



An Understanding of Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed"

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Introduction

"Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (Portuguese: *Pedagogia do Oprimido*) is a book written by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, first written in Portuguese in 1968. It was first published in English in 1970, in a translation by Myra Ramos. The book is considered one of the foundational texts of critical pedagogy and proposes a pedagogy with a new relationship between teacher, student, and society. The justification for a "Pedagogy of the Oppressed"; the contradiction between the oppressors and the oppressed, and how it is overcome; oppression and the oppressors; oppression and the oppressed; liberation: not a gift, not a self-achievement, but a mutual process.

Understanding the "Pedagogy of the Oppressed"

In the preface, Freire talks about how "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" came to existence, pointing out that it is based on his past experiences as a teacher in Brazil and his observations from the period in which he was in political exile. While trying to bring up critical consciousness in his students, Freire realized that many of them harbour a "fear of freedom." However, he posits that this fear is not a fear of freedom, but a fear of the risks associated with freedom. Freire also acknowledges potential criticisms of his theories as being too idealistic or reactionary and acknowledges that the book is written: "for radicals." He directly contrasts sectarianism—a belief system that misrepresents the world and tries to prevent change—with radicalization, a commitment to significant social change and human liberation. According to Freire, the educational model he posits can only be successful if its participants have been radicalized. Freire reflects on the incompleteness of his work, pointing out that the reader can view it critically and find aspects of his argument that even he has missed.

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The Justification for a "Pedagogy of the Oppressed"

Freire makes the case for why a "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" is necessary. He begins by identifying "humankind's central problem"—the problem of how we affirm our identities as human beings. Although all human beings strive toward this affirmation, it is constantly being interrupted by systems of oppression that exploit, and do violence against, oppressed people. Freire argues that oppressed people can regain their humanity in the liberation struggle, but only if that struggle is led by oppressed people. This introduces the central problem of the book: how to create an education system with oppressed people, for oppressed people, that will help them become freer. Freire then discusses the ways that oppression affects the consciousness of oppressors and oppressed people. Oppressors treat people as objects to be possessed and see freedom as threatening; oppressed people become separated from each other and begin to see their oppressors as the good ones. Freire asserts that the fight for liberation must consist of two stages: reflection on the nature of oppression, and then concrete action to change it. Leaders in this fight must exist in dialogue with oppressed people, rather than becoming like oppressors.

Freire puts forth a pedagogy in which the individual learns to cultivate his growth through situations in his daily life that provide useful learning experiences. This is not a pedagogy *for* the oppressed; it is rather a pedagogy *of* the oppressed. The subject should build his reality from the circumstances that give rise to the daily events of his life. The texts that the individual creates permit him to reflect upon and analyse the world in which he lives - not to adapt himself to this world, but rather as part of an effort to reform it and to make it conform to his historical demands.

Paulo Freire's learning approach requires that students do more than simply reproduce the words that already exist. They create their own words, words that allow them to become aware of the reality to fight for their emancipation. Without this, some people acquire a kind of naive consciousness in which they are aware of their situation but don't make any effort to change it; they take a conformist stance and consider their situation something normal, even to the point of supporting it themselves. Other individuals construct their reality and liberate themselves from oppression, only to go to the opposite extreme and become the antithesis of what they were fighting against.

The person who thinks and reflects goes about creating himself from the inside out. He creates his consciousness of struggle by transforming reality and liberating himself from the oppression that has been inserted by traditional pedagogy. In the same way, when he acquires a new way of thinking, his understanding of the social status that he holds changes him. It's not necessarily a materialistic understanding, but a cognitive one, whose importance is revealed in the liberation from oppression which is found in the interior of the consciousness of the individual who possesses it. Freire endeavours that the individual, through systematic study, also learn to fight for the end of oppression and constructive criticism of the status quo.

Freire's proposed method implies two distinct and sequential moments: the first involves becoming conscious of the reality that the individual lives as an oppressed being subject to the decisions that the oppressors impose; the second refers to the initiative of the oppressed to fight and emancipate themselves from the oppressors. Freire does not believe that the lived situation consists only of a simple awareness of reality. Instead, he believes that the individual has a historical need to fight against the status that dwells within him. The efforts of

the oppressed become focused and concrete through the type of learning that school really should give them, instead of encouraging them to adapt to their reality, as the oppressors themselves do.

In the relationships they establish, the oppressed appear to be the instigators of violence, even when the conditions and events that they have experienced up to that point incite them to try to modify their status. Nevertheless, in the eyes of the oppressors, such fights are canonised as unnecessary violence or Utopian dreams, and not as the ideas of a revolutionary who is known for the ideological commitment that he establishes with his peers, rather than for the battles he carries out. Although the reality of the oppressed is not the will of God, although He is not responsible for the oppressive situation, in a society without conscience such situations are presented as normal. These circumstances occasionally provoke mistaken horizontal violence between the oppressed themselves in their efforts to achieve emancipation.

