Pedagogy of the Oppressed

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PAULO FREIRE

Paulo Freire was an educator and theorist whose work is important to the field of education studies. Born in 1921, Freire grew up in the northeast of Brazil, where he often came in contact with the poverty that plagued Latin America during the Great Depression. After studying law, he began his career teaching Portuguese in secondary schools. In 1944 he married Elza Oliveira, a primary school teacher who encouraged him to develop his theories on education, and the two had five children together. Freire spent much of the 1950s and 60s implementing literacy programs for poor people in Brazil, often with the support of the Brazilian government, and this work directly informs Freire's writings. These programs often experimented with their methods, and they saw success in raising Brazil's literacy rates. In 1964, Brazil's president was ousted in a coup d'état and replaced by a military government, which found Freire's programs too subversive. Friere was imprisoned for more than two months as a traitor and exiled soon after. After a short stay in Bolivia, he worked in Chile for five years, where he published Education as the Practice of Freedom (1967) and Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1968). Both books were well received in the academic community, and Freire spent much of the late 1960s and 1970s as a Harvard lecturer and a consultant for the United Nations. After more than a decade in exile, Freire returned to Brazil in 1980 and joined the Worker's Party. He continued his educational practice late in life, and was eventually appointed Secretary of Education in Sao Paolo. He died in 1997.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

During the Cold War, Latin America experienced great political upheaval, as the competing interests of the capitalist United States and the communist Soviet Union fractured the globe. Military coups occurred in Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina, and other South American countries in the 1960s and 1970s, sometimes backed by the United States, and the new authoritarian governments in these countries were often explicitly opposed to communist ideas. Brazil's coup, in particular, impacted Freire's perspective in his writings: military leaders ousted left-leaning president João Goulart in 1964 and began to purge the government of programs and people deemed too radical (including Freire and his literacy efforts). It's within this context that Freire writes *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: exiled from his native country as it experienced an anti-communist regime change, Freire's ground-up approach to education critiques the rise of authoritarianism and right-wing policies in Latin America at that time. In contrast, Freire lived in Chile while writing the book, which had begun to implement land and education reform under president Eduardo Frei Montlava. By 1973, five years after the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Chile was struck by its own US-backed coup.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Freire's work, which is concerned with political and economic inequality, is in the Marxist philosophical tradition. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he quotes several essays and letters of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, whose work promotes a materialist view of history and critiques the structure of Western capitalism. In some places, like his discussion of dialectics, Freire invokes Marx and Engel's influences, like Georg Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1807)—a wide-spanning theoretical text about human consciousness and knowledge. Freire also draws from the writings of leftist thinkers and revolutionaries who followed them, like Vladimir Lenin's political pamphlet "What Is To Be Done?" (1902), Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), and *The Diary of Che Guevara* (1968). Fanon and Guevara, who respectively worked in Africa and Latin America, are particularly important because both explicitly sought to challenge European and American colonialism. Although Pedagogy of the Oppressed is his most famous book, Freire wrote several other texts expanding on his educational approach, including *Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1967), *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1973), and *The Politics of Education* (1985).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Pedagogia do Oprimido)
- **When Written:** 1967-68
- **Where Written:** Santiago, Chile
- **When Published:** 1968 (Portuguese), 1970 (English)
- **Literary Period:** Postcolonial Latin American literature
- **Genre:** Education Philosophy
- **Setting:** Cold War Brazil and Chile
- **Climax:** Freire boils down human existence to a process of dialogue, through which people turn thoughts and words into action: "To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it."
- **Antagonist:** Oppressive societies and the oppressors within those societies.
- **Point of View:** Third-person, though Freire occasionally uses the first-person.

EXTRA CREDIT

Bad Timing. When Freire was exiled by Brazil's military coup in 1964, he was first granted asylum in Bolivia. But he wouldn't stay for long: less than a month after Freire arrived, Bolivia was also struck by a military coup.

Delayed Reception. Although *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was first published in Portuguese in 1968, it did not appear on bookshelves in Brazil until 1974, when a new Brazilian president began to relax the government's stance toward political opponents. In fact, it was published in both English and Spanish first, receiving wide acclaim outside of Freire's homeland.

PLOT SUMMARY

In the preface, Freire discusses how *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* came to be, noting that it is based on his past experiences as a teacher in Brazil and his observations from the period in which he was in political exile. While trying to spur critical consciousness (or conscientização) in his students, Freire realized that many of them harbor a "fear of freedom." However, he posits that this fear is not really a fear of freedom, but a fear of the risks associated with freedom. Freire also acknowledges potential criticisms of his theories as being too idealistic or reactionary and acknowledges that the book is written "for radicals." He directly contrasts sectarianism—a belief system that misrepresents the world and tries to prevent change—with radicalization, a commitment to significant social change and human liberation. According to Freire, the educational model he posits can only be successful if its participants have been radicalized. Freire reflects on the incompleteness of his work, pointing out that the reader can view it critically and find aspects of his argument that even he has missed.

In Chapter 1, Freire makes the case for why a "pedagogy of the oppressed" is necessary. He begins by identifying "humankind's central problem"—the problem of how we affirm our identities as human beings. Although all people strive toward this affirmation, it is constantly being interrupted by systems of oppression that exploit, and do violence to, oppressed people. Freire argues that oppressed people can regain their humanity in the struggle for liberation, but only if that struggle is led by oppressed people. This introduces the central problem of the book: how to create an education system with oppressed people, for oppressed people, that will help them become more free. Freire then discusses the ways that oppression affects the consciousness of oppressors and oppressed people. Oppressors treat people like objects to be possessed and see freedom as threatening; oppressed people become alienated from each other and begin to see their oppressors as good. Freire asserts that the fight for liberation must consist of two stages: reflection on the nature of oppression, and then concrete action to change it. Leaders in this fight must exist in dialogue with oppressed people, rather than becoming like oppressors.

Chapter 2 introduces Freire's theories on education. He breaks down the traditional relationship between teachers and students, in which teachers have power and knowledge, but the students do not. In this "banking model" of education, a teacher "deposits" facts into the mind of the students, who have to memorize and recall them. Freire critiques this model and suggests that it teaches students to adapt to an oppressive world, instead of teaching them how to view the world critically. In the fight for liberation, oppressed people and educators should reject the banking model: Freire replaces it with a "problem-posing model" that makes teachers and students more equal. Problem-posing education presents students with worldly problems that relate to their lives and pushes them to analyze how and why those problems exist. According to Freire, this model directly combats oppression by empowering people to question their conditions, and by encouraging dialogue.

Freire begins Chapter 3 by expanding on the concept of dialogue: within a hierarchal society, he argues that dialogue is an act of "love, humility, and faith" in humanity. Dialogue also requires hope, mutual trust, and critical thinking from the people who are in dialogue together. Like the bigger fight for liberation, dialogue consists of both thoughts and concrete actions together ("praxis"); and Freire critiques people who *only* reflect, or *only* take action. From there, he explores the relationship between human beings and the world, arguing that educators should account for how their students perceive reality and history. He contrasts animals—which do not perceive history, but only live in the present—and people, who can understand that humans have shaped the world today and can shape its future. Historical moments are characterized by the ideas and values of people during that moment; Freire calls the worldly expression of those ideas "themes." By discovering these themes in a classroom environment, students can deepen their understanding of the world, and educators can gain insight into their students' perspectives. Freire proposes one way of achieving this, in which educators use auditory and visual materials to present students with a situation and gauge their feelings about it.

