

CONSCIENTIZAÇÃO

Freire and the Formation of Critical Awareness¹

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Abstract: In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and subsequent works, Paulo Freire extends the significance of *conscientização* or critical consciousness with respect to a liberatory pedagogy. The article discusses this cornerstone of Freirian thought, particularly with respect to its relationship to critical dialogue, the problematization of the world, the indispensability of resistance, and the process of radicalization. Key to this discussion is also the recognition that the development of emancipatory consciousness evolves through a critical praxis that requires our participation as cultural citizens and subjects of the world.

Key-words: Paulo Freire. Conscientization. Education and Post-Colonial Studies.

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Freire y la formación de la conciencia crítica

Resumen: En *Pedagogía del Oprimido* y las obras posteriores, Paulo Freire desenvuelve el significado de *conscientização* o conciencia crítica con respecto a una pedagogía liberadora. El artículo aborda esta piedra angular del pensamiento de Freire, en particular con respecto a su relación con el diálogo crítico, la problematización del mundo, el carácter indispensable de la resistencia, y el proceso de radicalización. La clave de este debate es también el reconocimiento de que el desarrollo de la conciencia emancipadora evoluciona a través de una praxis crítica que requiere nuestra participación como ciudadanos y sujetos culturales del mundo.

Palabras clave: Paulo Freire. Concientización. Estudios postcoloniales y Educación.

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*Conscientização represents the development of the awakening of
critical awareness.*

—Paulo Freire (1983)

Paulo Freire conceptualized the struggle for critical consciousness and social transformation as a road yet to be made; which, because it is unknown, must be traced out step by step, in our organic relationship with the world and in the process of our labor as educators, activist, and revolutionary leaders. The struggle for change begins, then, at the moment when human beings become both critically aware and intolerant of the oppressive conditions in which they find themselves and push toward new ways of knowing and being in the world. This process signals that moment of consciousness when individuals in community experience a breakthrough and decide to take another path, despite their uncertain future. Freire (1998a) considered the process of conscientization an essential critical principle of his pedagogy, in that it opens the field for the expression of epistemological curiosity. Hence, “it is one of the roads we have to follow if we are to deepen our awareness of the world, of facts, of events” (55). Similarly, Freire’s notion of human consciousness, as unfinished, offers us a sense of conscientização as a critical evolutionary process, whose openness enlivens our dialectical relationship with the world and beckons us toward emancipatory futures.

The evolution of conscientização or social consciousness is well echoed in the metaphor *el camino se hace al andar*³ or *we make the road by walking*. Freire, in dialogue with Myles Horton, (Horton & Freire 1990) spoke adamantly of social consciousness as a dialectical process that develops and evolves, as we each contend, through theory and practice, with the actual social conditions we find before us and in relationship with others. Rather than adhere to prescribed roles and structures that oppress and repress our humanity, Freire (1998a) urged for the development of emancipatory consciousness, through a critical praxis that requires our on-going participation as cultural citizens and subjects of the world. From this perspective, knowledge and the breakthroughs of consciousness it informs emanate critically and reflect the evolving social experience of the people themselves. And so, he asserted that our moments of awakening to critical consciousness or “the breakthrough of a new form of awareness in understanding the

³ Reference here is to a line from the poem *Caminante No Hay Camino* by Spanish poet, Antonio Machado.

world is not the privilege of one person. The experience that makes possible the “breakthrough” is a collective experience” (77).

True to his own understanding of knowledge as historical, there was a deepening in Freire’s articulation of the awakening consciousness or *conscientização*, over the years. This is particularly the case in his later writings, where he gave far greater salience to the role of feelings, sensations, and the body, in addition to the exercise of reason, in the formation of consciousness. This is particularly evident in *Pedagogy of Freedom*, when Freire (1998b) asserts, “What is important in teaching is not the mechanical repetition of this or that gesture but a comprehension of the value of sentiments, emotions, and desires...and sensibility, affectivity, and intuition” (p.48). This powerful assertion of the value of our human faculties, beyond our reason, in the struggle for our liberation is a hallmark of Freire’s pedagogy of love. His painstaking efforts to challenge the necrophilic grip of hegemonic schooling, simultaneously, pushed forth a new integral rationality infused with a communal understanding of social consciousness or *conscientização* as a living phenomenon of women and men in struggle.

The Concept of Conscientização

It is sufficient to know that conscientization does not take place in abstract beings in the air but in real men and women and in social structures, to understand that it cannot remain on the level of the individual.

—Paulo Freire (1983)

Freire’s concept of *conscientização* points to an understanding of critical awareness and the formation of social consciousness as both a historical phenomenon and a human social process connected to our communal capacities to become authors and social actors of our destinies. He emphasized that *conscientização* does not occur automatically, naturally, nor should it be understood as an evolving linear phenomenon. Instead, he spoke to an emancipatory consciousness that arises through an organic process of human engagement, which requires critical pedagogical interactions that nurture the dialectical relationship of human beings with the world. This entails a grounded appreciation for the dialectical tension that must be retained,

between the empowerment of the individual and the democratic well being of the larger communal sphere.

In writing about critical consciousness, Freire anchors his conceptual meaning of conscientização upon several key notions. First, he explains that the more accurately human beings can grasp the true causality of our particular circumstances or conditions of life, the more critical our understanding of reality will be. Yet, he provided an important caveat: whatever is considered true today may not necessarily be true tomorrow. Freire posits here a historical and dialectical theory of meaning that must be understood both relationally and contextually. As history moves and conditions shift, so must our readings of world, if we are to enable emancipatory life. The second notion is an outcome of the first, in that critical awareness encompasses phenomena or facts, which exist empirically or experientially within particular circumstances that inform their production. As such, through a critical awareness of the world, as rooted in particular social and economic conditions of life, we can more readily come to comprehend consciousness and the actions it informs as corresponding phenomena. Inherent to this view of the world, there is inseparability between consciousness and materiality that must be acknowledged and dialectically sustained. And lastly, but similar to the latter, the nature of human actions and societal structures corresponds to the nature of prevailing epistemologies and ideologies that inform the structures for communal life.