Furthermore, the oppressors accuse those who oppose them of being disobliging, irresponsible, depraved and responsible for their situation, even though even if these adjectives do sometimes apply, they are really a response to being oppressed and are ultimately the result of the exploitation to which these people have been subjected. The situation gets even worse when the oppressed accept this reality and adapt to it without questioning or even attempting to change it. This generates in the oppressed an emotional dependence that seems irrevocable. It is necessary, therefore, that these individuals get to know themselves to begin the fight for their inexorable emancipation.

The "Banking" Concept of Education as an Instrument of Oppression

Freire's Theories on Education

He breaks down the traditional relationship between teachers and students, in which teachers have power and knowledge, but the students do not. In this "*banking model*" of education, a teacher "*deposits*" facts into the mind of the students, who have to memorize and recall them. Freire critiques this model and suggests that it teaches students to adapt to an oppressive world, instead of teaching them how to view the world critically. In the fight for liberation, oppressed people and educators should reject the banking model: Freire replaces it with a "*problem-posing model*" that makes teachers and students more equal. Problem-posing education presents students with worldly problems that relate to their lives and pushes them to analyze how and why those problems exist. According to Freire, this model directly combats oppression by empowering people to question their conditions, and by encouraging dialogue.

Currently, in education, there is excessive use of lecturing and memorisation, with little analysis of the importance of what is being memorised. For example, 1945 marks the end of the Second World War. but we do not know how that affected our lives or how it continues to affect the daily relationships we establish. We have simply memorised and retained the date. Freire describes this situation as one in which the students are seen as containers into which knowledge can be deposited. The teacher is the depositor and the knowledge is that which is deposited daily. This bank concept of education attempts to transform the minds of individuals so that they will adapt better to actual situations and be dominated by them with greater ease. The more passive people are, the more they will adapt, the more their creativity will diminish

and their naivete increase, which creates the conditions necessary for the oppressors to emerge as generous benefactors.

Dialogics

Freire expands the concept of *dialogue*: within a hierarchal society, he argues that dialogue is an act of "love, humility, and faith" in humanity. Dialogue also requires hope, mutual trust, and critical thinking from the people who are in dialogue together. Like the bigger fight for liberation, dialogue consists of both thoughts and concrete actions together ("praxis"); and Freire critiques people who only reflect, or only take action. From there, he explores the relationship between human beings and the world, arguing that educators should account for how their students perceive reality and history. He contrasts animals—which do not perceive history but only live in the present—and people, who can understand that humans have shaped the world today and can shape its future. Historical moments are characterized by the ideas and values of people during that moment; Freire calls the worldly expression of those ideas "themes." By discovering these themes in a classroom environment, students can deepen their understanding of the world, and educators can gain insight into their students' perspectives. Freire proposes one way of achieving this, in which educators use auditory and visual materials to present students with a situation and gauge their feelings about it.

Man is not allowed to understand and transform the reality that encircles him when education is simply a method used to adapt him to this reality. The idea of Freire is that the individual learns to do just that- to understand and transform reality. To achieve this goal, dialogicity must be established between teacher and student, since man does not create himself in silence, but through words, actions and reflection. The use of dialogue, therefore, is the key element in learning. The dialogue established between the two subjects helps to increase reciprocal kindness, something that is an act of bravery, not cowardice. We are not talking about a naive act, but about the kind of dialogue that kindness between people creates.

Some people believe themselves to be leaders and go to the masses to establish a dialogue with them. But it is their interests and not the interests of the community that are pursued. They encourage people to adapt to a new way of life without attending to their historical demands. They fall into naively thinking that one should adapt to existing conditions, rather than construct the new and appropriate conditions required by critical thought - the kind of thought that builds spaces and opportunities for liberation and the overturning of oppression through conscious action.

It is important to establish a dialogue with a community. Since this implies the use of a language similar to that with which the individual is familiar, it is necessary to integrate oneself into the life of the individual - to study his language, practice and thought. Later, through the use of problematising education, these elements will come together to create knowledge, since it is not necessary to refer to other far away spaces to find opportunities and topics for study. Topics for learning can be found in the reality that surrounds the individual, it's just that they are hidden by the "*limiting situations*" that the oppressors create. These limits can disappear through the education that a problematising teacher, who moves from the particular to the general, encourages.

