

**cR**

Centro  
de Referência  
Paulo Freire

**Este documento faz parte do acervo  
do Centro de Referência Paulo Freire**

**[acervo.paulofreire.org](http://acervo.paulofreire.org)**



InstitutoPauloFreire

To get help, just send a mail with the body HELP

Thresholds in Education  
ISSUES IN FREIREAN PEDAGOGY

Tom Heaney

For first-time readers, Freirean literature is a maze of neologisms. A brief glossary[1] of frequently used terms has been included at the end of this text.

---

Brightly colored political posters, even more than mismatched chairs, worn carpeting, and unwashed windows, set this classroom apart from other schools. Eight Hispanic adults--three women and five men--gathered with their teacher to resume their lessons in literacy. Maria had arrived late, visibly distraught, explaining that her husband had threatened her. He didn't want her going out to classes at night and argued that her three children were being neglected. Maria, leaving the argument unresolved, had come to resume her studies. Her teacher, instead of giving advice or encouragement, asked the group for help. The members reflected on the Maria's experience and, in the process, identified several issues: a husband's putative "rights" over his wife, acceptance of domestic violence against women as 'normal,' a presumption that women are "asking for trouble" if they go outside at night and that Maria had the major responsibility for her children.

The discussion was energetic, with strong sentiments expressed by some who appealed frequently to "the way things are," and a growing solidarity among the women. While the group continued discussing these issues, the teacher recorded words on an improvised blackboard: "woman," "violence," "mother," and "wife"-- words to which the class would return, once their meaning had been expanded and enriched through the groups' discussion. Finally, it was Maria who interrupted and said, "You've told me the way things are; I'll tell you how they should be, and together let's talk about how to make them so." She effectively shifted the focus of the group from the patronizing solicitude of some who accepted the present reality to a strategy for social transformation[2].

Since the 1930's, American adult education has grown without an articulated philosophy. Most adult educators have not delved into complex issues of human consciousness, the origins of knowledge, or the meaning of freedom. Echoes of "education for freedom," with beginnings in Froebel and Dewey, found their way into the thought of Eduard Lindeman (1961) and others, but "freedom" remained an abstraction lost in a discussion of method and technique. If an expressed philosophy were to exist, its roots would lie in pragmatism, for the practice of adult education in the United States has paralleled the advance of a technological society. Social, industrial, and political machines have similar needs. All require exchangeable and renewable parts, all need specialized components and tightly managed coordination. As technology has become more complex and specialized, so has schooling on all levels. Not only must skills be developed in bodies and minds, but attitudes must be formed which are supportive of a technological superstructure within which adult labor is organized.

In the early 1970's, Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, visited Harvard and published an English translation of his best known work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. His general critique of education presented an analysis which challenged the neutrality of the technological model dominant in American schools. He argued that any curriculum which ignores racism, sexism, the exploitation of workers, and other forms of oppression at the same time supports the status quo. It inhibits the expansion of consciousness and blocks creative and liberating social action for change.

Freire's critique of education was not new. Even defenders of traditional schools have admitted that, if society is to hold together without the overt force of a police state, schooling must adapt learners to kinder, gentler controls: career choices (specialization), authority (dependency), and the good life (consumerism). Schooling must encourage competition (rule of the fittest), while maintaining order and cooperation (social conformism). As to the pursuit of happiness--in Jacques Ellul's words, "education makes us happy in a milieu which normally would have made us unhappy, if we had not been worked on, molded, and formed for just that milieu" (1964).

Practical and expedient interests play a determining role in educational policy-making. Adult educators uncritically accept an ancillary role in the service of economic interests. This is true not only in programs for the "disadvantaged," the design of which more frequently serves employers, but also in programs for those aspiring to middle and upper management positions. Adult education, whether for remediation or for career advancement, generally replicates patterns of earlier schooling: a top-down model of

instruction which fosters respect for authority, experts, discipline, and good work habits.

Freire's pedagogy for freedom, exemplified in his work in South America, found ready acceptance among many community-based, popular educators who organized adult learning outside established schools and institutions. For such educators, Freire's critique of traditional schooling validated their own conclusions that schools were part of the problem, contributing to the marginalization of minorities and the poor. Education for liberation, in Freire's view, would challenge the "givenness" of the world and enable learners to reflect on their experience historically, giving their immediate reality a beginning, a present, and, most importantly, a future. It would awaken in adult learners the expectation of change--a power which, once awakened, seeks expression in collective, transforming social action (Mackie, 1980).

### The Freirean Philosophy

In Freire's view of education, learning to take control and achieving power are not individual objectives, as in a "boot strap" theory of empowerment[3]. For poor and dispossessed people, strength is in numbers and social change is accomplished in unity. Power is shared, not the power of a few who improve themselves at the expense of others, but the power of the many who find strength and purpose in a common vision. Liberation achieved by individuals at the expense of others is an act of oppression. Personal freedom and the development of individuals can only occur in mutuality with others. In the experience of women's groups, civil rights workers, and many others committed to liberatory action, collective power and collegiality[4] protect the individual far more than authoritarian and hierarchial modes of organization.

Shared power in learning is exercised in control over the curriculum, its contents and methods, and over the coordination of all learning activities. Education for liberation provides a forum open to the imaginings and free exercise of control by learners, teachers, and the community, while also providing for the development of those skills and competencies without which the exercise of power would be impossible. Empowerment[5] is both the means and the outcome of this pedagogy which some have come to call "liberatory education." [6]

Liberatory education is mutually supported learning for empowerment. Whatever its formal structure or precise purpose, such education is a component of and subordinate to a liberatory praxis[7] which seeks to transform the social order. Transforming actions in aggregate comprise a revolutionary stance which simultaneously announces an egalitarian, participatory, and

democratic social order and denounces hierarchial, authoritarian, and alienating systems of organizations. The content of liberatory education is both critical consciousness[8] and the development of appropriate skills and competencies related to liberatory praxis. Its process is dialogical[9], affirming the mutual and coequal roles of teachers and learners. The governance of liberatory education reflects and anticipates the social order announced by its vision.

### Critical Consciousness

Freire suggests three stages in the progression by which critical consciousness[10] is attained (1973). The first of these stages is "semi-intransitive consciousness." Verbs which do not act upon an object are "intransitive." Consciousness of and action upon reality are two constituents of a critical relationship with the world. Consciousness which does not challenge the world is therefore uncritical and intransitive, for it does not act upon the world as an object. Total intransitivity is not a form of consciousness at all. Therefore, the first phase in the emergence of consciousness is, for Freire, semi-intransitivity. Semi-intransitive consciousness is the state of those whose sphere of perception is limited, whose interests center almost totally around matters of survival, and who are impermeable to challenges situated outside the demands of biological necessity. Freire observes that when these persons amplify their power to perceive and respond to suggestions and questions arising in their context, and increase their capacity to enter into dialogue not only with others, but with their own world, their consciousness becomes "transitive." Where before they reacted to particulars, to limited spheres, now they react to the general scope of a particular problem.

The second stage of consciousness is "naive transitivity." Freire characterizes this stage of consciousness by an over-simplification of problems, nostalgia for the past, an underestimation of ordinary people, a strong tendency to gregariousness, a disinterest in investigation, a fascination with fanciful explanations of reality, and by the practice of polemics rather than dialogue. Naive transitivity is never totally and irrevocably surpassed; for all who enter the learning process, this remains a lifelong task.

The third and final stage is "critical transitivity." This stage is characterized by depth in the interpretation of problems, by testing one's own findings and openness to revision and reconstruction, by the attempt to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and to avoid preconceived notions when analyzing them, by rejecting passivity, by the practice of dialogue rather than polemics, by receptivity to the new without rejecting the old, and by permeable, interrogative, restless, and dialogical[11] forms of

life.

Liberatory education[12] holds no monopoly on fostering these characteristics of consciousness. They are generalizations which describe the values to which all learning can subscribe. Neither are the three stages mutually exclusive. They not only admit of degrees on the vertical plane extending from semi-intransitivity to critical transitivity, but on a horizontal plane as well, which would indicate the direction and focus of consciousness.