In Chapter 4, Freire lays out a theory of "cultural action," or the methods that people use to create cultural change. He divides cultural action into two kinds, "dialogical action" and "anti-dialogical action": while oppressors use anti-dialogical action to protect their power and separate groups of people, radical political leaders can use dialogical action to bring people together in the struggle for freedom. Freire goes into the various methods of "anti-dialogical action" in detail: conquest, divide and rule, manipulation, and cultural invasion. He then

directly contrasts these with the "dialogical action" of radical political leaders: cooperation, unity, organization, and cultural synthesis. Freire also spends much of the chapter examining radical political leaders and the characteristics they must have to authentically help oppressed people. These leaders should understand the barriers that prevent oppressed people from committing to the struggle, while avoiding the techniques oppressors use to keep them in line.

CHARACTERS

Paulo Freire – Paulo Freire is a 20th-century educator and educational theorist, and the author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire's work with the Brazilian government figures heavily into his writing, as he formed much of his theory of education while attempting to fight high rates of illiteracy among poor Brazilians. Throughout his work, he also connects radical changes in the education system with radical changes in the political structure at large—both, he argues, are necessary to make people more free.

The Oppressor – The oppressor is an important part of Freire's conception of oppression. For Freire, the oppressor holds power over the oppressed and actively prevents them from having freedom. Oppressors rely on a permanent and unequal social system to keep their power and they manipulate the views of oppressed people to make the oppressed invested in a system that keeps them down. However, oppressors also deny themselves freedom in the process of denying others, which makes them unable to become free. Therefore, oppressed people must liberate oppressors in order to make society free.

The Oppressed – The oppressed are the collective group of people in the world who are exploited, intimidated, and "dehumanized" by an oppressive social system. Freire sees his philosophy as a means of helping any and all oppressed people change their conditions—which is why he refers to his educational model as a "pedagogy of the oppressed."

TERMS

Oppression, Liberation Oppression is a situation in which one group of people imposes unfair conditions on another group, preventing the latter group from questioning or challenging those conditions. For **Freire**, all oppressive societies are made up of two distinct groups: **oppressors** and **the oppressed**. Liberation is the opposite of oppression, a situation in which the oppressed group challenges the power of their oppressors and changes their conditions.

Dehumanization, Humanization Dehumanization is a process that **oppressors** use to prevent human beings from achieving the freedom to understand and change their conditions. In an oppressive society, oppressors use dehumanization to maintain their power over others and prevent them from being more authentically human. Humanization, then, is the opposite process, which **oppressed people** use to become more free and affirm their identities.

Freedom When **Freire** uses the term freedom, he is specifically referring to the freedom to question, understand, and change one's conditions in the world. Freire asserts that human beings naturally strive to achieve this kind of freedom, and that it is a key part of human identity. In this way, freedom is also the ultimate goal of Freire's pedagogy.

Praxis Praxis is the combination of reflecting and acting on the world in order to change it. While human beings seek the freedom to understand and change their conditions, praxis refers to the concrete work of doing so. **Oppressed people** can use praxis to become more critically aware of their conditions and to begin fighting for liberation; in fact, **Freire** argues that liberation itself is a kind of praxis.

Dialogue In **Freire**'s work, dialogue is the interaction between people who critically think about the world together. When people are in dialogue with one another, they have equal agency, and no person has power over the other. Freire argues that education and political change must be "dialogic" to achieve freedom, compared to the "anti-dialogic" nature of oppression.

Dialectic A dialectic is a contradiction or conflict between two separate ideas that are then synthesized into a new idea (i.e. thesis, antithesis, and synthesis). Dialectics are important to Marxist and Hegelian philosophy, and **Freire** argues that they represent the fundamental logic of the world. Therefore, Freire's pedagogy relies on the use of dialectics to help students understand their conditions.

Conscientização Often translated as "critical consciousness," conscientização is the process through which a person learns about the social and political contradictions of his/her life, and takes action to challenge them. **Freire** argues that conscientização is a necessary step for people to achieve freedom, and therefore it's an important goal of his educational model.

Verbalism, Activism Verbalism and activism are specific ways of achieving freedom that, according to **Freire**, are ineffective. Verbalism occurs when a person reflects on their conditions, but does not take any concrete action to change them. Activism normally refers to taking action for a political goal, However, Freire gives it a more specific meaning here: activism occurs when a person takes concrete actions, but does not change how they think about their conditions. Freire argues that freedom can only be achieved through the combination of reflection and action, which he calls praxis.

Theme Themes are the worldly expression of people's ideas, values, and feelings at a specific moment in history. For example, **Freire** argues that the most important themes of his

time are domination and liberation—both are expressed in the world through the conflict between **oppressors** and **oppressed people**.

Limit-situation A limit-situation is a historical condition that prevents people from having freedom. Any limit-situation implies that some groups of people will benefit from it, while other people will be harmed. For example, **Freire** sees underdevelopment as a limit-situation that has harmed Third World countries.

Pedagogy A pedagogy is a set of methods and practices for teaching. In academic settings, the term refers to the broader study of educational practices; it can include discussions of how students learn, how teachers interact with their students, and how different types of teaching create different classroom environments.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

FREEDOM AND OPPRESSION

Freire gives the term "freedom" a specific meaning: it is the freedom to critically question and change the world. In other words, a person is free when they are able to understand and change their own conditions. According to Freire, this kind of freedom is a primary goal of all people, "the indispensible condition for the quest for human completion." Freire also asserts that "humankind's central problem"—the problem that he seeks to solve with *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*—is the problem of "dehumanization." Dehumanization, according to Freire, is a process that prevents human beings from affirming their identity through freedom. Freire argues that human beings can only solve dehumanization by striving for personal and social freedom, since only people who question and transform the world are able to feel fully human.

To Freire, oppression is a situation in which oppressors impose unfair conditions on the oppressed, preventing the oppressed from achieving freedom. Dehumanization is the natural result of oppression, and it refers to the effect oppression has on human beings. Since oppressors deny freedom to the oppressed, they make the oppressed less human. Freire argues that in an unjust system, the oppressors view humanity itself as an "exclusive right" or "inherited property." Oppressed people, who are consistently denied freedom and treated like objects, often internalize this view of humanity. This is especially true because, in an oppressive system, people become successful when they become like the oppressors. When the oppressed see oppressive conditions as good or right, they can be paralyzed by a "fear of freedom." Therefore, achieving freedom requires oppressed people to reject their previous notions of what a good or right society is, and to understand that an oppressive society cannot give them freedom.

To create the conditions for freedom, educators and political leaders have to enable oppressed people to affirm themselves and to question and change their own reality. This is a difficult proposition, since oppressors fear this affirmation, because it means that their superior position will be threatened. Furthermore, although educators and political leaders often sincerely try to fight oppression, they can quickly become oppressors themselves when they do not give oppressed people the freedom to understand oppression on their own terms.