Freire's notion of conscientização entails the organic formation of an intimate relationship between consciousness, human action, and the world that we seek to reinvent. Most importantly, he emphasizes the communal or social circumstances that are required in its formation. A powerful political dimension in its formation is that critical consciousness, although it takes place in and emerges out of the expressed lived histories of each individual, cannot evolve and transform in the absence of others. More specifically, Freire argued "we cannot liberate the others, people cannot liberate themselves alone, because people liberate themselves in communion, mediated by reality which they must transform" (DAVIS, 1981; p. 62).

Freire however understood exceedingly well that the concept of conscientização could be easily distorted. In the first, through a sort of humanist idealism and liberal subjectivism that strips the concept of its criticality. Privileging subjectively it produces truths divorced from social and material conditions. In the second, scientific objectivity reigns king, privileging

objectively produced truths, divorced from social and material conditions. In both instances, forms of consciousness result from a dichotomy of the subject/object relationship, in the process of knowing, rather than critically from a socially grounded interdependence of subject and object.

In contrast, the process of conscientização or conscientization evolves from on-going dialectical relationships between human beings and the world. In this view, we come to consciousness through a widening capacity to exercise an integral rationality. One where subjective and objective knowledge, mind and body, matter and spirit, human beings and the natural world coexist in a perpetual dance, which resists their negation. Counterpunctal to this negation, Freire (1998a) argued, “human existence is, in fact, a radical and profound tension between good and evil, between dignity and indignity, between decency and indecency, between beauty and ugliness of the world” (p. 53).

Learning as a critical dialogical process for the formation of consciousness then must open the field to an active and rigorous investigation beyond simply our intuition or hunch—although Freire valued the significant contribution of these to learning. But, rather than stopping there, he urged us to “build on our intuitions and submit them to methodological and rigorous analysis so that our curiosity becomes epistemological” (p. 48) and, in so doing, we uncover those actions that are in the service of transformation.

Through critical dialogue, where our “curiosity becomes epistemological,” there is room for its expression, as well as the necessity to consider rigorously its meaning, in relationship to the world. In this way, Freire (1998a) maintained the dialectical tension between two important epistemological moments that support the development of consciousness: the necessity “to be immersed in existing knowledge as it is and to be open and capable of producing something that does not yet exist (p. 35). Given the oppressive policies and practices that defile emancipatory efforts within schools and society, Freire adamantly argued that we could not leave behind our critical consciousness when contending with the bombardment of commonsensical notions meant to conserve recalcitrant structures of oppression. As such, the phenomenon of conscientização is also deeply informed by our capacity to enter into the problematization of hegemony.

Problematization

Liberation implies the problematization of their situation in its concrete objective reality so that being critically aware of it, they can also act critically on it.

—Paulo Freire (1983)

One can only know to the extent that one has the opportunity and freedom to problematize the conditions and realities in which we are immersed. “To present this human world as a problem for human beings is to propose that they ‘enter into’ it critically, taking the operation as a whole, their action and that of others on it” (p.155). By entering into their own world, students can become aware of what they know in relation to their world and also what more they need to know, in order to participate more concretely, in the making of their destinies. This is a path toward greater consciousness, where students are actively involved in the task of codifying their reality as they know it and moving beyond the known to the unknown, toward becoming creators of knowledge and participants in making of the world. Freire believed that through an on-going dialogical process of problem posing or problematization, with students as subjects of their own learning, critical consciousness evolves and, as such, students organically participate in altering their lives, both as individuals and collective beings. In Freire’s pedagogy of love, students learn to exercise their reason in ways that lead to the construction of integral knowledge, which opens the door to further questioning and greater curiosity of why the world is as it is and how it might be different.

An important aspect of the pedagogy here is for students to find genuine opportunities for voice and democratic participation, in which they can think through more deeply the consequences of their individual and collective attitudes, interventions, behaviors, decisions, and, most important, the relationship of these to the official standards of knowledge imposed by hegemonic schooling. This implies a process of learning not necessarily dependent on a specific or determined curriculum, per se, but far more concerned with the capacity of educators creating the pedagogical conditions for problematization, so students can critically question, deconstruct, and recreate knowledge without repercussions or reprisals, in ways that enhance their sense of ethical responsibility to self and community.

Inherent to this problem-posing approach is a pedagogical process that humanizes; in that, according to Freire (1983) “to be human is to engage in relationships with others and with the world (p.3).” However, beyond the subjective humanizing dimension, he also insisted that a humanizing pedagogy guides students “to experience that world as an objective reality, independent of oneself, capable of being known” (p.3). Thus, through on-going participation in problem-posing dialogue, students gradually undergo an integral process of social and political formation. In so doing, they come to understand in profound ways that human beings make the world and thus, as human beings, they must also act concretely to transform it. Highlighting this point, Freire (1993) contended, “Problematization is not an intellectual diversion, both alienated and alienating. Nor is it an escape from action, a way of disguising the fact that what is real has been denied. Problematization is not only inseparable from the act of knowing but also inseparable from concrete situations” (p.153).

This inseparability from concrete situations or material conditions is key to understanding why social consciousness deepens as students interact with one another and their environment in the dynamic of critical dialogue. More specifically, by critically engaging with official or commonsensical knowledge, creating and recreating that content by their integral participation, responding to the challenges it poses, stepping outside egoism to consider the impact on others, students come to question: In favor of what? In favor of whom? (FREIRE A.M. 1995). Discerning the social and material consequences to transcend limit situations, students come to know the essence of themselves as full subjects of history, rather than objects to be manipulated, prescribed, exploited, or dominated.

