

## Day 2 - PAULO FREIRE: TEACHING IS NOT JUST TRANSFERRING KNOWLEDGE

### 1. A Mechanical Approach

According to Freire, knowing how to teach means creating possibilities for creating and producing knowledge rather than being engaged simply in the “game” of transferring existing knowledge. He says:

“When I enter a classroom I should be someone who is open to new ideas, open to questions, and open to the curiosities of the students as well as their inhibitions. In other words, I ought to be aware of being a critical and inquiring subject in regard to the task entrusted to me, the task of teaching and not that of transferring knowledge” *Pedagogy of Freedom*, p. 49.

Otherwise, he argues, teachers fall into contradictions and lose their power to convince. These contradictions have to do with one who speaks of equality in the school but behaves like an autocrat (ruler with absolute power) while teaching. Freire acknowledges that teaching with openness is a “demanding and difficult discipline” because it demands “constant vigilance” over ourselves to avoid being simplistic, facile (without effort) and incoherent. He reminds us, however, that he does not promote teaching in an atmosphere of indiscipline or mere “spontaneity.” Rather, we teach with methodological rigor.

Given that transferring knowledge is considered status quo, most of us are conditioned to this mechanical approach; we have internalized it; it is difficult to overcome. “Teachers and students are socialized into a mechanical way of education, year after year, and its form becomes synonymous with (equated to) professional rigor” (Shor & Freire, *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, p. 78). Students’ experience in doing education becomes listening to the teacher talk from a standard syllabus. Each discipline sets an appropriate language in a given territory. Freire speaks of the difficulty of changing one’s practice:

“What happens, then, when a young teacher meets for the first time the hypothesis of changing his or her behavior in the classroom?... She or he comes to the classroom with a new conviction, but this new teacher was already shaped in the dichotomy [split] between context and content... words and world.” *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, p. 136

### **\*Re reading & Taking Notes**

*Lets stop here for a few moments for your notes.*

*The questions Freire asks above are important. How can we implement change when we have National Examinations to prepare students for? How might we integrate words and world in teaching content? What is the argument here about rigor?*

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS  
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### 2. The “Banking” System

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire makes his well-known argument about what he called the “banking concept of education,” whereby students are turned into “containers” or “receptacles” to be filled with knowledge by the teacher. “The more completely s/he fills the receptacles, the better a

teacher s/he is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are” p. 72. Freire argues:

“Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués [statements] and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the ‘banking’ concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits” p. 72.

Freire further argues that actually it is the students themselves who are ‘filed’ away through their lack of creativity, participation, choice and transformation in this “misguided system.” His position on learning is that it is a human endeavor, and that knowledge (thus knowing) emerges only through “invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry...with the world and with each other” p. 72.

In the banking concept of teaching, those who consider themselves knowledgeable “bestow” (grant) knowledge upon those “whom they consider to know nothing.” Freire believed this approach projects or attaches “ignorance” onto others, a “characteristic of the ideology [system of ideas and ideals] of oppression” that mirrors (reflects) oppressive societies. Here the teacher becomes on the opposite side of the student in a teacher-student divide. Freire argues:

“Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling [reuniting] the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students. ... The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they need simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them.” *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 73

Whether intended or not, the banking system students are objects to be filled rather than subjects who critically consider their reality; a student is merely *in* the world, not *with* the world, a spectator, not a re-creator. The resulting position behind the banking concept is that the student is “not a conscious being, but a possessor of *a* consciousness: an empty mind passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside” p. 75. Freire says the following about the teacher’s role in the banking system:

The teacher’s task is to organize a process which already occurs spontaneously, to ‘fill’ the students by making deposits of information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge. And since people ‘receive’ the world as passive entities, education should make them more passive still, and adapt them to the world” [as it is] p. 76.

In contrast, authentic liberation, which Freire sees as humanization, is not another deposit, but a process of praxis (reflection and action) upon the world in order to transform it. Those committed to

liberation do not accept the “mechanistic concept of consciousness as an empty vessel to be filled,” nor do they accept education as one after the other deposits.

**\*Re reading & Taking Notes**

*Lets stop here for a few moments for your notes.*

*Freire’s arguments of a banking concept of education arise from his ideas around oppression. The banking system is found, to some degree, in most education systems in the world. We have adapted to it.*

*What is your understanding of Freire’s argument?*

*Are “transferring knowledge” and “depositing knowledge” the same argument?*

*What question would you pose to Freire?*

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS  
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**3. Teaching requires Curiosity**

“To me, the epitome [perfect example] of negation [contradiction or denial] in the context of education is the stifling or inhibition of curiosity in the learner and, consequently, in the teacher too. In other words the educator who is dominated by authoritarian ... attitudes that suffocate the curiosity of the learner finishes by suffocating his or her own curiosity. (Freire, Pedagogy of Freedom, p. 79)