In order to help the oppressed gain freedom, then, educators and political leaders must be careful with their methods. It's crucial to trust oppressed people's ability to come to their own conclusions, and to allow them to create change for themselves. When educators and political leaders seize too much power themselves, they rely on oppressive methods of teaching that take away the agency of the oppressed.

Freire suggests that enabling oppressed people to seek their own liberation is the only way to end dehumanization—not just of oppressed people, but of oppressors as well. When oppressors dehumanize the oppressed by denying them freedom, they simultaneously dehumanize themselves: Freire argues that oppressors prevent themselves from critically questioning their own conditions, because they rely on them to keep power. To achieve freedom for all human beings and create a new society, then, oppressed people have to liberate themselves and their oppressors at the same time.

EDUCATION

For Freire, education and oppression are connected, since education can be used either as a tool for oppression or as a method of liberation from oppression. Freire distinguishes between a pedagogy (a way of practicing education) that serves oppressors, and one that helps oppressed people understand and change their society. He outlines the problems with oppressive education, describes the promises of liberating education, and shows how educational tools can have political applications that help a society attain and maintain freedom. Freire's goal with his book is to invent and describe an educational practice that can liberate oppressed people and change society.

Before speaking about his specific educational model, Freire talks more abstractly about a "pedagogy of the oppressed," arguing that a "pedagogy of the oppressed" should push oppressed people to understand oppression. He says that

oppressed people should be directly involved in the development of this pedagogy so that they have the freedom to learn about things that are relevant to their lives. This act of reflection should then push oppressed people to fight for their liberation, because it should show them that oppression can be changed. In light of this, Freire argues that "the pedagogy of the oppressed cannot be developed or practiced by the oppressors," who would never actually help oppressed people become free.

However, Freire points out that only people with political power can implement a model of education on a large scale. Therefore, oppressed people should begin to implement the pedagogy of the oppressed on a smaller scale while they organize to fight for freedom. Freire calls these smaller uses of his pedagogy "educational projects," and he conducted many of them in his native country of Brazil before publishing *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1968.

Freire gives names to the two competing models of education described above: he calls the traditional pedagogy of modern education (education that reinforces oppression) the "**banking** model," and calls the liberating pedagogy he proposes the "problem-posing model."

The "banking model" relies on a hierarchy in the classroom: the teacher is more knowledgeable than the students, and therefore has all the authority. In this model, the teacher "deposits" facts into the minds of the students, who have to memorize and recall those facts. Freire argues that the banking model recreates the oppressive social structure that many people live in: it makes one group of people superior to another, and lets the superior group determine what is good or correct.

The "problem-posing" model, on the other hand, creates a more equal relationship between the educator and their students: in a "problem-posing" classroom, everyone fills the role of teacher and student at the same time. These "teacher-students" and "student-teachers" decide together what topics are important to talk about, and the educator then presents these topics as "problems" for the whole class to solve. This model does not treat educators as more "correct" or "knowledgeable" than their students; instead, it assumes that everyone has something to contribute to the class. It's much closer to Freire's vision of a society without oppression, in which everyone's voice has equal value.

Freire also shows that his pedagogy has applications in politics, as well as in education, since political leaders can use educational methods to bolster their political work. In the fight to change an oppressive system, political leaders have their own methods of challenging the oppressors' power—and Freire argues that these methods have much in common with his pedagogy. For example, political leaders use "organization" to bring people together in a structured group, and Freire calls this method "highly educational." When political leaders organize oppressed people to fight for freedom, they all learn how to create a social structure that allows everyone to be free.

STATIC HISTORY VS. FLUID HISTORY

According to Freire, "freedom" (the freedom to critically question and change the world) requires people to gain a new understanding of how reality works. Changing the dominant understanding of history is a key part of this process. While an oppressive educational system treats history as a static group of facts that are separate from the present, the oppressed have to develop a new view of history: groups of people changing their conditions over time. For Freire, this fluid view of history is inherently liberating and it can help oppressed people in the struggle to affirm their humanity.

To explain his concept of history, Freire argues that animals exist outside of history: they do not perceive time as a past, present, and future, but they "exist in an overwhelming present." Humans, however, can understand that people have taken concrete actions in the past that affect human experience in the present; likewise, people in the present can take actions that affect the future. Therefore, history is an active relationship between humans and the world that affects people's everyday lives. This awareness of history as being actively shaped by human choices empowers people to create change in the present, thereby steering the trajectory of the future.

By contrast, oppressors can use a more static, traditional concept of history to preserve their own power. In order to preserve the oppressive system, oppressors must convince the oppressed that history is abstract and separate from human experience. Oppressors don't want history to seem fluid: if people see their oppressive conditions as part of a constantly changing world, then they can also try to change those conditions. In order to protect their power, therefore, oppressors assert that their social order is the "good, correct, or healthy" way to organize a society; as a result, people don't see oppression as a changeable part of history, but rather as the only way their society can work at all.

The traditional "**banking** model" of education corresponds to this static view of history, as it presents knowledge as a group of various facts that students memorize and recall. In this model, a successful student changes their thinking to adapt to the oppressive system that's imposed on them. Furthermore, as the teacher "deposits" knowledge into the students, the students do not consider how or why those facts are true. This separates the students from the historical conditions that determine what they learn.

"Problem-posing" education, on the other hand, investigates the ideas that influence a person's historical moment. This often happens through a very specific process: the educator

shows the participants a situation that affects their lives, and the participants then identify how they feel about that situation, and analyze how and why it might exist. The problem-posing model of education corresponds to a fluid and emancipatory view of history, because when people become critically aware of what ideas have influenced their conditions—such as the ideas that history is static and the status quo is good or neutral—they understand what actions they can take to change those conditions. Because the static view of history helps oppressors, Freire argues that educators and political leaders should use teaching methods that promote the more fluid, liberating view.

MAINTAINING AND OVERTHROWING OPPRESSION

Freire sees education as useful not just for individual growth, but also for achieving social change. To expand on this point, he discusses social change as a necessary tool to achieve freedom and overthrow oppression. Within Freire's framework, systems of oppression try to prevent radical social change so that they do not lose power. Nevertheless, social change has the potential to maintain or overthrow oppression, depending on what methods people use to enact that change.

The primary goal of oppressors is to prevent the oppressed from enacting social change. The methods that oppressors use to maintain their power ("anti-dialogical action") can block social change both before and while it happens. One of these methods is "Divide and Rule": oppressors create internal divisions and rifts among oppressed people to keep them from organizing together. When the oppressed feel isolated or alienated from each other, they are much less likely to fight for change. Freire cites "community development projects" as an example of this in practice: when government agencies only focus their projects on small geographic areas, they separate the problems of one area from the problems of another area. This hinders the people in both areas from seeing that their problems are connected.

When oppressed people begin to understand their conditions and demand freedom from their oppressors, the oppressors use "Manipulation" to create the illusion of change. Freire uses the example of "pacts," or formal agreements between oppressors and groups of oppressed people: agreements like these can mislead the oppressed into thinking that the two conflicting groups are cooperating. In reality, oppressors determine the agreement's content, and may not even follow it—which means that the oppressed still do not have any power in the exchange.