Antidialogics and Dialogics as Metrics of Oppression

Freire lays out a theory of "*cultural activities*," or the methods that people use to create cultural change. He divides cultural action into two kinds, "*dialogical action*" and "*anti-dialogical action*": while oppressors use anti-dialogical action to protect their power and separate groups of people, radical political leaders can use dialogical action to bring people together in the struggle for freedom. Freire goes into the various methods of "anti-dialogical action" in detail: conquest, divide and rule, manipulation, and cultural invasion. He then directly contrasts these with the "dialogical action" of radical political leaders: cooperation, unity, organization, and cultural synthesis. Freire also spends much of the chapter examining radical political leaders and the characteristics they must have to authentically help oppressed people. These leaders should understand the barriers that prevent oppressed people from committing to the struggle while avoiding the techniques oppressors use to keep them in line.

The oppressor uses antidialogicity in a variety of ways to maintain the status quo. He conquers the oppressed with an invariably unilateral dialogue, converting the communication process into an act of necrophilia. Some oppressors even use other ideological instruments to achieve their conquest - like that of "bread and circus" - so that their conquest will be total.

The oppressors also seek to prevent people from uniting through dialogue. In their implicit discourse, they warn that it can be dangerous to the "*social peace*" to speak to the oppressed about the concepts of union and organisation, amongst others. One of their principal activities is to weaken the oppressed through alienation, with the idea that this will cause internal divisions, and that in this way things will remain stable. Compared to those who opposed them, the oppressors seem to be the only ones that can create the harmony necessary for life. But this is an effort to divide. If any individual decides to begin a fight for liberation, he is stigmatised, and included on the "black list", all to avoid the historically inevitable realisation of freedom.

Another characteristic of antidialogicity is the way it uses ideology to manipulate people to conform to the goals it proposes. Sometimes the manipulation happens by getting people to side with something that works to the disadvantage of the oppressed. Similarly, antidialogicity imposes a bourgeois model of life - a model that encounters among the masses fertile ground for a hidden manipulation of discourse. The organisation as an antidote to this manipulation is rare.

Some leaders left do go to the masses to expound upon their ideas. Nevertheless, the majority of their fight is centred upon their achievement of power. When they have achieved is objective, they forget about the masses who supported them. Other individuals call leaders flirt with both parties. Their behaviour toward the popular classes is ambiguous since they see this group as only a bargaining chip between the oligarchy and themselves. The liberation that the oppressed desire is never really achieved.

Conclusion

Everyone strives to become human but oppression interrupts it, the interruption is called 'dehumanization' which is where everyone strives to become something in life by going to school but in the process, they become indoctrinated.

He outlines the steps to becoming human:

1. Acquiring knowledge about humanization, identifying oppressors and working together with them to achieve liberation. In Nigeria, one of the ways the education system can be made to fulfil its purpose is by acquiring knowledge about becoming a useful member of the society and not recycling the indoctrinated knowledge and identifying those who are indoctrinating them.
2. Understanding the goal of the oppressors which is purely materialistic that they see humans as the object they owned and can manipulate anyhow they want and like. They value ownership more than humanity in the process they also objectified themselves that is the oppressors which Freire identified as teachers. The teacher only wants to take full control of the class. The goal of the oppressor (teacher) is not to train the younger ones to be able to think creatively but to put things and their oppressed (learners) to do things in their way, the teachers don't allow learners to think of learning in their way rather the teachers and educational policy formulators do that which is more or less objectifying the students
3. Dialogue / Discussion with each other to reach goals of humanization: learning process is supposed to be dynamic and not static, Freire identified that becoming a useful member of society should not be the work of a teacher only, learners can also impact teachers positively, the learning process should be in form of discussion.

Freire further explained that the oppressors (teachers) viewed the oppressed (learners) as like a *piggy bank* where they can deposit anything at every time, he used a theory called the *banking model* to explain this. This is also applicable in Nigeria where teachers only keep teaching according to the outlined syllabus not allowing the learners to learn creatively and also using a teaching method that does not allow learners to contribute to the teaching and learning process. Freire also explained in His book that learners are made to believe that Teachers are seen as an encyclopedia of knowledge while the learners are passive.

Freire pointed out ways of liberating the oppressed (learners) from their oppressors (teachers) as:

- i. The method of teaching that makes the learner be passive during the teaching and learning process should be removed from the curriculum and he encourages that it should be replaced with a learner-centred approach as seen in teaching methods like the discussion methods. He believes with a method like discussion both teacher and learner learn side by side and also create an equal environment for effective teaching and learning process.
- ii. The adoption of the use of more student's friendly language of instruction.
- iii. Imploring the use of thematic investigation, that is allowing students to think of how to solve a problem.

References

Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd.