

***Bon Voyage: A Peer-Reviewed
Journal of English Studies***

- Open Access Journal
- Indexed in NepJOL
- Print ISSN: 2382-5308



Published by:
Department of English
Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, Tribhuvan
University, Kathmandu, Nepal

Dialogic Pedagogy: Education for Social Justice
(A Book Review of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire)

Pradip Sharma PhD 

Department of English, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal

Article History: Submitted 13 April, 2025; Reviewed 22 July, 2025; Revised 23 July, 2025

Corresponding Author: Pradip Sharma, E-mail: rrcampus72@gmail.com

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Abstract

This book review examines Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, highlighting his transformative pedagogical concepts such as co-learning, dialogics, and cultural synthesis, fostering critical consciousness. Freire's model of humanizing literacy seeks to restore learners' dignity, creativity and autonomy. The review highlights the relevance of Freire's educational insights, which empower individuals by freeing them from 'intellectual tutelage' and fostering critical consciousness. Doing so, it reveals his critique of the traditional banking model of education, which sustains intellectual domination, underscoring his new pedagogical insight of collaborative learning for fostering self-awakening among learners, that transcends class and gender divide. Reconsidering a stratified global society, the study, after a close reading, foregrounds Freire's take on dialogics and cultural inclusion as a part of liberating humanity from the ideological incarceration of the oppressor. It also showcases the critique of the political structures that cultivate docile citizens, disseminating oppressor's ideology through literacy policy that forbids their critical consciousness. Finally, the review affirms the ongoing relevance of Freire's work in resisting dehumanizing literacy policies and promoting emancipatory education in modern contexts.

Keywords: Paulo Freire, pedagogy, critical consciousness, dialogics

Introduction

Aristotle says in *Metaphysics* that everyone has a natural wish for knowledge. This desire helps them avoid ignorance, freeing them from intellectual tutelage. The zeal for knowledge (epistemology) is an inherent tendency, which, ultimately, transcends cultural practices, ethnicity, race, gender dichotomy, and political divide. Epistemology permits us to question doxology (faith) and suggests that asserts our views. Brazilian educational reformist Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) foregrounds the power of inquiry in learning for humanization. He also argues that knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (72). He adds that education not only empowers citizens but also helps transform society if the pupils get the opportunity to be co-creator of knowledge. Freire’s pedagogy, thus, occupies a seminal position in critical pedagogy by dismantling the ideological constraints of the piggy “banking model” (75) of education—treating the learners as empty vessel, retaining the authority of the oppressors by making them inculcate the latter’s cultural values. While reviewing this, American educator, Jason Barthlowmew Scott terms it as the construction of culturally “incarcerated learners” (80), brainwashed docile human beings. To put it otherwise, in literacy pedagogy, Freire rethinks the banking model of literacy wherein the learners participate in the knowledge transmitting process—which means depositing one’s knowledge to others—for rearing the quo status society. Simply put, Freire employs the banking model metaphor to show that learners’ passive reception of knowledge reinforcing societal hegemony and inequality (*Pedagogy* 58). In contrast to instilling the ruler’s policy in the learners, Freire proposes an emancipatory pedagogical framework that entails critical consciousness (*conscientização*), dialogue, and the cultural synthesis of oppressed communities (72), which liberates people from ideological bondage and structural injustice.

In the preface of *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Henry A. Giroux states that Freire viewed capitalism as not only an economic paradigm but also as a cultural and pedagogical system that stripped people of their agency, confining them to an ideology in which they internalize their oppression (3). Giroux further highlights Freire’s uncompromising support of oppressed peoples everywhere. To him, oppressed people are not only poor but also immigrants, refugees, females, and socio-politically stripped-down communities. Giroux compliments Freire’s pedagogy of hope in the high time of capitalism that draws on the hegemony of the oppressed. Crucial to his postulation resounds the fact that every human being, irrespective of their societal position, can develop consciousness to retain self-autonomy and the right to be included.

Drawing on Marxist and humanist traditions that like to upgrade the base (improvised community), Freire too rejects the top-down transmission of knowledge, wherein students remain just a passive recipient which recounts a practice of “culture of silence” (*Pedagogy* 29). Instead, he advocates for a dialogical approach that fosters

awareness (*conscientização*)—a process that recalls Cartesian self-awareness through critical thinking: “I think, therefore, I am”—enabling learners to critically engage with and transform their sociopolitical reality (*Pedagogy* 79). This pedagogical shift also aligns with the Chinese adage—when I hear, I forget; when I see, I remember; when I do, I understand—emphasizing inclusive experiential learning as a means of confronting structural inequities. In tandem with the Chinese maxim, American political scientist Benjamin Franklin also pleads for participatory pedagogy—Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn—to spotlight the need to transform the learners’ passivity inherent in conventional literacy pedagogy.