However, even if radical social change does occur, it does not necessarily liberate the oppressed. A military coup, for example, does not liberate people because it does not rely on dialogue with those people to succeed; rather, coup leaders simply replace the oppressors' interests with their own interests. Similarly, populist leaders claim to work in the interest of the oppressed, but see themselves as a part of the oppressive system. Because they do not seek to change the material conditions that oppress people, their work is less useful for meaningful social change.

Even revolutionary leaders, those who want to change the oppressive system for the people, sometimes use oppressive methods to create social change. When a leader has trouble gaining the support and trust of the oppressed, they may manipulate or dominate the oppressed to create a unified movement. However, Freire argues that this domination cannot create significant social change: because it doesn't empower people to seek change for themselves, it prevents them from achieving freedom.

Throughout the text, Freire talks about education and revolution with equivalent vocabulary. The educational models Freire posits (the "**banking**" model and "problem-posing" model) map onto his discussion of "anti-dialogical" and "dialogical" cultural action. According to Freire, "anti-dialogical action" (like the "banking model") is a set of tools that oppressors use to divide and conquer the oppressed. "Dialogical action," on the other hand, is used by revolutionary leaders to organize and empower the oppressed, much like problem-posing education.

Freire also constantly compares revolutionary leaders to educators: both roles carry an obligation to make people aware of the oppressive system in which they live, while helping them become invested in a common struggle for freedom. And just as a "problem-posing" education makes all participants into both students and teachers, revolutionary leaders have to see themselves as part of the oppressed—they must struggle *with* people, and not *for* them.

Freire makes this comparison to show the importance of liberating educational methods in the fight to overthrow oppression. To create lasting social change, oppressed people have to change how they think about their society—and this critical awakening can only happen by changing how people are educated. For Freire, every aspect of society should be directly aimed at empowering oppressed people.

DIALECTICS

Throughout *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire draws heavily on the theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels—especially the concept of dialectics. A "dialectical" way of thinking starts with a "thesis" (an initial idea or proposition) and an "antithesis" (an idea that opposes or contradicts the thesis), and the interaction of these two ideas creates a "synthesis," or a new idea that reconciles the conflict between the two original ideas. Freire argues that

dialectics are the fundamental logic of reality, and he uses dialectic thought in his discussions of oppression, education, and social change. According to Freire, when oppressed people come to see the world as "dialectical," they become more aware of how reality works and can therefore affect reality to become more free.

Freire argues that dialectics are the natural logic of the world. In his theories of the world and of human consciousness, Freire brings up several examples of binary, conflicting ideas that must be resolved. For one, his model of history is dialectical: he points out that "themes" (the worldly expression of ideas and values during a historical moment) and "limit-situations" (historical conditions that limit human freedom) always exist in tandem with oppositional or contradictory themes and situations. The theme of "domination," for example, is dialectically opposed to the theme of "liberation." As some people try to become free and others try to preserve their oppressive power, the contradiction is resolved through the social changes that happen over time.

Freire also uses dialectical methods in his theories of education and social change. Since Freire believes that history proceeds according to dialectical logic, he argues that understanding dialectical thought can help oppressed people take action to free themselves. The "**banking** model" of education (where a teacher tells students to memorize and recall facts) is in no way dialectical. The teacher has knowledge, and he or she imposes that knowledge on the students. Freire's "problem-posing model," however, is dialectical in that teachers and students share important, and sometimes conflicting, ideas that are brought to a synthesis through group effort.

Freire uses the example of labor negotiation to explain how dialectical thought, as practiced in education, can be applied to political struggles. In this scenario, a group of oppressed workers wants to demand higher pay, while their leader wants to push for more radical changes. Freire argues that the solution to this problem lies in "synthesis": the leader should work with the people to get higher wages, while challenging the people to ask why they should *only* ask for high wages. Although the leader and the people have opposing perspectives, the leader should reconcile those perspectives to create a new strategy.

It's important to note that Freire's dialectical approach has its flaws. Although dialectics are commonly used in Marxist philosophy, other critical approaches (particularly more recent ones) reject the notion that dialectical logic can explain history and reality. Freire divides society into a strict binary of oppressors and oppressed people, while a more nuanced view of oppression might consider intersectionality—the notion that social categories intermix in such a way that a person can be simultaneously oppressor and oppressed.

A more nuanced view of oppression might also consider the motivations of people who attempt to preserve the status quo. For example, Freire would condemn a political leader who wants to create significant social change, but only makes superficial changes that do not challenge the oppressive system. While Freire sees these small changes as a sign of "false generosity" (since he believes that a leader who truly cares about the oppressed should work to create a wholly new society), this view takes for granted that oppressors see themselves and the oppressed as being totally separate. Even when he talks about revolutionary leaders, Freire points out a contradiction that makes their role in the struggle more complicated. Revolutionary leaders must see themselves as part of the oppressed so that both groups can fight for freedom together; however, they also have to be distinct from the oppressed, so that they can organize and coordinate the groups. Although liberation resolves the contradictions in oppressors and oppressed people, it also relies on certain contradictions like this.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

BANKING

Freire uses the symbol of the bank to explain how a traditional, oppressive pedagogy works. In this traditional model, which Freire calls the "banking model" of education, knowledge functions as a kind of social currency that teachers possess and students do not. The job of the teacher is to "deposit" that knowledge into the consciousnesses of the students, whose job is then "receiving, filing, and storing the deposits." Just as people deposit and withdraw their money at a bank, the teacher asks students to store and recall information that the teacher considers important. This image of "banking" also has a greater significance in the context of Freire's Marxist tradition: banks are prominent institutions of modern capitalism, a system that Freire sees as oppressive. As Freire argues that the end of the "banking model" will lead to liberation, he references other parts of society that will also have to change in the process.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Bloomsbury edition of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* published in 2000.

Preface Quotes

Thought and study alone did not produce *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; it is rooted in concrete situations and describes the reactions of laborers (peasant or urban) and of middle-class persons whom I have observed directly or indirectly during the course of my educative work.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of the book, Freire points out twice that his theories are based on the educational work he conducted in Brazil and Chile. Throughout the next four chapters, he cites several classroom discussions that involve working class people and peasants working through his problem-posing pedagogy. Freire argues that theory is inadequate unless it leads to concrete actions in the world, so he demonstrates here that his "pedagogy of the oppressed" directly engages with the real experiences of oppressed people. In contrast, he says that banking-model educators often determine their curriculum and methods without considering their students in the process.

This volume will probably arouse negative reactions in a number of readers. Some will regard my position vis-à-vis the problem of human liberation as purely idealistic... Others will not (or will not wish to) accept my denunciation of a state of oppression that gratifies the oppressors. Accordingly, this admittedly tentative work is for radicals.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker), The Oppressor

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

After grounding his book in the experiences of the oppressed, Freire addresses his potential audience. He admits that many people might not agree with his broad critique of Western society as oppressive, and that some people might find his hope for liberation unrealistic. However, Freire does not see this as a flaw in his argument, but rather as a flaw in readers who will not critically engage with his ideology—even if they disagree. Ideally, Freire believes, the readers who stay with his work through the end will be open to the idea that lasting social change (and liberation for all people) is possible.