Consciousness is not without focus. Reality is not grasped in its totality, as the generalizations in the third stage might suggest. Rather, the inquirer has a vantage point and moves about reality, viewing it from first this, then that perspective. It is perspective which is the horizontal plane on the matrix of consciousness. The vantage point of liberatory education is political--a point of view which affirms the transforming role for humankind in history and culture[13] and supports the political apparatus by which this role can be exercised. It links learning with action through which transformation[14] can and does occur. It neither submerges human will under psychological determinism, nor does it subordinate it to divine or mechanical imperatives. It finds hope neither in the unconscious within, nor in providence beyond, but in historical participation in the creation of a just and a free society. It proclaims the future as ours to determine and seeks the liberation of the human will to do so through learning and social action.

### Institutionalization

While Freire's theoretical framework gave many community-based educators grounds for hope, it was his pedagogy--the practical, how-to-do-it methods--which gave them sought-after tools for the reconstruction of urban adult education. Freire advocated dialogue and critical thought as a substitute for "banking" education[15] in which the riches of knowledge were deposited in the empty vault of a learner's mind. He suggested several pedagogical techniques based on the mass literacy campaigns he organized in Brazil and Chile--campaigns integral to broadly defined programs of revolution and social change. It was these techniques which many literacy and basic education programs immediately incorporated into their practice: reflection on the political content of learner's day-to-day experience, the organization of "culture circles"[16] which promote dialogue and peer interaction, and the use of "people's knowledge" as the basis for curriculum.

One facet of Freire's pedagogy not easily translated into the American scene was the link between learning and action. The literacy campaigns upon which Freire's work was based occurred in the context of revolutionary social change. The political apparatus

was at hand into which the released energy of liberated minds and bodies could flow. Opportunities for collective action were antecedent to learning; land redistribution was underway; technical and financial support was available for economic development; elections were to take place. Seldom, in the United States, have these conditions of liberatory education[17] been replicated. As a result, Freirean programs in this country have "raised consciousness," but seldom directly influenced social change. Their revolutionary bark has clearly been more fearsome than their bite.

"Freirean" programs multiplied during the seventies, giving rise to national networks of liberatory educators attempting to adapt methods used in rural and underdeveloped countries to the urban barrios and ghettos of North America. Paulo Freire assisted in this development and participated in numerous conferences and workshops, frequently sponsored by academics who sought to learn from and work with "grass roots" educators. Occupying storefronts, abandoned schools, and low rent offices, these same educators were often denied access to funds available to their less effective competitors--the schools and community colleges. "Effectiveness" in this case means that their "numbers"--enrollments, retention rates, and completion rates--were often significantly higher than in traditional programs.

Their effectiveness made Freirean programs attractive to publicly supported institutions whose funding was based on formulas affected by such numbers. In some instances, networks of community-based programs lobbied to sit at the public trough as a solution to their constant struggle for foundation support. By the early 80's, many Freirean centers came under the wing of city-wide bureaucracies and, in some instances, schools or community colleges began their own "alternatives" based on a Freirean model. In addition, governmental funding programs--from the Joint Training and Partnership Act (JTPA) and the Workplace Literacy Program to the State Local Impact Assistance Grant program (SLIAG)--have lured many financially-beset community-based programs to refocus their activities on federal priorities which, however important to national policy, nonetheless emphasize individual growth over collective empowerment[18] and preempt local agendas for action. As a result, very few of the experiments of the 70's remain intact, having succumbed to at least partial public subsidy.

### Limited Cooperation

As long as liberatory education[19] can be interpreted as methodologically distinct, but not different in its social and cultural consequences, then it can be tolerated as a variation within traditional systems of education. In fact, liberatory education is likely to be viewed this way by many educators, who

tend to interpret all approaches to learning as variations in pedagogical technique. Even the rhetoric of revolution sometimes used to describe the purposes of liberatory programs has proven acceptable to traditional school sponsors as a gimmick for increasing enrollments. Official school publications make reference to Paulo Freire, as did the Brazilian military during the years of Freire's exile, from 1964 to 1979! A sanitized and depoliticized Freire is now featured in the reading lists of graduate programs on adult education and Freire himself has been invited to address mainstream organizations such as the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education. Bureaucratic systems impose their own logic on liberatory practices, but underlying contradictions remain. In the process, too many Freirean programs have become little more than low-budget versions of the senior institutions upon which they have come to depend--their most emancipatory initiatives effectively blocked by economic sanctions imposed by their institutional sponsors. For them, the long term cost of survival in 'the system' is that social and political empowerment[20] as a collective goal is replaced with the more anemic goal of individual enrichment.