Noteworthy here are two important features related to problematization that must remain at the forefront. First is the dialectical nature of the teacher-student relationship, which must be upheld in the dialogical process of problematization; in that Freire argued that teachers and students must enter together through dialogue into the process of social change, whereby conscientizing both themselves and students simultaneously in a process of *inter-conscientization*. On this, Freire wrote (1983)

Problematization is so much a dialectical process that it would be impossible for anyone to begin it without becoming involved in it. No one can present something to someone else as a problem and at the same time remain a mere spectator of the process...In the process of problematization, any step made by a Subject to penetrate the problem-situation continually opens up new roads for

others subjects to comprehend the object being analyzed...The humbler they are in this process the more they will learn (p.153).

This collective or social feature must be absolutely central to how we, as educators, activists, and community leaders comprehend Freire's principle of conscientização. Second is the historical question; in that Freire (1998a) firmly believed that "to the degree that the historical past is not "problematized" so as to be critically understood, tomorrow becomes simply *the* perpetuation of today (102). To counter this outcome, requires a process of problematization that is integrated within a critical praxis of dialogue. As such, he believed deeply that through democratic forms of horizontal engagement, where I-Thou relationships of historical subjects reside, love, humility, trust, and criticality can prevail. In this process of knowing, students learn how to enact reflection and action in a permanent alliance, through the communal process of dialogue.

Critical Dialogue and Consciousness

If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity.

—Paulo Freire (1970)

In concert with the gnosiological and historical dimensions of reason, Freire (1983) considered dialogue to be indispensable to the act of knowing the world and hence, to the process of conscientization. It is through critical dialogue that students enter together into the process of problematization. And, by way of their critical exchanges, they experience important breakthroughs of knowledge that emerge from rethinking their historical and contemporary conditions. Within this process of reflection, new actions can emerge that better support students to participate more substantively in the process of their own learning, as well as enhance their experience of democracy, within culturally democratic relationships that focus on equality and justice. Another way to think of this phenomenon is that through engaging new possibilities in the process of teaching and learning, students are involved in potentially reconfiguring asymmetrical

power relations, in order to enact greater horizontal relationships, structures, and practices within the classroom and beyond.

Freire also placed much importance on students experiencing conditions in the classroom that nurture their intimacy with the practice of democracy. For he believed that it is through a deeply experiential and integral learning of democracy, in body, mind, heart, and spirit, that students come to understand that democracy is never a given and “liberation is not a gift (Davis 1981, p. 62). Rather, democracy is an active collective human project that must be consistently reconsidered, regenerated, and reinvented, through our vigilance and engagement with the actual historical and material conditions that impact our lives as individuals and cultural beings. Moreover, Freire (1983) believed that the proper climate to practice *an apprenticeship democracy* is within the openness of dialogue, where men and women can develop a sense of community, of participation in the solution of common life (p. 24-25).” This entails a consciousness of social and political responsibility, which grows and matures through meaningful and purposeful civic participation.

Freire asserted that “consciousness is intentionality towards the world” (DAVIS, 1981, p. 58) and critical dialogue is the means by which that intentionality is forged. Hence, we must seek to act, think, and speak about our reality in ways that are coherent with emancipatory principles of life, which insert teachers and students into a process of on-going mediation. As a politically dynamic process, critical dialogue also serves as an essential means by which we can bring greater congruence to our thoughts and actions as co-participants in the world. About this, Freire (1983) posited that since thinking human beings do not think alone; “There is no longer an ‘I think’ but ‘we think.’ It is the “we think” which establishes the “I think” and not the contrary (137). This necessary co-participation of the Subject in the act of critical thought constitutes a significant break with the dualism of Descartes and invites us to embrace an emancipatory understanding of knowledge construction as both communal and contextual, given that it must be anchored within the shared conditions that inform the lives of knowing Subjects.

And, as such, we must understand dialogue as both a meaningful forms of communication and active process of learning that retains reciprocity, which cannot be broken. In this reciprocal relationship of co-constructing knowledge and the world, students encounter genuine opportunities to direct their entrance into the classroom dialogue in meaningful ways. This in turn

calls upon educators to assume pedagogical responsibility for employing culturally appropriate and creative ways to engage students with respect to “mandatory knowledge” and classroom expectations, in order to ensure that a dialogical reciprocity persists in the teaching and learning process.

A common break in this reciprocity is precisely what occurs in the banking model of education or training, where the teacher is expected to teach and students to learn, without any recognition that true learning is a communal process, which must be reciprocal if it is to support the critical formation of oppressed students and their communities. Hence, it becomes more evident why deficit notions of education work anti-dialogically and, thus, thwart the process of conscientization, rendering students passive agents in traditional learning environments. Freire (1970) sought to unveil how deficit notions undergird *false generosity*, by “softening” the domination of the powerful, by essentializing the weaknesses of the oppressed to justify a culture of exclusion and domination. Of this he said, “The dominating consciousness absolutizes ignorance in order to manipulate the so-called “uncultured.” If some men are “totally ignorant,” they will be incapable of managing themselves, and will need the orientation, the “direction,” the “leadership” of those who consider themselves to be “cultured” and “superior” (p. 43).

Freire considered this *absolutizing of ignorance* as simply part of a larger anti-dialogical process, where myths are normalized and employed by the dominant culture to suppress the social agency and civic participation of subordinated populations. Here, he spoke to the manner in which the world is *mythicized* by the powerful, in order to ensure the alienation, passivity, and domestication of the oppressed. In the process, a series of myths and corresponding policies, practices, and methods are enacted to preclude the problematization of the world. Instead, social and material conditions of inequality, for example, are treated as fixed and naturalized phenomena to which oppressed populations must simply adapt.

In contrast, Freire asserted that a decolonizing pedagogy requires the *demythologizing of reality*, to counter the domestication of consciousness, inherent in banking education. For example, one of the most debilitating hegemonic myths has been the view of education as a neutral enterprise. In response, Freire persistently challenged disingenuous notions of neutrality within schools and society that veil underlying structures of inequality. He adamantly argued that if we are in constant interaction with the world, is impossible to maintain a posture of neutrality.