Chapter 1 Quotes

...The more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself...the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker), The Oppressed

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

Freire asserts that radicals are the target audience of his work, and then contrasts them with "sectarians," who are ideologically close-minded and who don't want the world to change. Radicals, to Freire, are able and willing to confront society's flaws—first by perceiving them, and then by committing themselves to transforming society. They are willing to partner with oppressed people to make this transformation possible, without claiming any authority over them. These "radical" characteristics are especially important for educators and political revolutionaries, and Freire argues that liberation is not possible without them. In a concrete way, much of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* consists of strategies that radicals should use to organize oppressed people.

While the problem of humanization has always, from an axiological point of view, been humankind's central problem, it now takes on the character of an inescapable concern.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker), The Oppressed

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Before delving into his argument in detail, Freire frames everything that follows through this "central problem": the fight for liberation is also a fight for humanization, and a "pedagogy of the oppressed" is also a humanizing pedagogy. Educators and revolutionaries, who are committed to humanizing all people, struggle against the oppressive forces that wish to keep people dehumanized and preserve their own power. In this way, Freire shows that education and political action are important ways that people come to understand themselves as human beings—and therefore, they are very useful tools for changing how people perceive themselves and others.

> 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.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker), The Oppressor, The Oppressed

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

Freire says that the fight for liberation is only meaningful if oppressed people do not try to oppress others in the process. From there, he asserts that oppressed people must liberate themselves and their oppressors at the same time. The problem is not oppressors by themselves, but rather the oppressive political system that places everyone into a violent hierarchy: according to Freire, oppressors dehumanize themselves when they dehumanize other people. To liberate everyone, oppressed people and their leaders must create a new society in which no oppression exists—not only by removing the oppressors' power, but by changing the institutions that gave them power in the first place.

> Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes a myth. It is rather the indispensible condition for the quest for human completion.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker), The Oppressed

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

After describing how oppressed people can be "fearful of freedom," Freire talks about the idea of freedom in more detail. Freedom, to Freire, is a state of being that makes people feel autonomous and responsible for their own lives; oppression, on the other hand, makes people strive to conform to their oppressors' standards. It is also a key aspect of humanization, and Freire argues that having freedom allows people to affirm their identities more fully. Because of oppression, people have to actively pursue their freedom in the face of a system that does not want them to have it. Freedom is not just a concept—rather, it's a concrete goal that people can reach with effort.

> 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 in the labor which brings into the world this new being: no longer oppressor, no longer oppressed, but human in the process of achieving freedom.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker), The Oppressor, The Oppressed

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

Before describing liberation as a kind of "childbirth," Freire integrates education into his argument: how can education work as a tool for oppressed people to reach freedom and humanization? Freire argues that education can help people realize where they fit into the oppressive system that much of the world depends on. In the process of liberation, oppressed people and oppressors can abandon those roles

that previously defined their lives—and begin, by contrast, to define themselves on their own terms. This argument is also very dialectical: Freire argues that liberation resolves the differences between oppressors and oppressed people by giving both groups a new role: partners on the path to freedom.

> Any situation in which "A" objectively exploits "B" or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression. Such a situation in itself constitutes violence, even when sweetened by false generosity, because it interferes with the individual's ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker), The Oppressor, The Oppressed

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

Freire points out that oppression shapes the consciousnesses of both oppressors and oppressed people, then he specifically defines oppression for the first time in this quote. For Freire, oppression is anything that keeps people from being humanized—it interrupts their natural desire to affirm themselves as human beings. Because oppression affects this key aspect of humanity, it is also an act of violence against others. Freire also criticizes what he calls the "false generosity" of people who claim to help the oppressed through charity, but who rely on a higher social status to do so: they, too, commit violence because they are invested in preserving the violent, oppressive system.

Chapter 2 Quotes

> For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. 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.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, Freire introduces the traditional "banking" concept of education and points out its flaws: banking does not allow students to fully think and ask questions for themselves, because they are required to learn whatever the teacher finds important. In sharp contrast to this, Freire argues that human beings affirm their identity by asking questions about the world and about their relationship to the world. When people critically investigate the world with others, they can also try to change it in tangible ways, and thus exercise their freedom. Banking education hinders oppressed people's freedom, knowledge, and creativity, filtering everything through the oppressors' perspective.

> Indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in "changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them"; for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker), The Oppressor, The Oppressed

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

Because the "banking" concept serves the interests of oppressors, Freire says that it also shapes the consciousness of its students in distinct ways. Oppressors want to change how the oppressed think about the world, so that they see oppression as a normal and permanent part of their lives. In this context, traditional Western classrooms help their students adapt to an oppressive society, instead of pointing out that their society is flawed and can be changed. As long as the oppressed try to adapt, the oppressors have no pressure to release their power—thus, Freire demonstrates here how education can serve as a tool for maintaining oppression.

Implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely *in* the world, not *with* the world or with others...In this view, the person is not a conscious being (*corpo consciente*); he or she is rather the possessor of *a* consciousness: an empty "mind" passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

While discussing how to respond to the flaws in banking education, Freire talks about its theoretical roots. To Freire, traditional Western education assumes that people have a passive relationship to the world: they live in the world and observe it as individuals, but they cannot change the world in a meaningful way. Likewise, people do not investigate the world, but merely receive information from it. In banking education, teachers "deposit" knowledge into the minds of their students, perpetuating this false separation between people and the world. Freire would argue that people and the world change each other at the same time, and that people can come closer to achieving freedom when they understand this fact.

Those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concept in its entirety, adopting instead a concept of women and men as conscious beings, and consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world. They must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

After fully describing traditional banking education, Freire proposes an alternative: he argues that oppressed people can only achieve full liberation by replacing the oppressors' pedagogy with a new pedagogy that is tailored to the needs of oppressed people. This "problem-posing" education should push students to ask questions about the world and show them the possibility of meaningful, lasting social change. Just as oppressors use banking to adapt people to the current system, problem-posing can serve as a tool to make people aware that the system is harmful to them. Problem-posing helps people better understand that they can affect the world, just as the world affects them.

Problem-posing education does not and cannot serve the interests of the oppressor. No oppressive order could permit the oppressed to begin to question: Why?

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker), The Oppressed , The Oppressor

Related Themes:

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

Freire points out what a "problem-posing" pedagogy should accomplish, and ultimately argues that it can only be designed to help oppressed people achieve liberation. Because problem-posing enables oppressed people to critically understand their oppression, it is a threat to the power of the oppressors—because oppressors do not want oppressed people to question their conditions. As Freire notes in Chapter 4, oppressors can use manipulation tactics to silence or appease the oppressed when they first become aware of society's inequality. But a problem-posing education helps the oppressed understand that the oppressors have no interest in relinquishing their power (which is one of the biggest obstacles to liberation).

Chapter 3 Quotes

To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

Freire begins Chapter 3 with a discussion of dialogue, and the importance of dialogue to the fight for liberation. For Freire, dialogue occurs when people work together to reflect and act on the world—and Freire argues that these two things are key aspects of human identity. Reflection and action can be found not only in dialogue, but also in praxis and in problem-posing education. When oppressed people and leaders do both in tandem, they begin to more fully exercise their freedom: reflecting on the world can reveal things that need to be changed, and changing the world can open up new possibilities to reflect on.

> Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause—the cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical.

