



EMPOWERING EDUCATORS: INTEGRATING PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED INTO TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract:

This article discusses Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed and how it can be meaningfully integrated into teacher preparation programs. Freire's ideas challenge traditional top-down forms of teaching thinking through dialogue, critical awareness, and a form of social consciousness that we believe, can offer new prospects for teacher education programs. The article outlines and describes several key aspects of Freirean pedagogy including the teacher-student relationship, conscientization, and reflection to provide in depth ideas about how Freirean pedagogy can transform teacher preparation so educators are prepared for equity-oriented and transformative practices in their classrooms. Furthermore, we provide a literature review, discuss common challenges, and provide examples from different contexts globally that illustrate Freire's ideas influence in teacher education. Lastly, we provide general recommendations for enacting and integrating critical pedagogy into educator puppy in order to make an argument of why educator preparation must change to better serve the constantly changing dynamic, and diverse learning communities with which we interact.

Keyword: *Empowering, Integrating Pedagogy, Curriculum, Teacher Educators, Transformative Learning, Liberatory Pedagogy, Education for Liberation*

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Introduction:

Education is not just passing along information, it is about changing how people think and act, and how they interact with the world around them. One of the most compelling ways of thinking about education comes from the work of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator who was known for writing about the "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" and "Pedagogy of Hope" works that describe his ideas of how to teach so that learners can reclaim their voices in education through critical reflection. While Freire's writing was focused mainly on adult literacy programs in Latin America, he has influenced educational practice around the world. That raises the question of how we can effectively examine and expand teacher education in relation to his pedagogy?

The following article will support teacher education programs to incorporate Freire's pedagogy into newly preparing educators as more conscious, reflective, and socially engaged educators fully aware of their distinct role in an unjust society. The work does not seek to simply prepare better educators but to prepare change agents in classrooms and communities.

Understanding Pedagogy of the Oppressed:

Before discussing the practical ways that teacher preparation might include Freire, we need to consider what Pedagogy of the Oppressed means. At the very base of Freire's philosophy is a criticism of the "banking model" of education, the premise of an education that deposits information into students as if they were an empty

container. Freire believed the banking model construed a student as passive and interfered with his or her capacity to develop the ability to think.

He recommended a dialogical method of education. In a dialogical education model, students and teachers can learn from each other through dialogue and reflection on that dialogue. We are not talking about whether the teacher knows everything in a topic, and a student knows nothing. Rather, a teacher and a learner emerge as a co-learner, and they can co-construct knowledge. This method is one in which students ultimately learn to be critical and question the world they see around them in order to understand the systems that influence them; to expose the systems; and to find ways to change them.

Freire also emphasized a significant component to his educational philosophy known as "conscientization", the process whereby individuals recognize social, political, and economic contradictions and take action against oppressive elements of reality. For future teachers, it is important to recognize the importance of this process since it will affect how they approach teaching and how they consider the students they will be working with.

Literature Review:

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has fundamentally changed how teacher education has been conceptualized, particularly with regard to challenging the traditional "banking model" of education that views students as passive banks of knowledge. Freire's dialogical method positions education as a learning process in which both students and teachers learn from each other in order to generate knowledge through learning and dialogue (1,8). Northeastern University scholar, bell hooks, best articulates this positioning in her work *Teaching to Transgress* and suggests that education should also be a practice of freedom and openly acknowledges the implications of personal experiences as practiced and valued in the process to learn with mutual respect, emotional engagement, and presence (3).

Research suggests that in order to have an effective teacher education program, teacher educators must prepare educators to understand how issues such as social inequality, power imbalances, and culture impact classrooms (5,12). The work of Ladson-Billing's culturally relevant pedagogy, for instance, parallels Freire's purpose since culturally relevant pedagogy is anchored on the understanding of students as cultural beings and their backgrounds as a way to give meaning to learning and ultimately to engage in critical consciousness (12). However, many teacher educator programs tend to focus on the technical aspects or means of delivering content while ignoring the downturn social and political ethics of education (7,14).

Evidence from empirical studies indicates that Freirean pedagogy promotes reflective practice and community action for pre-service teachers, supporting their growth as agents of change (11). Specific examples from post-apartheid South Africa and Latin America show that contextually adapting Freire's ideas can help teachers grapple with complex social realities as they support democratic processes (15). Nevertheless, when systemic barriers still exist, the full commitment of institutions is required to change the foundational elements of preparing teachers to enact critical pedagogy (14).

Why Teacher Education Needs This:

Traditional teacher education programs prioritize learning the methods, assessments, classroom management, and delivery of content. These are all important, but they often miss the larger context of education's social purpose, such as the role of the teacher as not just an instructor but to students as role models, guides, and often the only adult in their lives who encourages them to dream bigger.

Integrating the Pedagogy of the Oppressed into teacher education supports future teachers in developing a deeper sense of purpose. Future teachers begin to see themselves not just as classroom managers, but as members of a community and advocates for social justice. They reflect on their positions in society and how their identity relates to their role in education.

Additionally, teachers frequently work with students who come from diverse and sometimes marginalized communities. If educators are not taught to understand power, systemic inequality, and cultural sensitivity, they might instill systems of oppression Freire was working to dismantle.

Structural Shift in Teacher Education:

In order to properly adopt a Freirean pedagogy, teacher training must adjust in three important ways.