Some liberatory programs have fought to maintain their independence, either rejecting outright any public subsidies which would tie their program to a traditional educational purposes or accepting partial support, while building a diversified funding base. Both strategies have been fraught with problems. On the one hand, independence has meant bare-bones budgets, a diversion of energy from education to fund-raising and the coordination of volunteers, and staff "burn-out." On the other hand, cooperation with mainstream educational institutions takes its toll on staff for whom the limited interests of their sponsors dictate priorities and moderate action. There is no free lunch and programs which thought that the residuals of public funding would sustain the "liberatory" aspects of their program find that the obligations they have incurred under government funding so occupy staff that there is little time, energy, or incentive left for critical teaching and transforming action.

Those who sought to build limited cooperative relationships with schools and community colleges without succumbing to domination by these more affluent and powerful institutions have purchased their survival at considerable cost. The dynamics of limited cooperation frequently involve the use of "deviance credits," a strategy developed by liberatory women's groups for sabotage in the work place. The strategy works like this: while establishing a pattern of cooperation one simultaneously accumulates deviance credits--that is, conformity with a system's norms and standards increases the tolerance of that system for an occasional lapse into deviant behavior. Limited cooperation involves the establishment of



an overall pattern of cooperation which will regularly, but almost imperceptibly, be punctuated by dissent. Its success as a form of engagement depends on the frequency with which boundary-violating demands are placed upon the group accumulating the deviance credits.

However, the cumulative consequences of deviance can lead to increased repression, as sponsoring institutions, which transform partisan politics into civics lessons and substitute a technology of government for political conflict, move to protect their own political hegemony. Two nationally recognized and highly successful community-based programs, bound in a cooperative relationship with the City Colleges of Chicago, began to experience this repression in the late 70's, after out-performing all public programs in the state for almost ten years. One program, an alternative, Freirean-based high school for adults, was simply closed down; the other, a Hispanic center for literacy and political education, broke its ties with its sponsoring institution and remains committed to its initial vision today, but with a greatly reduced program and mostly unpaid staff.

#### Alienation

Alienation[21] is oppositional otherness--the simultaneous presence of conflict and distance. As Fanon observed, when alienation remains beneath the surface of consciousness, it results in ennui, passivity, submissiveness, and anxiety (1968). When alienation becomes conscious, it provokes anger, aggressiveness, hostility, frustration, and fear. Self-conscious alienation can also lead to critical reflection on reality and thereafter to action. Action will effectively overcome alienation to the extent that it can reduce conflict either by eliminating the distance through adaptation or compromise, or by increasing the distance through movement outside the sphere of oppositional influence, or by neutralizing the opposition through superior power or force. The first strategy eliminates alienation by accommodation and cooptation; the last two strategies overcome alienation by a positive and "creative" affirmation of position. Creative alienation is self-conscious, maintaining continuity with one's own identity and principles and building upon them in consistent ways. Self-consciously alienated people learn to fight back, to resist their oppression.

Creative alienation is not to be confused with marginality. Most community-based programs built on Freirean principles are marginal to what is now a highly funded and widely respected adult education enterprise. Only a few embody creative alienation--a small but vocal minority who, with political clarity, seek through their programs to destroy the symmetry of conventional social boundaries

by building within learners a heightened sense of alienation. For them, the experience of alienation provides stability--a corrective for bureaucratic systems which prescribe the future as a continuation of the past. They value those conditions identified by Morse Peckham in his discussion of art as the institutionalization of alienation:

These are social protection, psychic insulation, the capacity to endure over long periods problem exposure and solution postponement, the preference for tension rather than tension-reduction, the capacity to tolerate tension, the ability to tolerate disorientation and the desire to seek disorientation actively, a sensitivity to cultural incoherence, the capacity for self-validation which in other circumstances would be condemned as arrogance, and the ability to exist without the constant flow of validation which is so constant and pervasive a part of non-alienated life and the absence of which for faculty members is so destructive (1973).