Related Characters: The Oppressed (speaker), The Oppressed

Related Themes:

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

After talking about the nature of dialogue, Freire argues that dialogue can only exist if the dialoguers have a deep love of humanity and the world. If a revolutionary truly loves all people, for example, then he or she can commit to helping them achieve humanization and become free. To Freire, loving oppressed people means working *with* them instead of *for* them, which is the essence of meaningful dialogue. As he proceeds, Freire also says that dialogue is an act of radical humility and faith in the knowledge and power of the oppressed: oppression hinders people from using this power on the world.

> One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker), The Oppressed

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

Just as dialogue is the basis for liberation, Freire asserts that it is the basis of problem-posing education. He points out here that a non-oppressive educational or political program must uplift the perspectives of oppressed people and make those perspectives just as valuable as those of their leaders. He also references cultural invasion (a method that oppressors use to dominate the oppressed and preserve their power) before going into more detail about it in Chapter 4. Importantly, Freire does not account for people's intentions—educators can overtake oppressed people's cultures by not respecting their views, even if those educators are genuinely trying to help.

> The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people. Utilizing certain basic contradictions, we must pose this existential, concrete, present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response…

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker), The Oppressed

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95-96

Explanation and Analysis

After showing dialogue's importance to his pedagogy, Freire goes into great detail about how educators could build a curriculum for oppressed people while being in dialogue with them. Primarily, says Freire, this curriculum must be relevant to the real, present life experiences of the oppressed; if it isn't, then the program will have many of the same flaws that banking education does. It must also present oppressed people's circumstances in a new way: instead of being permanent facts of life, they become problems that have real solutions in the world. This method can help the oppressed contrast what they really want out of life with the systems that limit their freedom.

[Themes] imply others which are opposing or even antithetical; they also indicate tasks to be carried out and fulfilled. Thus, historical themes are never isolated, independent, disconnected, or static; they are always interacting dialectically with their opposites.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

Freire says that problem-posing educators can use the investigation of themes to help oppressed people understand their conditions. He then talks about his conception of history, where he defines themes as the worldly expression of ideas, values, and beliefs during a historical moment. Importantly, Freire talks about themes in terms of the dialectic logic underpinning other parts of the book—such as the relationship between oppressors and the oppressed, or between teachers and their students. When an idea like oppression, for example, is popular at a given point in time, there is also an opposing idea of liberation. Freire does not see history as a static part of the past, but rather as a constantly shifting set of beliefs and concepts.

Chapter 4 Quotes

The revolution is made neither by the leaders for the people, nor by the people for the leaders, but by both acting together in unshakable solidarity. This solidarity is born only when the leaders witness to it by their humble, loving, and courageous encounter with the people.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker), The Oppressed

Related Themes:

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

After focusing on dialogue in Chapter 3, Freire presents his theory of how oppressors and revolutionaries can reject (or employ) dialogue to affect their societies and cultures. In the process, he talks about revolution as an important form of radical social change, and lays out the characteristics of an effective revolution. To act in solidarity with oppressed people, Freire says that revolutionaries should show "witness"—or express that they are committed to liberation and willing to partner with the oppressed. He repeats several aspects of dialogue (humility, love, courage) here to show that a meaningful revolution must be rooted in dialogue to succeed.

Prior to the emergence of the people there is no manipulation (precisely speaking), but rather total suppression. When the oppressed are almost completely submerged in reality, it is unnecessary to manipulate them. In the antidialogical theory of action, manipulation is the response of the oppressor to the new concrete conditions of the historical process.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker), The Oppressor, The Oppressed

Related Themes:

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

Freire defines manipulation as a method oppressors use to prevent the oppressed from resisting, a kind of "anti-dialogical" cultural action. However, according to Freire, oppressors mainly use manipulation as a reaction rather than a preventative measure. If the oppressed are not aware that they are being oppressed, then the oppressors do not have to mislead them. They are much more likely to use manipulation when oppressed people begin to realize that their conditions are unfair. Freire suggests that oppressors do this through deceitful myths about how society works, and through formal agreements (or pacts) that do not hold the oppressors accountable.

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.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker), The Oppressor, The Oppressed

Related Themes:

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

A key aspect of Freire's cultural action theory is cultural

invasion, a tactic that oppressors use to gain and preserve power. Cultural invasion is less tangible than other forms of oppressive action (like conquest or manipulation), because it involves oppressors imposing their worldview onto the oppressed. When cultural invasion occurs, the oppressed begin to see the invaders' culture as superior and as an example to be followed. This benefits the oppressors because it makes their culture more stable, while oppressed people have to change their culture and beliefs to fit the oppressive system. This discussion recalls Freire's assertion in Chapter 1 that oppression shapes the consciousnesses of oppressed people.

> The role of revolutionary leadership…is to consider seriously, even as they act, the reasons for any attitude of mistrust on the part of the people, and to seek out true avenues of communion with them, ways of helping the people to help themselves critically perceive the reality which oppresses them.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker), The Oppressed

Related Themes:

Page Number: 166

Explanation and Analysis

Before delving into the methods revolutionaries can use to change society, Freire lays out the characteristics of a good revolutionary. One important point he makes is that revolutionary leaders must account for how oppression has shaped people's perceptions of the world and of others. Oppressed people may not trust a revolutionary leader at first, and a good leader will work with the people to find out why and to help them understand oppression. When this happens, leaders can sometimes fall back on oppressive tactics to gain support (like manipulation or coercion)—but Freire argues that liberation achieved through these methods will not be authentic or long-lasting.

> …Organization requires authority, so it cannot be authoritarian; it requires freedom, so it cannot be licentious. Organization is, rather, a highly educational process in which leaders and people together experience true authority and freedom, which they then seek to establish in society by transforming the society which mediates them.

Related Characters: Paulo Freire (speaker), The Oppressed

Related Themes:

Page Number: 178-79

Explanation and Analysis

In his section on organization, a method of "dialogical" action that revolutionaries can use, Freire says that it naturally proceeds from two other methods: cooperation and unity. When people begin to come together and see their struggles as similar, radical leaders can begin to bring them into a formal group that can fight for liberation as a common goal. It's significant that Freire talks about organization in educational terms: he often uses similar vocabulary for education and revolution, and he believes that educators and revolutionaries have similar roles in fighting for freedom with the oppressed. Within a formal group, oppressed people can have the power and freedom to determine how they want to change society.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PREFACE

Freire begins by noting that *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is based on observations from his education work in Brazil and from his political exile. He then expands on one of those observations, that many of his students initially fear critical consciousness (conscientização) as dangerous or "anarchic"—a viewpoint that comes from an internalized "fear of freedom" and the desire not to destabilize one's worldview. However, some students embrace this awakening more easily. Freire cites a class where a former factory worker told his classmates that he had changed from "naïve" to "critical," without experiencing the negative effects they were concerned about.

Freire introduces the ideas of "critical consciousness" and "fear of freedom" with a specific example from one of his classrooms, before he explicitly defines the two terms later in the book. It's important that Freire immediately grounds these concepts in his educational programs—throughout the text, he stresses that a combination of the abstract (theory and reflection) and concrete (praxis) is needed to create lasting social change.