Therefore, he surmised, “if we are conscious or not as educators, our praxis is either for the liberation of the people—their humanization—or for their domestication, their domination” (DAVIS, 1981, p.57).

Although Freire own formation was grounded in the intellectual roots of Western philosophy, his theorizing went beyond the neutrality of Socratic principles of dialogue or Plato’s realm of transcendence. As educators, activists, scholars, and leaders committed to the struggle for our humanity, Freire firmly believed that our connection and contact with the world is essential to a politics of change. He argued dialectically against neutrality, while also calling forth the “openness of the future” that must extend beyond certitudes, sectarianism, or dogma. For those socialized deeply within Western positivism, this negation of neutrality on one end and the assertion of openness on the other can boggle the mind. Yet, Freire’s dialectical stance speaks to both personal and political levels of struggle. On the personal level, grounded in an emancipatory political vision, we must struggle fiercely against forms of sectarianism or dogma that renders us rigid and close-minded to the creative and unforeseen possibilities for social change. Yet, on the political arena, we must acknowledge that most mainstream policies and practices go unimpeded, due to repressive epistemologies or epistemicides (PARASKEVA, 2011) that, wittingly or unwittingly, adhere to the interests of the wealthy and powerful.

Hence, the politics of hegemonic schooling conserve and reproduce colonizing attitudes and practices founded on reified knowledge and deficit notions, where students are deceptively initiated into static and limited prescribed roles, for which the limits of their educational opportunities prepare them to assume. Not surprisingly then that Freire objected to the notion of “training,” which renders students and workers passive receptacles of a fragmented, specialized, and instrumentalized knowledge, in which they are not permitted the room for conscientization—a requisite for their full democratic participation. This uncritical process of labor is often essentialized and well-supported, on practical ground, even among those working within oppressed communities, in the name of making a living. Freire (1970), however, objected; in that, “through such methods the masses are directed and manipulated” (p. 143) and their quest for liberation thwarted. In contrast, if the preparation for particular jobs were accompanied by humanizing opportunities for critical formation, participation in decision-making, community involvement, and an emphasis on a livable wage, perhaps a better case could be made for such an

approach, as an initial measure. Unfortunately, mainstream “training” programs are generally associated with limited choices, limited voice, and limited wages.

At this juncture, it should be noted that Freire’s conceptualization of dialogue as essential to an emancipatory pedagogy and community struggle have not always been accurately understood or practiced, by those who would reduce his pedagogy to method, stripping away its revolutionary intent. This is particular true given that instrumentalized or functionalist approaches to dialogue, which destabilizes the very principles that give meaning and power to emancipatory life. For Freire, seeking absolute answers, prescribed formulations, or fixed outcomes are not the intent, when subjects of history enter into communion for the purpose of liberation. This is so, given that under the constraints of capitalism and its sorted inequalities, we are forced to first unveil and problematize the myths and distortions that bind our sensibilities and, from there, move toward collective possibilities often unforeseen at the beginning of our dialogue together. With this in mind, two other important qualities of dialogue include the willingness to exist with uncertainty and to welcome surprise in our encounters. Freire (1970) considered a critical capacity for uncertainty and surprise important in countering the hegemonic reproduction of *prescription*, where “every prescription represents the imposition of one individual’s choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms” (p.47).

Given that we have all been so conditioned to hold prescribed expectations of our students or to expect so little from them, classroom opportunities to express their creativity and imagination in more fluid and undetermined ways can result in truly unexpected outcomes. In many ways, what Freire understood is what so many educators accidentally discover—when students genuinely experience the freedom to think unfettered and their imaginations find an open field to express themselves, they often work far harder and with greater discipline, enthusiasm, and joy than they do when they are forced into anti-dialogical modes of teaching that sentence them to prescriptive regurgitation of knowledge—knowledge that is abstracted and decontextualized from their lived histories and their active presence. Traditional teacher tendencies of control and authoritarianism also narrow the field of rationality, by way of prescribed ways of knowing and hegemonic expectations of performance. This privileging of prescribed banking approaches, in turn, diminishes the voices of difference and promotes

exclusion. It is the transformation of precisely this deadening and anti-dialogical pedagogy in schools that informs a problem-posing pedagogy, which advances the formation of consciousness and a democratic culture of voice, participation, and solidarity.

Dialogue that supports the development of emancipatory consciousness, however, does not aspire to creating perfect order in the classroom or the society at large, given that any epistemological and material sense of order is highly ensconced in cultural and class sensibilities, and thus, must remain in the communal terrain of constant renegotiation. Instead, Freire's notion of dialogue aspired to an integral awareness of self and others and an emergence of consciousness, which arms teachers and students with the critical objectivity necessary to allow ourselves and others "to be," so that together we can explore the consequences of relationships and their material circumstances. This process assists us to better resist inequalities of power and to discover new possibilities for unfettered expressions of humanity.

Indispensability of Resistance

What is essential is that learners...maintain alive the flame of resistance that sharpens their curiosity and stimulates their capacity to risk.

—Paulo Freire (1998)

In his introduction to *Pedagogy of Freedom*, Stanley Aronowitz (1989) noted, "Freire holds that a humanized society requires cultural freedom, the ability of the individual to choose values and rules of conduct that violate conventional social norms, and. In political and civil society, requires the full participation of *all* of its inhabitants in every aspect of public life (p. 19). Freire's dialogical approach then sought to challenge debilitating dualisms and untenable binaries that negate, polarize, or limit life choices. However, to *violate conventional social norms* entails that, by necessity, resistance or dissent must have a place in the democratic society. Hence, student resistance in the classroom merits critical engagement, in that it plays an important role the process of problematization. Rather than adversarial or problematic to the critical construction of knowledge, resistance serves as meaningful antecedent to the evolution of critical consciousness.