These characteristics are evident in veterans of struggles with public agencies throughout the 70's and early 80's. The trauma of independence and remaining truly based in the local community exacts much from liberatory educators who built their programs outside the dominant educational system, but the survivors value their sense of alienation and take pride in their uniqueness and marginality among adult educators.

## Conclusions

Literacy work is generally recognized as most effective when undertaken by or in the context of community-based organizations--and least effective when directly managed by large, bureaucratic systems of schooling (Mezirow, Darkenwald, and Knox, 1975; Hunter and Harmon, 1979). Literacy and other basic skills can be acquired with astonishing speed when the development of those skills is linked with other activities, the intended outcome of which is change in conditions of oppression (Adams, 1975; Freire, 1970; Shor, 1987).

Freirean, community-based adult education continues to provide a working model for resolving the problem of illiteracy in the United States, not because it incorporates more effective methods of instruction, not even because its connections with "grass roots" organizations enhances recruitment efforts and grounds learning in the day-to-day experience of the people. Liberatory education[22] provides a working model because it links the problem of illiteracy with broader social and political ills and because it does not propose merely educational solutions to these problems. Its hope and its promise lies in social action for change as an intended

consequence of critical understanding.

Embedded within many community-based programs is a depoliticized vision, a by-product of cooperative arrangements with other, mainstream institutions. These programs, although no longer based on principles put forward by Freire in the previous decade, nonetheless are frequently more effective in reaching and retaining hard-core illiterate adults simply because they are closer to the problems of the neighborhood, they less resemble the more formal schools with which previous "failure" has been identified, and they evidence care and respect for their neighbors which leads to mutual trust and perseverance.

Most Freirean programs, on the other hand, have been condemned to a marginal existence. There is little which school-based educators can emulate in the practice of their "liberatory" counterparts. Participatory and democratic pedagogical practices might be adapted to American schools, but the critique of social and economic oppression linked with collective action for social change creates dissonance, destroying the neutrality of the schools and unmasking their complicity in maintaining the economic and political imbalance of the social order. Historically, liberatory programs for literacy have been sustained by government only during the brief time following a revolution, as in Nicaragua (Miller, 1985) or Guinea Bisseau (Freire, 1978)--a time when the possibilities for change are real and the political apparatus for accomplishing those changes is at hand. The pedagogy of Paulo Freire has limited potential outside such chaotic and transitional periods in a nation's history.

The survivors--those liberatory programs in the United States which have maintained their vision--await the revolution and attempt to prepare learners for political options not yet available.

---

## REFERENCES

- Adams, F. *Unearthing Seeds of Fire*. Winston-Salem, NC: Blair, 1975.
- Ellul, J. *The Technological Society*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1964.
- Fanon, F. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1968.
- Freire, P. *Cultural Action for Freedom*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review Press, 1970.

--Education for Critical Consciousness. New York: Seabury, 1973.

--Pedagogy in Process. New York: Seabury, 1978.

--Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Seabury, 1970.

Hunter, C., and Harmon, D. Illiteracy in the United States. New York: Harper & Row, 1979.

Lindeman, E. The Meaning of Adult Education. Montreal: Harvest House, 1961 (Originally published by New Republic, Inc., New York, in 1926).

Mackie, R. Literacy and Revolution: the Pedagogy of Paulo Freire. London: Pluto Press, 1980.

Mezirow, J., Darkenwald, G., and Knox, A. Last Gamble on Education. Washington, D.C.: Adult Education Association of the U.S.A., 1975.

Miller, V. Between Struggle and Hope. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985.

Peckham, M. "Arts for the Cultivation of Radical Sensitivity," in Shimahara, N. (ed.) Educational Reconstruction. Columbus, Ohio: Merrill, 1973.