By interrogating Freire’s theoretical contributions, this review elucidates their enduring relevance in modern critical pedagogy that advocates for the freedom of humanity. Freire’s model can also be linked with educator Jim Scribner’s taxonomy of pedagogical roles of the teacher as an explainer, involver, and enabler (*Learning Teaching* 18), particularly the latter two, who follow participatory education to enhance critical thinking. This study delves into the system of education, which, for Freire, is a dangerous model that prohibits the creative and reflective abilities of the learners. Not only this, he critiques the literacy policy, highlighting how it instills the rulers’ ideology through syllabi that do not transform society but rather preserve the status quo. It does not refine the character of the learners either. Brooding over the dialogic and inclusive educational model that aids in transforming both the learners and the society, Freire critiques the banking model that compels the students to graduate without having refined characters.

Freire’s critique of the “banking model” of education severely assesses a traditional approach where teachers merely deposit information into students, reinforcing oppressive structures. This model positions educators as the sole knowledge bearers, leading to passive learning where students memorize without critical engagement (Jackson 209) in the learning process. In contrast, Freire pleads for a “problem-posing” education that entails dialogue, critical thinking, and co-creation of knowledge, empowering learners to challenge societal inequities (Torres-Olave and González 1050). Torres-Olave and González emphasize Freire’s dialogical pedagogy that helps to promote critical awareness among the learners, reinforcing the need for education for social justice.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, drawing on critical dialectic theory of neo-Marxist, like Adorno and Horkheimer, Freire explains how dominant ideology (re)produces inequality through cultural mechanisms. Adding to the liberating and humanizing education as an innovative pedagogy of Freire, Gerard Huiskamp recaps:

Paulo Freire sought to critically reexamine what a commitment to the “authentic liberation” of the poor entails, both theoretically and practically. From his adult literacy and rural organizational work in Brazil and Chile, respectively, Freire set out in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to develop and employ a pedagogy that would enable intellectuals, in partnership with the urban and rural poor, to transform the conditions of oppression to which they were subjugated. (73-94)

Huiskamp reflects on the transformative power of education and its liberating efforts through ‘consciousness -raising’ amid the ‘colonized mentalities of the oppressed. He commends Freire’s take on the attainment of new awareness among the oppressed. Freire also pleads for the following models of schooling as a part of social welfare:

A. The Banking Model vs. Problem-Posing Education

To spotlight the need for *The Pedagogy of Oppressed* Freire underpins the issue of humanization which modern education system lacks. Humanization is the corollary of liberation which liberal pedagogy does not cater. Rather modern pedagogy nurtures the oppressor’s power, echoing power and knowledge complementary bond in Michel Foucault. Nonetheless, Freire adheres to humanity and states, “This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves” (36). To Freire, the process of liberation should be a social and must not recourse to the ideological inculcation policy of the ruler. This is because the dehumanization of man has been taking place as an unjust and exploitative social order. Freire, therefore, critiques the “banking concept” of education, where teachers act as narrators depositing information into students, reinforcing oppressive structures (*Pedagogy* 58). This depository of knowledge ideologically sutures the mind of the learners and stops their constructivism, which Freire condemns.

In contrast, his *problem-posing education* encourages dialogue, critical thinking, and co-creation of knowledge, empowering learners to challenge structural violence that breeds systemic inequities. ‘The Problem-Posing Education,’ to Freire, encourages collaboration between teachers and students as equals, which Antonio José Muller et al also find apt to focus on identifying and solving real-world problems together (50). They too emphasize how Freire’s approach focuses on identifying and solving real-world problems collaboratively. This method encourages critical thinking and active participation among learners, fostering a more engaging and practical learning experience. Indeed, Freire’s problem-solving model aims to cultivate critical and reflective thinkers who can engage with their environment, promoting empowerment and critical engagement of the learners.

B. Conscientization and Liberation

Freire criticizes the traditional “banking concept” of education, where knowledge is deposited into passive students. Instead, he promotes problem-posing education, which encourages active participation, critical thinking, and reflection. This method helps learners understand their reality and empowers them to take action to transform it. Central to Freire’s pedagogy is the idea of *conscientização*— consciousness-raising; the process by which the oppressed recognize and act against their oppression (*Pedagogy* 109) which enables the learners to decolonize their minds from the hegemony of the oppressor. This concept draws on Marxist class struggle, emphasizing that liberation requires both

reflection and praxis (action informed by reflection). Here, Freire believes that education should help individuals recognize and challenge oppressive structures by fostering their autonomy. By instilling knowledge and skills and fostering conscience and awakening the learners from the hegemony of the oppressor, Freire's pedagogy aims at liberating individuals from oppression.

C. The Role of the Educator

Freire redefines the teacher-student dynamic as a reciprocal relationship where both of them learn/ unlearn. Instead of the 'jug-mug' binary of the well-informed teacher and empty pupils, he suggests 'two-way' communications wherein he postulates a dialogic class (Rick Bowers 368), in relation to Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, which sounds more inclusive and democratic. He warns against "false generosity" (*Pedagogy* 44), of the liberalist education model where well-intentioned educators perpetuate dependency instead of acknowledging learners' autonomy. He spotlights the importance of dialogue between educators and learners to foster critical consciousness among the latter. This mutual exchange fosters critical thinking and helps learners become active participants in the learning process. For it, Freire critiques the cultural invasion and construction of docile people whose hegemony ultimately strengthens the oppressor. Resurfacing the process of liberal pedagogy, Freire criticizes that "When the oppressed are almost completely submerged in reality, it is unnecessary to manipulate them. In the anti-dialogical theory of action, manipulation is the response of the oppressor to the new concrete conditions of the historical process" (121). By teaching the oppressors' culture, the educators like to annihilate students' autonomy. Put differently, they like to constitute the 'yes-men' which sounds anti-democratic too because it rejects individual freedom and autonomy.