Freire (1983) believed that no problem or act of resistance could ever be resolved by simply ignoring, dismissing, or trying to eliminate the resistance or opposition, without falling into authoritarianism. Instead, what we as teachers must learn to do is to cultivate and nurture dialogue in ways that create new fields of possibility large enough to welcome the tensions generated by resistance. This enhances the field from which students can launch their energies into emancipatory directions of inquiry, through critique and thoughtful engagement. It is this pedagogical response to resistance that most supports the communal evolution of consciousness, in that transformation is made possible through a collective democratic process of participation, voice, solidarity, and action that forges new possibilities.

Accordingly, an important aim of Freire's emancipatory pedagogy is to override preconditioned or hegemonic patterns in how we name the world, by providing a demythologizing context in which teachers and students can consider the political consequences of particularly ways of thinking and their consequences. In the process, Freire asked us to move away from fixed or prescribed notions of life and toward a relational and contextual understanding of knowledge, history, and community. This idea is also relevant to Freire's (1993) notion of a critical literacy, informed by his teaching of literacy as a decolonizing practice, which for him was "above all, a social and political commitment (p.114). In the process of *reading of the word and the world*, Freire (2002) also sought to explore "the relationship prevailing between political lucidity...and the various levels of engagement in the process of mobilization and organization for struggle—for the defense of rights, for laying claim to justice" (40). Hence, the capacity to read the word and the world is fundamentally linked to a larger political struggle against hegemony, which entails a critical literacy that prepares students toward a more just life.

A problem-posing pedagogy, with Freire's concept of critical literacy as its compass, is meant to support students in becoming consciously aware of their context and their conditions of life; whereby they become more consciously aware of their options and their right to choose, as empowered subjects of their destinies. It is at that point that Freire considered students to become politicized, in that they gained a sense of critical awareness about how power relations impact them and their communities. To become politicized then implies entering into an evolutionary process of consciousness, by which individuals become critically aware that their active involvement in the historical process is directly linked to their capacities to denounce injustice

and announce a more just world. Critical resistance is anchored to a dialectical process, through which students or communities struggle to contend with the consequences of particular values, policies, and practices that threaten their right to be. Hence, resistance is often the precursor to students becoming more critically conscious and, as such, must also be linked to an emancipatory right to choice.

Freire's pedagogy encompasses conditions of pedagogy that support teachers, students, and communities to enter intentionally into a lived historical process. Within a pedagogy that supports the development of critical consciousness are also the underlying purposes of empowerment and self-determination that enable students to reflect on their lives and the world around them. Freire (1983) believed that as teachers and students grow in the power of reflection and social agency, we also develop "an increased capacity for choice" (p. 16). This increased capacity for choice is a fundamental prerequisite, as oppressed communities move to liberate ourselves from old prescribed choices that have been handed down to us by the powerful. It is, moreover, through the deepening of consciousness that we struggle to recuperate the possibilities for choice, often denied us within the hegemonic context.

The process of recuperating choices, however, can be an arduous process, Freire (1970) explained that during epochal transitions, "the deepening of the clash between old and new encouraged a tendency to choose one side or the other; and the emotional climate of the time encouraged the tendency to become radical about the choice (p.10)". When intensified this can cause deep polarization in society and also can lead to violence—whether that violence is the oppressor's violence that seeks to preserve the status quo or the violence of the oppressed struggling to create a breakthrough from which new conditions can emerge. This process, of course, can create enormous dissonance and resistance, given that it speaks to the necessity for a significant shift in paradigm. The extent to which educators can express faith, compassion and love for their students, as well as create conditions for all to participate in a process of empowerment, will ultimately determine the manner in which students are able to move through their resistance, when asked to interrogate unjust systems of power and privilege that may implicate their own perspectives and past practices.

It is worth noting here that the dialogical approach of Freire's pedagogy is meant to be as empowering a process for teachers as it is for students, in that it is also meant to prevent teachers

from becoming fossilized in our ideas. This is best achieved when we recognize that teaching is as much a process of learning from our students, as it is a process of students learning from teachers. Thus, this radical suppleness is best cultivated, as we see in Freire's life, when we aspire persistently to learn with our students, express love and faith in their interactions, and yet, are not afraid to express that "fire in the belly" that is fueled by an uncompromising love for freedom, life, and the world. This process, however, can only proceed effectively, when radical educators have developed sufficient patience, confidence, faith, knowledge, and commitment to a humanizing vision of education. This moves us beyond absolute, reified, and fixed formulas of teaching and learning, toward a dialectical understanding and integral approach, which supports pedagogical practices that bring students and the world into constant relationship, in the interest of democratic life.

Within a Freirian approach to education, resistance then is not considered a problem to be defeated. Instead, a critical understanding of resistance is an essential component to the process by which new knowledge emerges and political formation in the interest of justice evolves. For this reason, Freire (1983) considered the spirit of resistance "a symptom of advancement, an introduction to a more complete humanity [and an] attitude of rebellion as one of the most promising aspects of our political life" (p.36). However, he did not believe that genuine democratic life could be won by resistance or rebellion alone, in that the struggle for our liberation could not exist predominantly as dissent, but rather had to also move toward a constructive process of critical intervention and remaking of concrete situations. Dialogue, therefore, was for Freire the collective praxis by which we transform the power and promise of resistance into transformative action. So, rather than to shut down resistance by authoritarian means of control or manipulation, Freire urged us to appreciate that without resistance, transformative knowledge is impossible. This is to say, that resistance holds the key for unveiling, in more substantive ways, the asymmetrical relations of power within schools and society and the impact of oppressive consequences. In essence, resistance can be understood as a significant dialogical juncture, where limit situations can be more clearly identified and unveiled.

By embracing the indispensability of resistance, we come to recognize its relationship to how teachers and students participate either to open the field of rationality or to close it, depending upon on ideological allegiances, cultural values, class privilege, or lived histories. An

emancipatory response to resistance, through openness and acceptance, expands the field of rationality, in ways that invite students to look more critically at their own attitudes, how these came to be, the consequences of their actions, and new ways in which they might respond to the world, in both theory and practice. This demands a pedagogical process that shifts the focus away from trying to eliminate oppositionalities or resistance to ways that engage student resistance in meaningful ways and encourages greater inclusiveness and collaboration. Through this dialogical process, resistance to and problematization of oppression unfold, in ways that honor the dignity of our humanity and bring us into new relationships with one another.