Shor, I. Critical Teaching and Everyday Life (3rd printing). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

---

## Glossary

With the writings of Paulo Freire, a number of neologisms and old words with new meanings have been introduced into the discourse of educators. In particular, terms are derived from Marxist literature with new interpretations. The following lists some of the more common terms currently in use, together with their definitions.

### ALIENATION:

The term is derived from Marx and refers to the domination of people by power elites, material constraints, political structures, and thought itself. Ultimately, alienation is the separation of humankind from its labor. It interferes with the production of authentic culture (see Culture[23]). It is affected by any process

which limits a person's power to know the world, and thus dehumanizes the world itself (see Humanization[24]).

#### "BANKING" EDUCATION:

In the "banking" method of education passive learners receive deposits of pre-selected, ready-made knowledge. The learner's mind is seen as an empty vault into which the riches of approved knowledge are placed. This approach is also referred to as "digestive" and as "narrational" education.

#### CODIFICATION:

A codification is a representation of the learner's day-to-day situations. It can be a photograph, a drawing, or even a word. As a representation, the photograph or word is an abstraction which permits dialogue leading to an analysis of the concrete reality represented. Codifications mediate between reality and its theoretical context, as well as between educators and learners who together seek to unveil the meanings of their existence.

#### CONSCIENTIZATION:

Conscientization is an ongoing process by which a learner moves toward critical consciousness[25]). This process is the heart of liberatory education[26]. It differs from "consciousness raising" in that the latter frequently involves "banking" education[27]--the transmission of pre-selected knowledge. Conscientization means breaking through prevailing mythologies to reach new levels of awareness--in particular, awareness of oppression, 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.

#### COLLEGIALITY:

Collegiality is a form of social organization based on shared and equal participation of all its members. It contrasts with a hierarchical, pyramidal structure, and is represented by a series of concentric circles. Authority resides in the center-most circle, not over the others, but equidistant from each, so that authority can listen and reflect the consensus of the whole (see Consensual Governance[28]). A collegial model has been frequently associated with liberatory education programs[29].

#### CONSENSUAL GOVERNANCE:



Decision-making by consensus requires the discussion of issues until all are in agreement--this in contrast to decision-making by voting in which rule by the majority is imposed on those who dissent. Decision-making by consensus is time consuming and difficult. At times, consensus represents the willingness of a minority "not to oppose" a decision, but the ultimate benefit of this model is that no one is excluded by a decision. This model is characteristic of participatory democracies as occasionally exemplified in U.S. history by the town hall meeting.

#### CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS:

This is a level of consciousness characterized by depth in the interpretation of problems, through testing one's own findings with openness to revision, attempting to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and preconceived notions when analyzing them, receptivity to the new without rejecting the old because it is old.

In striving toward critical consciousness, the individual rejects passivity, practicing dialogue rather than polemics, and using permeable, interrogative, restless, and dialogical[30] forms of life. Critical consciousness is brought about not through an individual or intellectual effort, but through collective struggle and praxis[31].

#### CULTURE:

Culture is used in its broadest, anthropological sense as including all that is humanly fabricated, endowed, designed, articulated, conceived, or directed. Culture includes products which are humanly produced, both material (buildings, artifacts, factories, slum housing) and immaterial (ideology, value systems, mores), as well as materially derived products such as social class and the socio/political order. The key aim of liberatory education[32] is to regain dominion over the creation and use of culture.

#### CULTURE CIRCLE (CIRCULO DE CULTURA):

The círculo de cultura is a discussion group in which educators and learners use codifications (see Codification[33]) to engage in dialogue about the reasons for their existential situation. The peer group provides the theoretical context for reflection and for transforming interpretations of reality from mere opinion to a more critical knowledge.

#### "CULTURE OF SILENCE":

The "culture of silence" is a characteristic which Freire attributes to oppressed people in colonized countries, with significant parallels in highly developed countries. Alienated and

oppressed people are not heard by the dominant members of their society. The dominant members prescribe the words to be spoken by the oppressed through control of the schools and other institutions, thereby effectively silencing the people. This imposed silence does not signify an absence of response, but rather a response which lacks a critical quality. Oppressed people internalize negative images of themselves (images created and imposed by the oppressor) and feel incapable of self-governance. Dialogue and self-government are impossible under such conditions.

