real problems and actual needs. He suggests that only when dialogue succeeds, "these adults [can] begin to change society."<sup>xxxiii</sup> From yet another perspective, conscientization is often described as the process of becoming aware of social and political contradictions and then to act against the oppressive elements of our sociopolitical conditions. This entails developing a critical attitude to help us understand and analyze the human relationships through which we discover ourselves. Conscientization usually begins with the individual person becoming aware of her own social context, political context, economic context, gender, social class, sexuality, and race and how these play an important role in the shaping of her reality. The process of conscientization also entails becoming aware of our agency to choose and create our reality.

Freire goes on to note that 'conscientizacao' does not stop at the level of their subjective perception of the situation, but through action prepares men (and women) for the struggle against the obstacles to their humanization.<sup>xxxiv</sup> In keeping with the Marxist tradition, Freire regards one's material surroundings as the basis for the development of one's consciousness. In the words of Marx and Engels, Consciousness is, therefore, from the beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Therefore, to be an active participant in the community, one needs to be in constant dialogue in order to attain conscientização or critical consciousness.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Conscientização does not only include apprehending the inequalities in one's life but also taking action in order to change them.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Conscientization means breaking through prevailing mythologies to reach new levels of awareness, in particular, awareness of oppression, of being an object in a world where only subjects have power. The process of conscientization involves identifying contradictions in experience through dialogue and becoming a subject with other oppressed subjects- that is, becoming part of the process of changing the world.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

In this method, learners reach for 'conscientization', a process by which the learner advances towards critical consciousness. Through the "culture of silence", people lose their cultural, political and social stability and identity. Culture of Silence is a process that makes dominated individuals lose the means needed to critically respond to the culture that is enforced on them by a domineering culture. Some human beings are submerged in the culture of silence. Some are ignorant of different social matters. Every human being, no matter how 'ignorant' he or she may be, is capable of looking critically at the world in a dialogical encounter with others. It is not a traditional way of teaching and learning.<sup>xxxix</sup>

In specific terms, Freire's educational philosophy holds praxis and dialogue as closely related. Genuine dialogue represents a form of humanizing praxis. He views dialogue as "the encounter between men, meditated by the world, in order to name the world."<sup>xl</sup> In order to enable teachers and students to maintain their own intentionality and become an interactive or communicative subject coexisting with the external world or others, Freire advocates that teachers and students should dialogue, instead of teachers given absolute authority to oppress students. Teachers should use equal and interactive dialogues and mutual respect with students based on inter-subjectivity. This will endow student with the courage and ability of "critical consciousness".<sup>xli</sup>

Through this process of conscientização, the oppressors and oppressed can come to understand their own power. As previously mentioned, Paulo Freire worked with people who had been socialized within institutions shaped by the oppression of colonization. It bears repeating that although slavery was formally abolished in 1888, people continued to sell themselves into slavery during Freire's time. Freire worked with the sons, daughters, and grandchildren of former slaves, and he

noticed that the power dynamics of the institution of slavery continued to affect how people saw themselves and how they related to the people around them.<sup>xlii</sup> When a person or group of people has been socialized within an oppressive system such as slavery or patriarchy, it is often the case that the oppressed internalize the oppression and do not know that they are oppressed. Hence, the observation that the workers and peasants that Freire worked with were often not aware of the extent of their own oppression because of their history, socio-political and economic contexts. Since they had been socialized to obey orders, to perform specific functions, and to not question authority figures, they were discouraged from following their own interests and from thinking for themselves. Freire noticed that his students would often think of themselves as objects instead of subjects and agents with the ability to choose their own destiny.<sup>xliii</sup>

Freire emphasizes that there are several steps in the process of conscientization and that the consequences of personal choices could in fact shape personal history as well as contribute to the creation of human culture. Equally important is Freire's highlights that every single human being has the ability to change the world for the better through their work. This was very important because it allowed common men and women to see their own self-worth. Given that their dialect, race, work, and culture were constantly demeaned by a system of oppression, Freire affirmed the worth of every person and that person's work. Freire's students came to see themselves as the makers of their own destinies, as confident shoemakers and weavers who created art, and whose culture and dialects were important and valuable.