Freire, nevertheless, understood that, although the power to denounce and announce is born of collective struggle, it also is the outcome of politically coherent and integral human beings, who must each come to a personal decision to struggle, given that each revolutionary woman or man must live with the great joys and hardships that such a commitment entails. Hence, revolutionaries or those who are radicalized are those who, unable to persist in the oppressive values, formations, and practices of the old era, commit their passion, reason, life energy, and physical fortitude to the long historical struggle for freedom and, thus, to self-determine their own destiny as authentic human beings—extricating themselves from the limited choices presented to them by the hegemonic apparatus of schooling.

However, the transformation of material conditions cannot take place without also the transformation of consciousness, as both a personal and social phenomena. Freire considered this to be so, in that the reproduction of material conditions, whether just or unjust, is inextricably linked to the collective beliefs and actions that fuel their perpetuation. If we seek to change the material conditions that oppress the majority of the world's population, then we must recognize the ultimate purpose of an emancipatory pedagogy to be nothing less than the radicalization of consciousness—where love and political commitment inform our underlying participation in communal life and the struggle against our disaffiliation and oppression.

Praxis of Radicalization

A more critical understanding of the situation of oppression does not yet liberate the oppressed. But the revelation is a step in the right direction. Now the person who has this

new understanding can engage in a political struggle for the transformation of the concrete conditions in which oppression prevails.

—Paulo Freire (2002)

Despite his overarching emphasis on the role of social relationships in the formation of critical consciousness, Freire recognized that each individual must also find within themselves and in communion with others a decisive point in their lived historical process that signals their radicalization as an imperative of emancipatory life. This to say, that political consciousness and a commitment to action cannot be transferred, in a banking mode, to students or communities, no matter how oppressed. As such, the praxis of liberation that informs the development of critical awareness requires a dialogical process, whereby individuals through their personal reflection, dialogue, solidarity, and actions over time, awaken to and evolve greater faith in their own social agency and capacity for integral formation.

To better comprehend the power and possibilities of emancipatory consciousness requires that we retain in place the dialectical qualities that underpin this process. More specifically, we radicalize and are radicalized, through relationships labor and struggle with one another. This, however, does not collapse the individual into the communal or the communal into the individual, in that each has a field of sovereignty and autonomy that is brought to bear, in the forging of critical consciousness. Rather than cogs in the great wheel of revolution or the historical process of evolution, we are, in fact, creators and co-creators of life—whether we participate passively through inaction and submission or bring forth critical impulses for liberation to bear upon the social and material structures that impact our existence.

An ever-present question, however, in the process of radicalization is how we make the radical option. Freire (1983) believed that the ethical man or woman “who makes a radical option” does not deny another the right to choose nor imposes that choice upon another. However, radicals do have “the duty, imposed by love, to react against the violence...in a situation in which the excessive power of a few leads to the dehumanization of all” (pp.10-11). Unfortunately, it is precisely this human potential to know the world critically and to denounce injustice that is most corrupted by the lovelessness of oppression and the hostility of authoritarianism—a hostility that functions to disable the individual and collective participation and empowerment of those deemed renegades, within the existing regime.

Freire understood that if emancipatory life is indeed a journey or road to the unknown, then great courage, discipline, and commitment is required to denounce injustice and to remain ever present in the larger struggle for individual and social transformation. Rather than a perspective that objectifies the outcome of democratic struggle as some definitive endpoint or transcendent utopia, Freire understood, through his own life, that the struggle for liberation is an on-going revolutionary and human evolutionary process, driven by a dialogical praxis, where on-going reflection, voice, participation, action, and solidarity are key ingredients to forging culturally democratic possibilities.

Freire considered this dialogical relationship essential to the praxis of radicalization and the formation of political clarity, in that critical dialogue provides a collective space in which our ambiguities and contradiction can be expressed, critiqued, and transformed, through a spirit of solidarity. As the process of radicalization implies, it requires a profound commitment to self-vigilance, particularly where ideological contradictions and historical privileges of liberal educators must be exposed; those “who proselytize about empowering minorities while refusing to divest from their class-and-whiteness privilege—a privilege that is often left unexamined and unproblematized and that is often accepted as divine right” (MACEDO, 1989, p. xxx).

The radicalization of consciousness and sustained political struggle for democracy requires individuals who, through their commitment, political clarity, and love for the world, are capable of containing their arrant impulses and desires associated with unjust privilege and the internalization of oppression, if we are to move away from self-destructive behaviors or deadening forms of resistance that betray our yearning for freedom. As such, Freire believed that both reason and human compassion must inform an emancipatory educational process; but this speaks to a reason and compassion born from an integral and coherent engagement with the world, rather than prescribed forms of sentimentalism. As such, students must find opportunities to better comprehend the emotional life and to practice engaging with one another in organic and creative ways, so not to become mired in unnecessary conflict and contradiction. With this in mind, Freire counseled radical educators to practice parsimony in our communication, particularly when mean-spirited opposition threatens to derail transformation possibilities.

Nevertheless, Freire’s unrelenting focus on education as a political terrain of struggle was undoubtedly fueled by his indignation over oppressive structures and exclusionary conditions

enacted through hegemonic belief systems, which systematically warp how oppressed populations view our lives and surrounding conditions. Hence, any pedagogy in the interest of liberation must be geared fundamentally toward the problematization of our domestication and the transformation of the myths that conserve the oppressed-oppressor contradiction. Recognizing the difficult of such an effort, Freire (1970) likened it to childbirth; but implicitly linked it to the process of radicalization through his reference to the emergence of a *new being*.