#### DECODIFICATION:

(see Codification[34]) Decodification dissolves a codification into its constituent elements and is the operation by which learners begin to perceive relationships between elements of the codification and other experiences in their day-to-day life and among the elements themselves. Thus, decodification is analysis which takes place through dialogue, revealing the previously unperceived meanings of the reality represented by that codification. Decodification is the principal work of a *circulo de cultura* (see Culture Circle[35])

#### DIALECTIC:

Dialectic is a term referring to a dynamic tension within any given system and the process by which change occurs on the basis of that tension and resulting conflict. Based on the writings of Hegel, every concept implies its negation; that is, in conceiving anything (thesis), we must be able to imagine its opposite (antithesis). Change occurs as this tension leads to a new conception of reality (synthesis). It should be noted that Marx, in contrast to some liberatory educators, postulated that such tensions and contradictions were embedded in concrete culture[36] (thus, dialectic materialism) and not merely found in contradictions between the existential world and our thoughts about the world.

#### DIALOGICAL METHOD:

The dialogical approach to learning is characterized by co-operation and acceptance of interchangeability and mutuality in the roles of teacher and learner, demanding an atmosphere of mutual acceptance and trust. In this method, all teach and all learn. This contrasts with an anti-dialogical approach which emphasizes the teacher's side of the learning relationship and frequently results in one-way communiques perpetuating domination and oppression. Without dialogue, there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no liberatory education[37].

#### EMPOWERMENT:



Empowerment is a consequence of liberatory learning. Power is not given, but created within the emerging praxis[38] in which co-learners are engaged. The theoretical basis for this discovery is provided by critical consciousness[39]; its expression is collective action on behalf of mutually agreed upon goals. Empowerment is distinct from building skills and competencies, these being commonly associated with conventional schooling. Education for empowerment further differs from schooling both in its emphasis on groups (rather than individuals) and in its focus on cultural transformation[40] (rather than social adaptation).

#### GENERATIVE THEMES/WORDS:

Generative themes are codifications[41] of complex experiences which are charged with political significance and are likely to generate considerable discussion and analysis. They are derived from a study of the specific history and circumstances of the learners. In a literacy program, generative themes can be codified into generative words--that is, tri-syllabic words that can be broken down into syllabic parts and used to "generate" other words.

Generative words have been most useful in relation to languages which are phonetically based (e.g. Spanish, Portuguese).

#### HUMANIZATION:

The central task in any movement toward liberation is to become more fully human through the creation of humanly-enhancing culture[42]--in a word, "humanization." This historical task is countered by the negative forces of dehumanization which, through oppressive manipulation and control, compromise human values for personal gain and power. The task of the oppressed is to liberate themselves and, in the process, liberate their oppressors.

Revolutions are humanized to the extent that the new regime confronts its tendency to replicate the oppression of the old (see Transformation of the World[43]).

#### LIBERATORY EDUCATION:

Education which is liberatory encourages learners to challenge and change the world, not merely uncritically adapt themselves to it. The content and purpose of liberatory education is the collective responsibility of learners, teachers, and the community alike who, through dialogue, seek political, as well as economic and personal empowerment[44]. Programs of liberatory education support and compliment larger social struggles for liberation.

#### MYSTIFICATION:

Mystification is the process by which the alienating and oppressive features of culture[45] are disguised and hidden. False, superficial, and naive interpretations of culture prevent the emergence of critical consciousness[46]. Educational systems are key instruments in the dissemination of mystifications: e.g. unemployment is "mystified" as personal failure rather than as a failure of the economy, thus making it difficult for the unemployed to critically understand their situation.

#### PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH:

Participatory research is an approach to social change--a process used by and for people who are exploited and oppressed. The approach challenges the way knowledge is produced with conventional social science methods and disseminated by dominant educational institutions. Through alternate methods, it puts the production of knowledge back into the hands of the people where it can infuse their struggles for social equality, and for the elimination of dependency and its symptoms: poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, etc.