1. **Reconsidering the Teacher-Student Relationship:** Rather than considering teachers as the all-knowing authority of content, programs should promote collaborative working relationships. Examples of activities include discussions, workshops, and reflective journals, that stimulate future teachers' ability to question, create knowledge collaboratively, and, most importantly, analyze how and why we teach - not just what we teach.
2. **Incorporating Critical Pedagogy in the Curriculum:** A course should cover themes of social justice, power, and cultural responsiveness. Case studies and visits to classrooms in action can strengthen students' ability to connect theory with practice in relation to practices and structures in place that often require accommodating all learners.
3. **Encouraging Reflection on Practice:** Teacher education programs should promote the connectivity of action and reflection instead of separating them. Ongoing reflection be it through journaling, supported with mentoring or community-based work, is vital to help educators examine their own beliefs and past experiences regarding educational inequalities and how to disrupt them.

Challenges in Implementation:

While the advantages of Freire's thoughts on teacher education are evident; there are challenges as well.

A major barrier is resistance from teachers and institutions alike. Many faculty members have grown used to the traditional way of teaching and may view Freirean pedagogy as too political or simply unrealistic. Time is also a problem, as the programs have already reached maximum course loads.

Yet these dilemmas highlight the need for systemic change. If we truly value the socio-political role of education, we must take seriously critical pedagogy. While we may not be able to measure the success of a student who subscribes to critical pedagogy through standardized test scores, we can appreciate the impact critical pedagogy

has long-term on future teachers' mindsets and actions something that cannot easily be measured, but is of utmost importance.

Success Stories and Examples:

Despite the obstacles to adoption, certain institutions and programs have integrated Freirean pedagogy into teacher education. For example, there are community-based teacher education programs in the United States that work collaboratively with local schools and families to train their future teachers to be community advocates. These programs focus on cultural competence, dialogical processes, and activism.

In South Africa, there were various teacher education reforms inspired by Freire's work after the end of formal apartheid. Future teachers were trained to not only teach curriculum content, but also to engage in helping students make sense of a new democratic society.

In Latin America, which is Freire's home, many teacher education programs are still based on Freirean principles. In Brazil, "Edu cacao popular," or popular education, is developed for community teachers who serve communities without adequate schooling. In popular education, teachers engage students where they are by drawing on the reality of the students and the local context. Local, indigenous and students' knowledge is brought into the classroom, and students are encouraged to become aware of the political climate and act politically. These examples demonstrate that not only is it possible to make space for Freirean pedagogy within teacher education programs, but that it can also transform the lives of future teachers and students.

Recommendations:

If we want to genuinely support educators, of integrating Pedagogy of the Oppressed into teacher education cannot be optional; it is imperative. Here are some very actionable steps:

- **Train Teacher Educators First:** Change must start with the educators of future teachers. Faculty development programs should specifically highlight Freirean methods and critical pedagogy.
- **Review Curricula:** Institutions should review their teacher education curricula and develop curricula that address social justice, equity, and critical reflection.
- **Create Safe Spaces for Dialogue:** Potential teachers must feel free to explore their own values, ask challenging philosophical questions, and reflect on experiences and assumptions without judgment.
- **Establish Partnerships with Community Organizations:** Universities must work with local communities, schools, families, and other organizations in a capacity that acknowledges the systems of oppression and explicit challenges faced in the local community to provide preservice teachers with teaching education that is grounded in possibilities for action while addressing the inequalities of their local community.
- **Instill a Culture Where Teacher Education and Reflection Practices are a Life-Long Process:** Preservice teachers must have opportunities for sustainable professional growth that situates their decision making around practices of critical pedagogy and critical reflection even beyond graduation
- **Engage Students So They Feel a Part of Curriculum Development:** Allow future educators to be part of the process of developing curriculum. Having them participate in curriculum planning meetings, or feedback

sessions, or developing a course proposal has the implementation experience of democratic education in action at its core, which is key to Freire's philosophy.

- **Incorporate Multilingual and Multicultural Teaching:** It is not too difficult to incorporate local languages and cultural references into teaching practices. Preparing future educators to teach students from diverse backgrounds is even more meaningful when we all have a coherent way to make sense of a multitude of experiences. This is consistent with Freire's proposition on the importance of acknowledging and honoring students' past lived experiences.
- **Personal Storytelling and Sharing Narratives:** Encourage student educators to engage in their own educational storytelling. Teacher educators who invite students to think about their own backgrounds, beliefs, and formative experiences help students develop an understanding of their own identities and biases about teaching when using reflective prompts. Personal storytelling develops and promotes empathy, which is a foundation of the Freirean model, and empathy promotes democratic education through dialogue.

Conclusion:

Paulo Freire's quote, "Education does not change the world. Education changes people. People change the world," symbolizes the core of what it means to place Pedagogy of the Oppressed at the center of teacher education. When we enable teachers to be critical thinkers, reflective practitioners, and courageous actors, we are providing teachers the capacity to do more than just teach; we are enabling them to change lives.

Teacher education must move beyond technicality, to an ethical, emotional, and political dimension. Teacher education must create an environment that questions assumptions and prepares teachers for the complicated realities of teaching. Most importantly, teacher education must motivate teachers to see themselves as not only conduits of information, but as curators of hope, and builders of a more just world. When we embrace a Freirean approach, we provide the opportunity to nurture a new generation of educators who see every student as capable, every classroom as a site of freedom, and every lesson as an opportunity to achieve a slightly more just world. We should strive for more than teachers who know what to teach. We should nurture educators who have a deep understanding of why they educate and who are ready to revolutionize the world through their students, one at a time.

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