Liberation is thus a childbirth, and a painful one. The man or woman who emerges is a new person, viable only as the oppressor-oppressed contradiction is superseded by the humanization of all people. Or to put it another way, the solution of this contradiction is born of our collective labor which brings into the world this new being: no longer oppressor no longer oppressed, but human in the process of achieving freedom (p. 49).

Without a consciousness of radicalization to support us, as educators who continuously must contend with repressive forces of schooling, it is impossible to support the imagination, creativity and dreams of our students. In order to support the emancipatory dreams of others, we must believe in the possibility of our own dreams and cultivate a deeply embodied sense of how to move with an evolving consciousness of freedom through our lives. Freire (1983) also believed, drawing on the words of Karl Mannheim, that central to the process of radicalization is the need to develop “a frame of mind which can bear the burden of skepticism and which does not panic when many of the thought habits are doomed to vanish” (p. 33). What cannot be lost here is that social struggle in the midst of oppression requires that we be able to stand on our own two feet, when necessary. Therefore, the process of radicalization must contend with both individual and social processes of transformation. In that the individual and society must be understood as dialectically indivisible in Freire’s conceptualization of emancipatory life. This dialectical relationship of human beings *and* the world is fully in concert with Freire’s pedagogical vision of consciousness, as a powerful mediating political force in the classroom and out in the world.

Humility, as an indispensable quality of a critical pedagogy, is also indispensable in the process of our radicalization. Freire (1983) linked this quality to the idea that radicalized individuals are Subjects to the degree that we are able to perceive with humility both our historical and personal contradictions in an increasingly critical fashion. As such, we can never consider ourselves “the proprietors of history” but rather in a necessary communion with others

“to participate creatively in the process by discerning transformations in order to aid and accelerate them” (12). By so doing, as Freire illustrated repeatedly, we can become living examples of ethical beings, by engaging our conflicts and contradictions in ways that allow us to grow in awareness and apply our critical consciousness toward collective action, for the betterment of the world.

The question of faith in self and others is another tenet of Freire’s pedagogy that impacts the process of radicalization; in that faith, coupled with a deep abiding love for life, comprises a significant foundational premise for the enactment of radical hope, in our teaching and living. This sense of radical faith is closely tied to our pedagogical and political capacities to believe in those social and material conditions of liberation that we are yet unable to see in the material realm. In essence, it is the political force generated through our collective efforts that provides us the impetus to fight for social justice in schools and society. This radical faith emerges through our critical belief in the radical possibilities of our collective reinvention.

Without such a deep sense of faith in what we might accomplish together, it is difficult to live with a critical sense of hope in the future. This understanding of radical hope, which much be anchored in concrete human possibilities, is a cornerstone of Freire’s philosophy and way of life. And it is this critical hope and underlying faith in life that offers us an avenue by which we can live, dialectically, in what exists now *and* what might exist in the future to come, through our consistent love, commitment, and labor. For Freire, this radical hope develops in conjunction with the formation of critical consciousness and our radicalization, as we push against debilitating ideologies and structures that attempt to squelch our emancipatory dreams. With each transformative moment in the classroom or out in the world, our liberatory pedagogical resolve becomes stronger, as our commitment to love deepens and our political grace matures, in the process of our on-going collective practice, as educators, activists, or community leaders for social justice.

This process of radicalization predisposes us to reevaluate constantly our lives, attitudes, behaviors, actions, decisions, and relationships in the world. It is through this dynamic process of change that conscientização develops and evolves, as we come to engage courageously the oppressive forces that impact our lives, intervening with greater confidence and strength. By confronting together the risks inherent in our radicalization, we stop surrendering our lives, our

children, and our communities to the decisions of others. Inseparable here is the political commitment and responsibility required to fight for liberation, so that our destinies rest squarely in our own hands.

The Educator and the Emergence of Consciousness

Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness; the latter strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality.

—Paulo Freire (1970)

Freire beckoned revolutionary educators and leaders to embrace the labor of teaching, both as a personal and collective process. In order to create the conditions for genuine student empowerment, educators had to also embrace the struggle for their own personal and collective empowerment. In this sense, Freire understood the pedagogical struggle for the transformation of material conditions had to be conceptualized in conjunction with the formation of critical awareness. And this pedagogical process could only be enacted by educators who themselves were committed to a larger project of social transformation. This political resolve was evident in Freire's life and throughout his writings, in that his pedagogy of love was founded upon an ethics and practice committed to an emancipatory vision, made possible through a growing political consciousness in the interest of freedom.

Freire understood that this entailed a radical choice that had to be made. No one could force anyone to undertake the risks and labor of a transformative commitment. It had to be a deeply sincere and radical decision that educators had to come to within themselves. In this respect, Freire was incredibly thoughtful, open, and accepting of the difficulties and risks that such a decision meant in the life of radical educators. A true commitment to social justice had to entail a serious commitment, anchored in the knowledge of what such a choice required of us—an internal commitment to both personal integrity and a lived solidarity, in our personal, pedagogical, and political relationships.

One might say that Freire (1995) viewed his labor as an educator as a calling to a path of liberation and an emancipatory vocation, which served as an expression of his *raison d'être* in the world as a historical subject and political being. With this in mind, he also touched the importance of becoming clear of our own purpose so that we can take charge of our praxis.

In my case, I am in the world because I would like to accomplish one of my tasks which is to contribute to changing the world. I discovered that very early in my childhood. I could not have come to the world in order to preserve the world as it is. I do not believe in immobility in history. I want to make some contribution to change, to transformation because it is by transforming that we make it better (p. 19).

In many ways, Freire's pedagogy and life were deeply anchored to a political commitment and spiritual resolve, in that he sought to be *in communion* with students and communities whose lives were most vulnerable under capitalism. In many ways, he surrendered his life to the quest for knowledge in the interest of human liberation, recognizing that his life's work would be but one small contribution to the long historical struggle for freedom. In many of his writings, he often spoke to the question of fear and its impact, in that he recognized that fear can constrict and constrain the social agency of many well-meaning educators, obstructing their ability to fight with resolve for the transformation of educational practices, which they themselves saw as destructive to their teaching and the lives of their students.