#### PRAXIS:

Praxis is a complex activity by which individuals create culture[47] and society, and become critically conscious[48] human beings. Praxis comprises a cycle of action-reflection-action which is central to liberatory education[49]. Characteristics of praxis include self-determination (as opposed to coercion), intentionality (as opposed to reaction), creativity (as opposed to homogeneity), and rationality (as opposed to chance).

#### PROBLEMATIZATION:

Problematization is the antithesis of "problem-solving." In problem-solving, an expert takes distance from reality and reduces it to dimensions which are amenable to treatment as though they were mere difficulties to be solved. To "problematize" is to engage a group in the task of codifying reality into symbols which can generate critical consciousness and empower them to alter their relations with nature and oppressive social forces. Problem-posing is a logically prior task which allows all previous conceptualizations of a problem to be treated as questionable. Problematization recognizes that "solutions" are often difficult because the wrong problems are being addressed.

#### TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD:

To transform the world is to humanize it (see Humanization[50]). All transformations do not result in liberation. Transforming

action could dehumanize the world with an oppressor's curious and inventive presence (e.g. the development of the V-2 rocket in World War II). Only history reveals the problematic nature of being human and the consequences of having chosen one path over the other. The transformation of the world is humankind's entry into history. As people act upon the world effectively, transforming it by work, consciousness is in turn historically and culturally conditioned. Conscientization[51]) is the result of action which transforms the world and leads to humanization.

---

Thresholds in Education

Contact: [thea@chicago1.nl.edu](mailto:thea@chicago1.nl.edu)[52]

Entered: 20 Jun 95.

\*\*\* References from this document \*\*\*

- [orig] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html>
- [1] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Glossary>
- [2] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Transformation>
- [3] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Empowerment>
- [4] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Collegiality>
- [5] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Empowerment>
- [6] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Liberatory>
- [7] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Praxis>
- [8] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Critical>
- [9] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Dialogical>
- [10] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Critical>
- [11] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Dialogical>
- [12] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Liberatory>
- [13] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Culture>
- [14] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Transformation>
- [15] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Banking>
- [16] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Circle>
- [17] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Liberatory>
- [18] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Empowerment>
- [19] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Liberatory>
- [20] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Empowerment>
- [21] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Alienation>
- [22] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Liberatory>
- [23] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Culture>
- [24] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Humanization>
- [25] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Critical>
- [26] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Liberatory>
- [27] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Banking>
- [28] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Consensual>

- [29] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Liberatory>
- [30] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Dialogical>
- [31] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Praxis>
- [32] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Liberatory>
- [33] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Codification>
- [34] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Codification>
- [35] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Circle>
- [36] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Culture>
- [37] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Liberatory>
- [38] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Praxis>
- [39] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Critical>
- [40] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Transformation>
- [41] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Codification>
- [42] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Culture>
- [43] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Transformation>
- [44] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Empowerment>
- [45] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Culture>
- [46] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Critical>
- [47] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Culture>
- [48] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Critical>
- [49] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Liberatory>
- [50] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Humanization>
- [51] <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#Conscientization>
- [52] <mailto:thea@chicago1.nl.edu>

--- Internet Message Header Follows ---

Received: from info.lanic.utexas.edu (info.lanic.utexas.edu [128.83.142.37]) by cronopio.ibase.br (8.6.12/Revision: 1.203 ) with SMTP id UAA20027 for <admin@psicnet.com.br>; Mon, 18 Mar 1996 20:05:57 -0300

Received: (from daemon@localhost) by info.lanic.utexas.edu (8.6.9/8.6.9) id RAA27893; Mon, 18 Mar 1996 17:16:56 -0600

Date: Mon, 18 Mar 1996 17:16:56 -0600

Message-Id: <199603182316.RAA27893@info.lanic.utexas.edu>

Errors-To: lin@link.utexas.edu

Reply-To: agora@info.lanic.utexas.edu

From: UT-LANIC WWW Mail Service <agora@info.lanic.utexas.edu>

To: admin@psicnet.com.br

Subject: Thresholds in Education (was: Freire) (URL: <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html>)