Curiosity is what makes us “question, know, act, ask again, recognize.” Why wouldn’t we want our classrooms to be filled with curiosity? A lesson then becomes an environment of challenge rather than a “nest” where students gather. Freire insists that people will always be “at their most authentic” when they are curious, when they get to know, and they produce or recreate knowledge rather than just mechanically storing it. In his book, Letters to Cristina, Freire muses:

“I dream of a time and a society in which one’s learning nature and curiosity will not be satisfied...I should go beyond the fundamental question about what I do, how I do it, and what I do it with. I should challenge myself with other indispensable [necessary] questions: who do I serve doing what I do, against whom or in favor of whom, and why do I do what I do?” p. 115

As teachers, we can push our curiosity and ask similar questions: Why and how do I teach what I do? Who do I serve teaching what I teach? Why do I teach? The exercise of curiosity makes our questions more critical and more rigorous. The exercise of curiosity releases the imagination, the emotions, the “capacity to conjecture and compare” Pedagogy of Freedom, p. 82. Freire states:

“...as a student who dreams of becoming a teacher tomorrow or who is already teaching, I ought to have as the object of my curiosity the experiences I have lived with various teachers, as well as my own experiences with my own students. What I want to say is the following: I must not think only of the programmatic contents that are the themes of our discussions in the

various teaching departments. I must reflect at the same time on the questions of whether this or that teacher teaches in an open, dialogical way or in a closed, authoritarian way.”

**\*Re reading & Taking Notes**

*Lets stop here for a few moments for your notes.*

*If curiosity is part of being human, then is the banking system of dehumanizing pedagogy? Is this an argument a*

*leader in education might make? What or who might challenge such leadership?*

*If you were leading a new school or curriculum, how might you engage inspiring curiosity in the curriculum?*

*Why wouldn't we want our classrooms to be filled with curiosity?*

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS  
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**4. Critical Consciousness**

*Critical:” a sustained commitment to issues of inequality, injustice, and the possibilities of personal and social transformation, and to interrogate [question] assumptions about these issues that often are taken for granted.” (from Emotion and Traumatic Conflict, by Michalinos Zembylas, p. 4)*

*Critical Consciousness: “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.” (from Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p. 35)*

As we have read so far, Freire insisted on teaching that remains open to students’ autonomy and curiosity. Equally important, he urged teachers to cultivate students’ critical thinking. He believed that the development of critical consciousness would not happen for students while they indulge in mechanical memorization at the expense of connecting what they read and what is happening in the world, their country, or local community. Freire spoke about the “creative challenge” of reading texts with a critical mind:

“Really reading involves a kind of relationship with the text, which offers itself to me and to which I give myself and through the fundamental comprehension which I undergo the process of becoming a subject [rather than object to be filled]. While reading I’m not just a captive of the mind of the text as if it were simply a product of its author. This is a vitiated [soiled or impaired] form of reading that has nothing to do with thinking or teaching correctly. (Pedagogy of Freedom, p. 34)

What the teacher can instill in the student is “the beauty of our way of existing in the world as historical beings, capable of intervening in and knowing this world” p. 35. It is important to be immersed in existing knowledge in order to be open and produce ways of knowing that do not yet exist. However, curriculum that is disconnected from life, “centered on words emptied of the reality they are meant to represent, lacking concrete activity” does not move students toward critical consciousness (awareness) (Education for Critical Consciousness, p. 33). Here Freire argued that critical consciousness is integrated with reality through analysis of causality and an attitude of creation, recreation, and self-transformation.

In contrast, a naïve (unaware), static consciousness “superimposes” itself (as fact rather than perception) on reality and creates a “culture of silence.”

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire argued that this “silence” among people to oppressive elements is a direct product of “the whole situation of economic, social, and political domination.” Those within a culture of silence are ill equipped to know and respond to their harsh realities. While submerged in and conditioned to situations of poverty and domination, critical awareness and response become practically impossible. It became clear to Freire that “education systems are major instruments in the maintenance of culture of silence.” He spoke of a kind of revolutionary leadership in education to equip people to become critical instead of silent regarding inequalities and injustices.

A revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice *co-intentional* education. Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators. In this way, the presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation [false], but committed involvement. p. 69

In a dialogue with his colleague Ira Shor, Freire says the following about those who take on such leadership.

Those who accept the task of social transformation have a dream but they also have such a quantity of obstacles in front of them. As I said before, the teachers who support the status quo [the existing state of affair] are swimming with the current, but the ones who challenge domination are swimming against the current. ...The liberating educator has to create in herself or himself some virtues, some qualities... not *given* to her or him....The liberating educator has to create by creating, in the very practice of teaching itself, learning the concrete limits for his or her action, getting clear on the possibilities, not too much behind our limits of necessary fear and not too far ahead. *A Pedagogy of Liberation*, p. 177).

**\*Re reading & Taking Notes**

*Lets stop here for a few moments for your notes.*

*What “creative challenges” can you pose to your students?*

*What “creative challenges” can you pose for yourself?*

*What “creative challenges” can you and your students work on together?*

*What does critical consciousness mean to you in your daily life of teaching?*

*What questions might you pose to Freire about leadership in your reality?*

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS  
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