Freire recognized that the trenchant individualism of mainstream life under capitalism, reinforced in the preparation of teachers and the structure of education, interfered with ability of many educators to move beyond individualistic interests to invest themselves in a larger collective vision of emancipatory possibility. Impaired often by conditioned fears of losing their livelihood or sense of personal independence or control, many educators persist in enacting contradictory forms of consciousness that derail the collective movement necessary to transform schools and society. As witness to his own life and that of others, Freire understood that a solid commitment to liberation does not diminish our personal sovereignty, but rather enhances personal empowerment through the political grace and maturity generated from our on-going communal participation in social struggle. This is directly tied to the manner in which critical praxis and the solidarity it informs works to disrupt the isolation and alienation engendered by hegemonic institutions. As such, through our collective commitment to struggle with others against oppression, we open ourselves to the development and evolution of collective

consciousness and the knowledge necessary to overcome the limitations of oppressive forces that limit emancipatory possibilities.

As such, it is through our genuine commitment to social struggle that we find the wherewithal from which to build our human capacity as activists—a capacity which enhances both the quantity and quality of our pedagogical and political resolve. This emergence of consciousness occurs through our individual and collective actions, in the name of justice and freedom. Accordingly, this emancipatory process can work to widen our rationality, providing us glimpses into the unlimited possibilities for reinventing our world. In contrast to hegemonic or fixed epistemologies of power that dominate schools and society, Freire advocated for an evolving political consciousness imbued with the courage to dream new ways of learning, living, and loving in the world.

Yet despite our most heartfelt commitment, Freire viewed the fight for our liberation as an arduous path that requires enormous self-vigilance and personal determination, given the powerful forces of negation at work in the world that limit and restrict our lives as subjects of history and cultural citizens. Through the subordination of the majority of the world's population, those in power have created a closed meritocratic system of capital that preserves inequalities and social exclusions. Through the advancement of positivist assumptions and exclusionary paradigms that today privilege of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, the majority of the world's population is more and more excluded from decision that mark the destinies of our communities.

Hence, our personal struggles—particularly for those us from working class and racialized populations—are as demanding as the larger societal struggles we wage. In many ways, this may be understood as the dialectical manifestation of the oppressed-oppressor contradiction, given the manner that structures of banking education and the culture industry constrict the intellectual and political formation of students from oppressed communities. As such, the pedagogical formation of teachers and students often echoes a resounding need for a critical dialogical process that invites us, at all levels, to reflect deeply on the ethics of our practice and the consequences of our actions with respect to questions of inequality. This also often requires from us renewed commitment to the transformation of consciousness and significant shifts in how we comprehend and respond to our world.

Through our development of critical consciousness, we, as teachers and students, can shift away from singular notions of truth, toward a plurality of awareness where simultaneous truths exist as contextual and relational phenomena—cultural truths often thwarted by hegemonic epistemologies that can blind us from seeing the wisdom and power that lies beyond hegemonic beliefs. Often these epistemicides exist camouflaged in commonsensical rhetoric that presents truth as fixed, obfuscating oppressive policies and practices that perpetuate human suffering. In contrast, critical consciousness opens the field of interpretation and analysis to shed light on the hidden curriculum of schooling and official transcripts of society that conserve the interests of the status quo and devalue the lives of the oppressed.

As is evident by his writings, Freire was an ardent believer that education could serve as a political vehicle for the formation of social consciousness. However, for teachers to enter effectively in such a process also requires great personal perseverance, discernment, and patience in their own pedagogical and political radicalization as agents of social change. For Freire, education constitutes an *act of love* precisely because it requires our personal investment as teachers in the lives of our students, in ways that also require our full presence as evolving human beings in the classroom. Freire (1998a) describes this “presence” as that which “can reflect upon itself, that knows itself as presence, that can intervene, can transform, can speak of what it does, but that can also take stock of, compare, evaluate, give value to, decide, break with, and dream (p. 26). To develop the power of this presence, we must address our conflicts and contradictions, if we are to be able to support our students in engaging theirs. Moreover, this “demands constant vigilance over ourselves so as to avoid being simplistic, facile, and incoherent (p.51). Generally, this form of self-vigilance can also help to keep us supple of spirit and humble in our approach to the difficulties faced by our students and their families.

It can almost go without saying that a deeply humanist philosophy is at the center of Freire’s (1983) articulations of pedagogy and social consciousness. In *Education for Critical Consciousness*, he summarized his perspective on this question.

The humanist aspect is not abstract. It is concrete and rigorously scientific. This ism is not based on vision of an ideal human being, separated from the world, the portrait of an imaginary person...It is a humanism concerned with the humanization of men and women, rejecting all forms of manipulation as the contradiction of liberation. This humanism which sees men and women in the world and in time, “mixed in” with reality, is only true humanism when it

engages in action to transform the structures in which they are reified. This humanism refuses both despair and naïve optimism, and is thus hopefully critical. Its critical hope rests on an equally critical belief, the belief that human beings can make and remake things, that they can transform the world. A belief then that human beings, by making and remaking things and transforming the world, can...become more fully human” (p. 145)

The political formation of consciousness and the pedagogical practices necessary for this formation must then encompass this humanizing ethos—an ethos that moves us away from egoism, fatalism, arrogance, dogmatism, sectarianism, and all forms of ideological traps that can imprison our minds and derail the intimacy of our relationship with democracy. As such, Freire’s pedagogy of love reflects an expansive belief in the power of social consciousness and a deep abiding faith in the emancipatory potential of our personal and political labor, as empowered human beings. Further, this points to a living pedagogical process that derives meaning and purpose from our material existence and, as such, recognizes that in order to exist free, we must be willing to struggle together to contend with our right to both personal autonomy and communal sovereignty, as we embrace simultaneously our joint stewardship of our lives, communities, and the world.

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