Freire argues that conscientização is not "destructive"—it helps people strive for self-affirmation and allows them to affect history in a meaningful way. He suggests that students often fear the risks of pushing for freedom, instead feeling more comfortable with the stability of their current lives. These students do not always acknowledge their "fear of freedom" openly, and might not even be conscious of it. Freire reiterates that his ideas are not purely theoretical, but are "rooted in concrete situations" involving the poor and middle-class people from his educational programs.

Key to Freire's idea of oppression is that oppressed people internalize its effects. Oppressors try to convince oppressed people that the oppressive social order is not only good or right, but also permanent and unchangeable. However, Freire argues that the comfort of stability cannot bring about liberation—oppressed people must learn that the world can, and will, change.

Freire then addresses potential criticisms of his work: his focus on liberation and oppression could be seen as "idealistic" or "reactionary," and some will not accept his critiques of oppressive systems. In light of this, he suggests that the book's primary audience will be "radicals" who are committed to changing society. Freire contrasts radicals with "sectarianism," an ideology that tries to treat the world as static and controllable. Sectarians can be right-wing or left-wing, but both prevent people from having freedom by distorting reality.

Freire openly connects his model of education with other radical forms of social change, especially revolution. By arguing that mainstream society is inherently oppressive, he distances himself from thinkers who focus on making positive changes within society—or who don't believe society should change at all.

Sectarians, according to Freire, distort or misinterpret the natural logic of the world. He claims that right-wing sectarians seek to "domesticate" time, which means to control people by preventing the natural changes of history. When leftists turn to sectarianism, they can attempt to combine a dialectic logic with the unchanging perspective of sectarians; this, in turn, leads them to believe that the future cannot be changed. In both cases, sectarians bend the truth to match their own ideas of what the world should be like.

History plays a very important role in Freire's concept of oppression. When we think of the past as static or unchanging, we implicitly think of the future in a similar way. Freire points out that this problem appears in both right-wing and left-wing ideologies, even among people who understand the "dialectic" logic that Freire promotes.

Freire breaks down the ideal characteristics of a radical: radicals are "committed to human liberation," willing to confront oppression head-on, and they work in dialogue with other people. Radicals do not see themselves as the gatekeeper to freedom for the oppressed, but instead they fight in solidarity with the oppressed. Because of this, the "pedagogy of the oppressed" that Freire will discuss in Chapter 1 can only be effected by radicals. Freire then expresses hope that readers will point out aspects of his argument than can be refined, and acknowledges that he has never participated in a political revolution—although he reflects on revolution in detail. At minimum, Freire hopes that he conveys his trust and faith in human beings throughout the text.

Again, Freire connects education and revolution, but he does so even more explicitly here. Only radicals have the commitment to humanity and to social change that is needed for a truly liberating education program. Throughout Freire's text, oppressed people (and the revolutionaries who organize them) occupy multiple roles: they are characters, sources, and a significant part of his audience.

CHAPTER 1

At the start of the chapter, Freire introduces what he calls "humankind's central problem": the problem of "humanization" (the natural human drive to affirm ourselves as human beings) and "dehumanization," which is a product of historical oppression. Though both humanization and dehumanization are possible for all people, people naturally strive to become more humanized, a process that is constantly undermined by "injustice, exploitation, and…violence." Dehumanization is not our destiny as people, but rather the product of an unfair social order. Because of this, the most important task of oppressed people is to liberate themselves (and their oppressors) from an unjust system. When oppressors appear to help oppressed people, Freire argues that they often harbor a "false generosity" that relies on oppression to work. To truly help oppressed people, one must join the struggle to destroy oppression entirely.

Freire grounds his approach to Pedagogy of the Oppressed *in how we understand ourselves as human beings: he directly links liberation with human identity, and oppression with a damaged sense of self. There is a constant tension between people struggling to become themselves, and an enemy who actively hinders them. Oppressors are standing in the way of what human beings naturally want out of life. It's worth noting that this idea of oppressors having false generosity is a somewhat severe viewpoint—he assumes that most people who try to help oppressed people do so in bad faith, rather than trying to help earnestly but not knowing the best way to do it.*

Any movement to defeat oppression, according to Freire, has to be led by oppressed people. Oppressed people have the most experience with oppression's effects, and in fighting for their humanity they demonstrate how necessary liberation is. However, at the beginning of this fight, oppressed people sometimes act like oppressors themselves. Freire asserts that an oppressive system shapes the attitudes of oppressed people, and makes them believe that they should become just like oppressors. This means that oppressed people do not always see themselves as "oppressed" at first, holding onto the "fear of freedom" mentioned in the Preface. Freire boils down the oppressor/oppressed relationship to one of "prescription": oppressed people behave in ways prescribed to them by their oppressors. Freire suggests that oppressed people fear freedom because it requires them to reject these internalized ideals and behaviors. Nevertheless, freedom is a constant goal for all people, "the indispensible condition" for feeling complete as a person.

Freire continually stresses the need for oppressed people to lead their own struggle for freedom. However, oppressed people have to first shift from their traditional ideas of how to live—ideas that are based in the hierarchical system of oppression. Since oppressed people learn that this hierarchy is the natural and moral way to organize society, they may have to relearn long-held beliefs and attitudes toward society and each other. As his discussion of sectarianism points out, Freire argues that non-oppressors can hinder their struggle for freedom when they hold on to the values and methods of the oppressors.

To overcome oppression, people must begin to recognize its causes so that they can transform their conditions and begin to create a new society. But at the same time, people also have to confront their internalized beliefs and ideas that hinder their freedom. For Freire, this becomes the role of a "pedagogy of the oppressed": to help the oppressed critically examine the nature of oppression, and take action to change their conditions. This pedagogy should also be led, at least in part, by oppressed people, so that they play an active role in their own liberation. Beginning the struggle for liberation in this way is difficult, for both oppressed people and oppressors who become aware of their problematic role in society. But Freire argues that the concrete work of helping people become free is a vital way to overcome these challenges.

Education, to Freire, has the potential to be a tool for human transformation. But this requires us to consider what education could look like if we remodeled it to specifically *address the needs of oppressed people, instead of serving the interests of oppressors. Freire's use of the term "pedagogy of the oppressed" points to this theoretical question, which ultimately guides much of the text.*

The results of liberation should be twofold (and, to Freire, dialectical): there should be an *objective* change in how society works, and a *subjective* change in how people perceive the world. Both are necessary because Freire sees the relationship between people and the world as interconnected: human action has created our society, and human action can change it for the future. These changes can only occur through "praxis," the combination of reflection and action aimed at transforming the world. When only one occurs, true liberation is not possible. Freire points out that oppressors use a variety of techniques to dissuade oppressed people from critical reflection: if oppressed people realize that they live in an oppressive system, more will be spurred to take action against it. For this reason, a pedagogy that helps create freedom should let oppressed people take the lead in deciding what's best for themselves.

Just as reflection and action need to occur together in the process of liberation, the end result should be changes in both how we reflect and act on the world. In Chapter 3, Freire goes into more detail about the relationship between human beings and the world, in his discussions of history and dialogue. Oppressors have a vested interest in keeping human action separate from the world of oppression, so that oppressed people cannot remove the oppressors from power.