From the same plane, Freire again comments, "In cultural invasion it is essential that those who are invaded come to see their reality with the outlook of the invaders rather than their own; for the more they mimic the invaders, the more stable the position of the latter becomes" (124). He points out that cultural invasion is an instrument of the oppressor and the social reality of modern literacy policy. His idea of cultural inclusion contrasts with anti-dialogic pedagogy in the classroom. Instead it empowers the students to liberate themselves and transform the society. Therefore, he appeals to give students a voice in their education by involving them in decision-making processes, allowing them to choose topics for projects or select reading materials that interest them. Here, Freire postulates the role of teacher as a facilitator and guide not an agent of the ruler that is in consonance with American educationist Alison King's (1995) who assumes teacher not as a sage on the podium to preach rulers' ideology, however, a guide on the side to enable the students to learn and unlearn.

Overall, Freire's dialogic pedagogy scores contemporary relevance to liberate the underdogs from ignorance and remains crucial in discussions of bell hooks' (1994) whose decolonizing purpose of education too ties up with Freirean pedagogy to challenge Eurocentric curricula. Not only this, his idea reiterates in Giroux's (2020) critical pedagogy in the digital age to examine and counter depersonalizing neoliberal education. Freire's

pedagogical stand also assists social movements like ‘Black Lives Matter and Fridays for Future’ which embodies his praxis of education to activism. Though Freire’s pedagogy scores value in garnering social justice, it also has some pitfalls: On the grounds of its utopianism Nicholas Burbules (1993) examines it as impractical, idealistic, and overlooking institutional constraints. Likewise, Michael Apple (1999) links it with only a specific cultural community of Latin America and questions its universal application. To illustrate, Nepal and India where there are numerous cultural communities and the syllabi cannot encompass all of them. From the same veins, Antonia Darder points out the structural constraints and time consuming of practicing Freire’s inclusive and dialogical models of pedagogy.

However, some educators find potential of social transformation and attaining individual autonomy in Freire’s model. Among them, Peter McLaren (2000) explains that Freire’s conception of education as a profoundly political project oriented towards the transformation of society has been crucial to the education of revolutionary societies and societies in civil war, as well as established Western democracies. Freire’s work has had considerable influence among progressive educators in the West, especially in the context of the emerging traditions of critical pedagogy, bilingual education, social justice, and mutual respect for multiculturalism (53-54). Freire’s advocacy for liberating literacy, therefore, provokes the educators to rethink and reframe the existing top-down literacy policy which safeguards the oppressors’ culture.

Freire’s worthy tome, *Pedagogy*, remains a constructivist appraisal of the banking model of literacy pedagogy for educators and activists committed to social justice. Enthused by Freire’s literacy model of communication between students and teachers instead of the top-down model of teaching, education activists are creating pressure for redrafting student-centered pedagogy that addresses the ground reality. Additionally, Freire’s showcasing of the humanizing pedagogy that demands the need to arouse inquiry, consciousness, and creating a live classroom environment where students feel comfortable to share their thoughts and experiences. This can be done through group discussions, debates, and collaborative projects to promote critical thinking that enables the students to use problem-posing education to address social justice. He also appeals to educators to encourage reflection and action as a part of classroom praxis that activates the students to reflect on their learning and take action. Above all, he implores to use real-life contexts in syllabi to connect lessons to students’ lives and experiences. This makes learning more relevant and meaningful, helping students see the value of their education in their daily lives.

Conclusion

Freire highlights the need to challenge the ‘banking model’ so that the learners can move away from rote memorization and passive learning. Instead, they use interactive teaching methods such as discussions, hands-on activities, and peer teaching. Thus, Freire’s critique of dehumanizing education and his vision of emancipatory learning continue to inspire global movements for equitable pedagogy. What stands out in the book is its

emphasis on the dialogical method that promotes co-learning and critical consciousness. Because education is not just an academic instruction but a part of a political act. For the oppressed community, learning helps reclaim their voice and identity. Though Freire's all-encompassing dialogic literacy seems idealistic, it helps unlearn the dehumanizing ideological slavery, cultivating critical consciousness. Moreover, his take on social justice enlightens researchers and educators to remap, redesign, and reevaluate future pedagogical policy. At last, Freire's advocacy for a humanizing approach to education emphasizes critical thinking as a means of reclaiming learners' autonomy and liberating them from the ideological hegemony of neoliberal literacy. It reaffirms his humanist pedagogical attempt to empower the underprivileged community for radical social transformation to address modern identity politics.

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