Instructors can select from a wide variety of activities when planning instructional sessions. 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. He explains that, those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concept 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 and replace it with the posing "of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world."<sup>xliv</sup>

Therefore, Freire believes that the problem-posing method along with the critical consciousness of 'conscientização' and praxis lead to "education at the practice of freedom."<sup>xlv</sup>

### **Critical Pedagogy and the Emancipatory Role of Dialogue**

Freire's critical pedagogy focuses on the struggle for the liberation of the poor. He advocates for an "education for liberation". According to him, for apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention; through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world with the world, and with each other.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Freire argues that this education for freedom from alienation is impossible without dialogical relations between the student and the teacher.<sup>xlvi</sup> 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."<sup>xlvi</sup>

Dialogue or problem - posing system of learning, becomes then a possible way out of most existential woes. Talking of problem-posting method, Freire says that since the teacher is not the absolute authority, there is a mutual respect between the teacher and the students. Again he says that this makes it possible for students to be able to make valid contributions towards education; and thus, the humanity of students is considered. Freire stresses that problem-posting education is dialogical in character. It involves dialogue between the student-teacher and the teacher-students. This is contrary to the banking system which progresses by issuing series of communiqués. For example, some committees sit and prepare curriculum which is later imposed on students. This kind of educational process is one way in nature. However, it must be understood that a teacher who can empathize with the students is needed for the critical method to be possible. The teacher should be able to enter into the activity of inquiry alongside the students. Freire notes:

Then through dialogue, the teacher-of-the students and the student-of -the-teacher cease to exist, and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teacher. 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 teaches.<sup>xlix</sup>

As interesting as it sounds, we shall later look into the possibility of this learning condition. For, it stands to be proven that, unlike the teacher, that a new learner

can be preoccupied with the content of a specific dialogue and engage meaningfully in an idea he or she has practically no knowledge about. This is where Friere's idea seems to need more clarifications. But Freire seems to suggest that the teacher's prior preparation before the actual dialogue engenders the feasibility of the exercise. In his words, "education which is able to resolve the contradiction between teacher and student takes place in a situation in which both address their act of cognition to the object by which they are mediated. Thus, the dialogical character of education as the practice of freedom does not begin when the teacher-student meets with the students-teachers in a pedagogical situation, but rather when the former first asks herself or himself *what* she or he will dialogue with the latter *about*. And preoccupation with the content of dialogue is really preoccupation with the program content of education.<sup>1</sup>

Sunil *et al*, would consider this dialogue to be essential for the restoration of our incompleteness which invariably suffices for emancipation. The kind of education issuing from this dialogue implies that the teacher should not assume absolute authority, since what he or she is teaching is not something alien to the students and they can contribute positively as well. Authentic education, according to Freire, will involve dialogue between the teacher and the student, mediated by the broader world context. He warns that the limits imposed upon both the oppressor and the oppressed dehumanize everyone involved, thereby removing the ability for dialogue to occur, and inevitably bars the possibility of transformation. He proposes 'dialogic' as an instrument to free the oppressed, through the use of cooperation, unity and organization and cultural synthesis. Dialogue is the way to overcome problems in society to liberate human beings; for there is no individual without limitations. All are incomplete. Understanding of these limitations and incompleteness is essential for dialogue with others.<sup>ii</sup>

Over and above the already identified limitations is the need for, humility, hope, faith and love in the dialogic process. Almost sounding evangelical, Freire believes that a meaningful dialogue requires some virtues for its effectiveness. The naming of the world, through which people constantly re-create that world, cannot be an act of arrogance. Dialogue, as the encounter of those addressed to the common task of learning and acting, is broken if the parties (or one of them) lack humility. Freire reasons thus: How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? How can I dialogue if I regard myself as a case apart from others mere "its" in whom I cannot recognize other "I"s? How can I dialogue if I consider myself a member of the in-group of "pure" men, the owners of truth

and knowledge, for whom all non-members are "these people" or "the great unwashed"? How can I dialogue if I start from the premise that naming the world is the task of an elite and that the presence of the people in history is a sign of deterioration, thus to be avoided? How can I dialogue if I am closed to (and even offended by) the contribution of others? How can I dialogue if I am afraid of being displaced, the mere possibility causing me torment and weakness? Self-sufficiency is incompatible with dialogue. Men and women who lack humility (or have lost it) cannot come to the people, cannot be their partners in naming the world. Someone who cannot acknowledge himself to be as mortal as everyone else still has a long way to go before he can reach the point of encounter. At the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know.<sup>lii</sup>

Our incompleteness tends to find hope and solace in our interlocution. We easily give up and for that matter without hope things can be very difficult. Hope becomes very necessary for it keeps people striving for liberation without giving up. When people enter into dialogue they should have hope that it will bring about positive results. Lastly, dialogue needs critical thinking. A kind of thinking that admits that reality is in process; not something static. Dialogue needs a kind of thinking which is not separate from action but which provokes involvement.<sup>liii</sup>

