

Day 1: PAULO FREIRE: TEACHING IS A HUMAN ACT

Ethics: a set of moral principles, especially ones relating to or affirming a specified group, field, or form of conduct

1. Intervention and Autonomy

According to Freire, education is a human act of “intervening in the world.” By intervention he referred to the aspiration (hope and ambition) of achieving changes in society within education, health, economics, human relations and human rights. Such intervention becomes a “subversive force,” keeping alive hope for a world without exploitation (oppression) and inequality. He believed that: “Teaching requires a capacity to be critical”; “Teaching requires humility”; “Teaching requires critical reflection”; “Teaching always involves ethics.” By ethics, he meant not being afraid to condemn that which creates obstacles to hope and action.

In the beginning of his book Pedagogy of Freedom, Freire says,

“Two subjects occupy me in the writing of this text. The question of what forms education and becoming a teacher, and a reflection on educative practice from a progressive point of view. By ‘progressive’ I mean a point of view that favors the autonomy of the students.” p. 21

Becoming a teacher, according to Freire, means the development of a self-confidence (and authority) that “expresses itself in a firmness of action or of decision in regard to its respect for the freedom and autonomy of students” p. 85. The self-confident teacher has the ability to discuss her or his position (viewpoint), but is also open to reviewing that position. Here, Freire’s idea of a teacher’s authority (commitment to ongoing critical reflection and the autonomy of students) is not authoritarian (oppressive). That is, both the authority of the teacher and the freedom of the students are “ethically grounded,” which transforms the teaching/learning space (for teacher and student) into “authentic educational experience” (experiencing autonomy).

***Re reading & Taking Notes**

Lets stop here for a few moments for your notes

Intervention: interrupt, alter a result or reality

Autonomy: independence, freedom from external control

Authority: confidence from personal expertise

Authoritarian: enforcing obedience at the expense of personal freedom

Authentic: accurate, reliable, genuine

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS
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Does Freire’s position make sense in your own life as a teacher? How so? What do you find inspiring? What do find problematic or challenging? What questions can you pose (for further reflection or dialogue)?

2. Freedom & Respect

“Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of [hu]mans; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable [essential] condition for the quest for human completion. (Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p. 47)

Respect and freedom are essential to education for Freire. In teaching, it is important to make it obvious to students that respect for them as well as to yourself as a teacher is fundamental. He also argues that it is important to recognize that it is not possible to live ethically without freedom, and that there is no such thing as freedom without risk. Freire says:

“Teachers who exercise their freedom will feel that it becomes greater and more integrated to the degree that they ethically assume responsibility for their actions. To decide is to break with something, and, to do this, I have to run a risk... I refuse to silence the freedom of the students, and on the other hand, I reject any inhibition of the process of constructing good discipline.” Pedagogy of Freedom, p. 87

As a teacher, you are dealing with the practice and exercise of your own freedom and authority while, at the same time, dealing directly with the freedom and development of your students’ autonomy. Students are in the process of building their own capacity of authority (confidence). As a teacher, you cannot teach what you do not know; you must be engaged permanently in your own learning.

Freire also argued for the importance of teachers being prepared to teach the contents of their subject or discipline well and correctly. This does not mean, however, that you “merely reduce your teaching practice to the mere transmission of content.” Freire states:

“It is my ethical posture [attitude, stance] in the course of teaching these contents that will make the difference. It is a posture made up of my commitment to thoroughness, my investment in excellence, and my competent preparation that reveals humility rather than arrogance. It is a posture of unconditional respect for students, for the knowledge they have that comes directly from life and that, together with the students, I will work to go beyond. My coherence [consistency] in the classroom is as important as my teaching of contents. A coherence of what I say, write and do.” Pedagogy of Freedom, p. 94

Here, Freire argues that it is important for your students to see your struggle (against authoritarianism or freedom with no limits; forms of domination), and practice as coherent (toward hope, and being a determined fighter who never gives up). It is necessary, he says, that you discuss this struggle with students from time to time so that your struggle does not appear contradictory at times.

This dialogue with students could matter in terms of students understanding freedom and autonomy: that it comes with responsibility for decisions, and is not the “absence of limits.” For students, freedom becomes mature in confrontation with other freedoms in relation to parents, teachers, and the state. It’s in making decisions that your students learn to decide. This learning experience includes the

consequences that any decision must be assumed by the decision maker. The participation of the teacher (or parent) is helping students analyze the possible consequence of decision-making.

Autonomy for students is the result of making various and innumerable decisions while being aware and conscientious. And, students learn from watching your decision making as a teacher that respects freedom and autonomy. Freire states:

“Autonomy is a process of becoming oneself, a process of maturing, of coming to be. It does not happen on a given date. In this sense, a pedagogy of autonomy should be centered on experiences that stimulate decision making and responsibility, in other words, on experiences that respect freedom.” *Pedagogy of Freedom*, p. 98

Another point Freire argues here is that education is not neutral whether or not authoritarian or progressive, humanizing or dehumanizing (wherein humanity has been stolen). Teaching is a “directive” vocation (profession) that is political in its address to dreams, ideals, and objectives. In the Forward Chapter to Freire’s book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Richard Shaull writes,

“Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring conformity to it, or it becomes ‘the practice of freedom,’ the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.” *Pedagogy of Freedom*, p.34

Freire argues that what should guide education is respect to all those involved: for teachers on the part of administrations and communities, between teacher and student. What is neutrality, he asks? He answers: “a comfortable and perhaps hypocritical way of avoiding any choice or even hiding my fear of denouncing injustice. To wash my hands in face of oppression.” p. 101

***Re reading & Taking Notes**

Lets stop here for a few moments for your notes. In rereading the text, look for these concepts and how they are used.

