

DAY 4 - PAULO FREIRE: HOPE AND AGENCY

This is the road I have tried to follow as a teacher: living my convictions; being open to the process of knowing and sensitive to the experience of teaching as an art; ... accepting my limitations, yet always conscious of the necessary effort to overcome them and aware that I cannot hide them because to do so would be a failure to respect both my students and myself as a teacher. (Freire, Pedagogy of Freedom, p. 69)

Hope and Hopelessness

Along with his convictions, openness, and challenges as a teacher, Freire believed in hope, and that hope is shared between teachers and students. He said,

“The hope that we can learn together, teach together, be curiously impatient together, produce something together, and resist together the obstacles that prevent the flowering of our joy”, p. 69.

Hope is essential, and not an intruder to our lives. Hope is a natural force in the context of our “unfinishedness.” In contrast, Freire argued that hopelessness is a distortion, not a normal way of being. That is, we are first beings of hope but may lose that hope because of harsh situations and circumstances. In our disappointments and despair we can fall into a form of silence, “of denying the world and fleeing from it” (Pedagogy of the Oppressed.) Therefore, we should struggle as human beings to “diminish” those reasons, situations, and conditions that instill hopelessness in us.

Similarly, in his book, Pedagogy of Hope, Freire argues that hopelessness paralyzes us, and we submit to fatalism (this is meant to be) and despair. Hope cannot exist when we think of the world and its future as pre-given (it is what it has to be), as if a mechanical repetition of the present, with no room for dreams, decisions, and expectancy in struggle.

Hope and Liberation

In Freire’s book, Pedagogy of the Heart, he speaks about the relationship between liberation and hope. He explained, “Hope of liberation does not mean liberation already.” We must fight for liberation but in favorable conditions, which we labor toward. This fight should not be seen as a burden. The less able we are to dream of freedom, the less able we will be to face the challenges ahead. As a progressive educator, he says:

“...I must not reduce my instructional practice to the sole teaching of technique or content, leaving untouched the exercise of a critical understanding of reality. In speaking of hunger, I must not be satisfied with defining it as ‘urgent need for food, big appetite, lack of nourishment, deprivation from, or scarcity of food.’ ...I must recognize the reasons for the phenomenon [hunger].” p. 45

Dreams and Hope

In *Pedagogy of the Heart*, Freire tells the story of a TV report about landless rural workers in Brazil, where the reporter asked a young man if he ever dreams. The youth replied, “No, I only have nightmares.” Freire argues that the bitterness of the young man was so profound that “his presence in the world had become a nightmare, an experience in which it was impossible to dream.” The young man repeated his message to the reporter, “I only have nightmares,” as if to ensure that the reporter remember his nightmare: he could not see a future for himself. He must concentrate on survival.

Freire used the story to illustrate that, “without a vision for tomorrow, hope is impossible.” Often the past does not generate hope, but immobilizes and nullifies tomorrow. And this can become historical in oppressed societies: “the oppressed grandchild repeats the suffering of their grandparent.” Freire points out that having dreams is a political act; it is part of human nature. Having dreams is important to history. “There is no change without dream, as there is no dream without hope” (p. 81).

“As project, as design for a different, less-ugly ‘world’, the dream is as necessary to political subjects, transformers of the world and not adapters to it, as...it is fundamental for an artisan, who projects in her or his brain what she or he is going to execute even before the execution thereof.” *Pedagogy of Hope*, p. 82

Freire goes on to say, where there is no hope, there is no room for education, only room for training. The basic importance of education is not only about content, but also about the “why” of social, political, and historical facts we live under. In education, our reading of the world enables us to know the world more and more critically, and to the nature of hope: “though I know things can get worse, I also know that I am about to intervene to improve them” (*Pedagogy of Freedom*, p. 53). For Freire, hope means pushing beyond dreaming of a better day, toward thinking about how to do that as a collective vision. We are part of a larger social fabric of responsibility.

Hence, he argues, there is need for a kind of education of hope. He says, “One of these tasks of the progressive educator, through a serious, correct political analysis, is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be”, p. 3. However, unveiling alone does not change a reality, but is a revelation (understanding) in the right direction. When we act in order to transform the world, we move toward new possibilities for fuller and richer lives for our communities and ourselves.

***Re reading & Taking Notes**

Lets stop here for a few moments for your notes.

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS
MAKING CONNECTIONS
POSING QUESTIONS

As teachers, how do we help our students fight against despair? How do we nurture critical hope in them? How do we encourage their dreaming?

What are your dreams as an educational leader?

What are your hopes as an educational leader?