### **The Theoretical Structures of Freire's Critical Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy provides among other things, a theoretical structure for dialectical thought. This sounds like a difficult concept, but it just means challenging given situations, asking questions and considering other possibilities that might enable positive changes to be made. Critical theory re-examines the basic assumptions that people make about the world, and especially about society and all its institutions, roles and structures. It asks not only what is happening, but also why things are set up this way, and what the consequences of concepts, practices and experience might be. Following this line of thought, Giroux notes that critical theory "offers new concepts and categories for analysing the role that schools play as agents of social and cultural reproduction."<sup>liv</sup>Elucidating further on theoretical structures, a look at theories that are either explicitly or implicitly connected with the structure of Freire's critical pedagogy needs to be highlighted especially because this critical pedagogy challenges the biases and oppressive structures that can undermine learning and alienate students. Inclusive teaching offers strategies for translating that theoretical knowledge into action.<sup>lv</sup>

**A theoretical structure worth mentioning, as propounded by Gorski and Swalwell that is in tandem with Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed, is the issue of equity and social justice.** They argue, that “at the heart of a curriculum that is meaningfully multicultural lie principles of equity and social justice – purposeful attention to issues like racism, homophobia, sexism, and economic inequality.”<sup>lvi</sup> In the same vein, Gay suggests that instructors address topics such as racism, historical atrocities, and structures of power, and contextualize issues within race, class, and gender<sup>lvii</sup>. While librarians may initially feel uncomfortable discussing challenging topics in the classroom, Bunner found that ignoring issues of race is more problematic for students of color than imperfect conversations.<sup>lviii</sup>

Applying critical theory to education involves re-examining basic concepts and asking questions. One might start by re-examining the nature of childhood, and the expectations that adults have of children in a particular time and place. It has been noted that a young learner appears to be a construction that arises from historical, cultural and economic conditions about whom educators can hold multiple views regarding his or her formation and growth. Practitioners can recognize both the child in need of nurture and the child as agent of their own learning.<sup>lix</sup>

Critical pedagogy considers the wider social structures, such as the lack of pension and healthcare provision, the general weakness of the regional economy, and cultural values such as fatalism and collectivism as factors which influence the view of childhood that prevails.

Social constructivists in particular recognize that learners’ cultures, including shared values, behaviors, and beliefs, shape their knowledge. However, no society is made up of a single, monolithic culture; rather, different communities reflect different values and beliefs, and encourage and discourage different behaviors. Political, social, and educational systems tend to reflect the dominant culture, and over time the values, behaviors, and beliefs associated with that culture become so ingrained as to be invisible. Those living within the dominant culture do not recognize it as a system but simply see it as “normal,” and anything outside of that system is “other” than normal. Some educational theorists recognized that these differences have a profound impact on education. Bourdieu, for instance, saw that traditional educational systems tended to reflect and favor the experiences of children from wealthy families. Because these children understood that system and saw themselves reflected in it, they thrived and were successful, while

children from poorer families struggled. Since the dominant systems are essentially invisible, those in power tend to attribute the challenges faced by marginalized individuals as inherent to the person. In other words, if a child from a poor family struggles to learn how to read, teachers will often assume the issue is with the child's innate ability to learn, rather than recognize that the child might not have had the same pre-literacy experiences and current support systems that other children have. Because they do not recognize the root issue, these educational models tend to replicate rather than challenge the existing systems. So learners from the dominant culture continue to succeed while those from marginalized communities continue to struggle; a phenomenon that Bourdieu refers to as cultural reproduction.<sup>lx</sup>

While earlier theorists tended to focus mostly on the impact of economic disparities in education, other writers and educators like bell hooks, Henry Giroux, and Ileana Jiménez have applied feminist, queer, and critical race theory to examine how existing classroom power structures marginalize women, people of color, and other learners as well. Importantly, critical pedagogy does not end with theory but rather focuses on praxis, or translating knowledge into action. Critical pedagogy sees education as a tool for empowerment, a place where learners develop the knowledge and skills they need to undo oppressive structures and achieve liberation.<sup>lxi</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Unlike the traditional "banking" model of education that positions learners as passive recipients of information, in a classroom guided by critical pedagogy, learners engage with problems that are personally meaningful and are active agents in their own education and through that education gain agency to enact change in the world beyond the classroom.<sup>lxii</sup> Critical pedagogy informs the critical approaches to information literacy which urges us to move away from a skills-based, teacher-centered approach to information literacy toward one that questions dominant information structures and adopts student-centered teaching methods. Building on the ideas of agency and empowerment, critical information literacy encourages learners to see themselves as part of the "scholarly conversation" and as creators of information, rather than just consumers, and provides them with ways to recognize and challenge dominant powers within the current systems of creating, sharing, and evaluating information. Thus, for instructors, critical pedagogy pushes us to surface power dynamics in the



classroom and the larger communities in which our learners live, and to reflect on how our own culture and biases colour our approach to the classroom. In doing so, it offers a model for a more inclusive teaching practice.

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