<i>Respect</i>	<i>Coherence</i>	<i>Decision making</i>	<i>Humanizing</i>
<i>Freedom</i>	<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Consequences</i>	<i>Dehumanizing</i>
<i>Ethical Posture</i>	<i>Neutrality</i>	<i>Vocation</i>	<i>Struggle</i>

*Does Freire’s position make sense in your own life as a teacher? How so?
 What do you find inspiring? What do find problematic or challenging?
 What questions can you pose (for further reflection or dialogue)?*

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS
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3. Fatalism versus Possibility

Freire speaks of the feeling of suffocation or numbness when a process of standardization of formulas and models to which we are evaluated crushes our freedoms. (What are the implications of such

evaluations?) He is speaking here of an invisible power which provides a certain level of efficiency by conformity. For many of us, this larger social environment of rules and policies we are a part of, not by our choosing, appears irreversible, destined to be, “out of our hands.” At times we feel powerless against facts that happen because they had to happen and cannot be altered. This is a mechanistic (machine-like) way of understanding our history and the world, and offers no place for choices, or making decisions, which is “essentially human.” In his book, Pedagogy of the Heart, Freire argues:

“It is impossible to understand history as possibility if we do not recognize human beings as beings who make free decisions. Without this form of exercise it is not worth speaking about ethics. p. 37

Freire argues that if our historical past is not problematized and critically understood, tomorrow will be continuation of today, without the freedom of choice. “There is only room for well-behaved submission to fate. Today. Tomorrow. Always.” p. 102 He calls this “fatalism” and rejects it because he believes it reduces the human person to nothing, to a person who sees reality as a closed world with no exit.

Education is a practice of humanization and must be full of hope, ideals and possibilities. It is not as if we should be against evaluation per se, but against a type of methodology (of power) that aims to silence “constructive diversity, constructive criticism, and, ultimately, freedom.” Pedagogy of Freedom, p. 104

***Re reading & Taking Notes**

It's worth stopping here to think about “fatalism” (the belief that all events are predetermined and therefore inevitable, or a submissive, passive outlook, resulting from a fatalistic attitude).

What do find problematic or challenging? What questions can you pose (for further reflection or dialogue)?

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4. Inner Security and Unfinishedness

One thing Freire reminded us in our struggles as teachers: Education cannot do everything. We cannot think that our teaching is going to transform a whole country. We need to think critically about what education can do, such as strengthen convictions for our students and ourselves that it is possible to change things.

“...when a competent teacher who is full of life and hope for a better world, who has a proven capacity for struggle and for respect for what is different, knows that the best way to modify the situation of the world is through the consistency with which she/he lives out his or her committed presence in the world, knowing that this presence in the school, though it is a special and important moment that should be lived with authenticity, is nevertheless only one of many moments. Pedagogy of Freedom, p. 110

Freire spoke of bringing certain qualities and cautions to his own teaching that in turn became a store of

wisdom. His example include: the necessity of an attitude of permanent openness toward others; a methodological mistrust that prevents him from becoming absolutely certain of being right; alertness and sharpened perception to hear with respect – allowing openness to difference, to being approached, to questioning and being questioned, to agreeing and disagreeing.

However, he also stressed the importance of constructing an inner security in order to live with such openness to the world. He reminded us again of the importance to allow students to see the security with which you discuss a theme or analyze a fact. Inner security does not rest on the false assumption that you know everything there is to know. It does rest on the conviction that there are things you do know and some things you do not know. Inner security then is grounded on the knowledge that you are unfinished, and reveals there is much you may still come to know and learn. Without shame for not knowing, we are left with “open-ended curiosity toward life and its challenges, which are essential to your educational practice.” Freire goes on to say:

“The experience of openness as a founding moment of our unfinishedness leads us to the knowledge and awareness of that unfinishedness. It would be impossible to know ourselves as unfinished and not to open ourselves to the world and to others in search of an explanation or a response to a multitude of questions.” Pedagogy of Freedom, p. 121

Freire also talks about an openness for the well being of your students and their educational experience under your care. He argues that openness to such care has to do with your openness to life itself, “to the joy of living.” Here, joy does not come only from finding out an answer; it comes also from the inquiry. He says:

“There is something mysterious, something called “vocation,” that explains why so many teachers persist with so much devotion in spite of the immoral salaries they receive. Not only do they remain but they fulfill as best they can their commitment. And do it with love.” Pedagogy of Freedom, p. 126

Freire also insisted that carrying out your teaching with feeling and joy does not prevent your serious, scientific education and a clear-sighted political consciousness. For him, educative practice is all of the following: affectivity, joy, scientific seriousness, technical expertise at the service of change, and not the preservation of the status quo.

****Re reading & Taking Notes***

Lastly, let's stop here and consider inner security, curiosity and unfinishedness. How do they affect your teaching? How do you see teaching as a vocation, a calling, or purpose?

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