A pedagogy of the oppressed, for Freire, is designed to help people regain their humanity. A pedagogy led by oppressors, like traditional Western education, cannot truly help oppressed people because it is a product of the oppressive system that must be overthrown. All the same, only the oppressors have the political power to implement a pedagogy on a large scale—which is why Freire recommends using smaller "educational projects" to introduce liberating ideas to the people. More broadly, Freire sees his pedagogy in two stages. In the first stage, oppressed people become aware of their status as "oppressed people," and commit to changing their conditions. When the oppressed have succeeded in freeing themselves, the second stage expands the pedagogy's scope to include all people—not just the oppressed.

Much of Freire's work is based on the smaller "educational projects" he conducted in South America. Importantly, Freire emphasizes the inadequacy of traditional education in helping oppressed people achieve freedom, and he sees his theories as a necessary counterpoint to that tradition. The text primarily focuses on the first stage of Freire's pedagogy, though—he spends much more time going into what his pedagogy should look like because we have not reached the second stage yet.

A key part of the first stage of Freire's pedagogy involves understanding the consciousnesses of oppressors and oppressed people, and especially the inner conflicts of oppressed people. Freire defines oppression as an act of exploitation, violence, and a failure "to recognize others as persons." Not only do oppressors commit violence against the oppressed by keeping them from being fully human, they often stereotype oppressed people as "violent" for responding to oppression. Because of this, the struggle of liberation is an act of love, an attempt to restore the humanity of all people. True liberation does not only remove oppressors from power, but also creates a society in which the role of "oppressor" does not exist—which will feel like a kind of oppression to them.

Freire points out several contradictions between oppressed people's lived experience and how oppressors talk about them. For example, oppressed people are stereotyped as "violent," when Freire would say they are responding to violence that comes from society. In contrast to this, he characterizes liberation (and working with oppressed people) as a loving act that directly combats violence.

Freire then examines the oppressor consciousness in greater detail. More than anything, oppressors prioritize "their right to live in peace"—but concede that they also depend on oppressed people's existence to hold power. Oppressors have a "materialistic" view toward their lives: through oppression, they attempt to transform the world, people, and time into objects that can be owned. And because oppressors feel that they can own humanity, they see the fight for humanization and freedom as inherently dangerous. Oppressors also rely on controlling others, to the point that Freire calls them "necrophilic" or life-killing. Freire acknowledges that oppressors can join the fight for liberation with oppressed people, but he argues that the oppressors often bring oppressive beliefs and perspectives with them. These converts can also practice "false generosity," that relies on oppression to be meaningful.

One potentially contentious part of Freire's argument is that oppressed people have to liberate their oppressors while liberating themselves. Freire explains this by analyzing the oppressors' values: since oppressors are opposed to freedom and humanization, they try to prevent everyone from achieving those goals. An oppressor can only affirm their humanity outside of the oppressive system that keeps them in control. Freire also argues that control, in this context, is an act of violence that stifles human life.

People who commit themselves to human liberation should constantly reflect on their preexisting beliefs and biases. To authentically achieve freedom, a convert should be able to work with oppressed people, without seeing them as ignorant or untrustworthy. He or she should also examine how oppressed people think, in order to see where the oppressive system affects their perspective. For example, Freire suggests that oppressed people sometimes take on a "fatalistic" view towards their circumstances, because they have been taught that their misfortunes are the product of things out of their control (like God, or fate). Freire continues to detail the oppressed consciousness, noting that oppressed people often feel alienated from society and undervalue themselves. An effective "pedagogy of the oppressed" should rely on the knowledge and experiences of oppressed people, even if those people are not initially confident in their abilities or value.

Freire is clearly against fatalism, and he connects it to ideas about religion and destiny. He doesn't seem to oppose religion or spirituality, but he suggests that the fatalistic aspects of some religions help the oppressors. Oppressors, of course, also rely on fatalism to convince oppressed people that the future cannot change. Nonetheless, these beliefs can be changed with an effective educational system, even among oppressors. Freire argues that we must take these deep-seated beliefs into account as we present a new, and radical, vision of what the world is.

According to Freire, oppressed people can begin to gain confidence and conviction when they learn about the causes of oppression, and see that their oppressors can be vulnerable. A key part of liberation is this movement from passive acceptance to active participation in the struggle. Along the way, the oppressed should enter into dialogue with others to push for freedom together; when people try to liberate the oppressed without their participation, they remove their agency, treating them "as objects which must be saved from a burning building." Leaders in the fight should trust oppressed people to come to their own conclusions. Freire argues that political leaders should approach liberation in a "pedagogical" way, since educational methods can be used to shift how oppressed people think. However, if this is not done in dialogue with the oppressed, it can resemble propaganda. Leaders and the people must take on the task of reflection and action together.

Another key concept Freire introduces in this chapter is dialogue: dialogue is the opposite of hierarchy, a shift from superiority (and, by extension, inferiority) to equality. Because the struggle for freedom can only succeed if it's based on dialogue, education should be the same way. These connections between education and revolution become more vital as the book proceeds and Freire describes the methods needed for effective social change. People can struggle for freedom without using dialogue, which leads to a movement that is incomplete and inadequate.

CHAPTER 2

Freire begins Chapter 2 by describing the characteristics of a traditional Western classroom. He focuses on its "narrative" aspects: the teacher is a "narrating Subject" with students who are passive. The teacher's narration—or the facts that he/she is teaching—is disconnected from the students' life experiences, and students memorize these facts without understanding their full meaning or context. Freire calls this the "**banking**" model of education, one in which teachers "deposit" knowledge into the minds of their students. He finds this model problematic because it stifles creativity, and does not encourage students to ask new questions through praxis.

Freire uses the term "narration" to call attention to the one-sided nature of traditional teaching. In the banking model, students rely on the teacher to tell them which ideas, facts, and perspectives are correct, useful, or relevant to their lives. Freire's critique of these classrooms—where students memorize and regurgitate facts—can still be seen today in political debates about school curriculums and standardized testing.

Knowledge, for Freire, is the result of a constant process of questioning the world. However, the "**banking**" model conceives of knowledge as something that teachers have and students lack. This approach is closely tied to oppression, because it presumes that the people who don't have power are ignorant. Freire then asserts that his pedagogy, which aims to help oppressed people become free, must change the contradictory relationship between teachers and students. In this relationship, teachers have absolute authority and control over their students.

According to Freire, oppressors often claim that some kinds of knowledge are only possessed by authority figures. From this premise, oppressors can then claim that hierarchies are the best way to organize society—not only governments, but schools and families as well. If only some people have knowledge, then only some people can be in a position to lead others.

The "**banking**" model molds the attitudes of students: it teaches them to adapt to the world as it is, instead of questioning it or trying to change it. This helps oppressors, who want to prevent oppressed people from understanding the true nature of oppression. Freire argues that oppressors combine "banking" education with institutions like welfare, which treats oppressed people as if they exist outside of normal, "healthy" society. To liberate themselves, oppressed people cannot become "integrated" into oppressive society; rather, they must transform society entirely. "Banking" education combats this transformation by turning people into "automatons."

In the oppressors' narrative, oppressed people live on the margins of good, traditional, society because of their own faults. But Freire urges oppressed people to see traditional society as inherently bad because it marginalizes them. This is why Freire often critiques people who attempt to reform oppressive institutions: to him, reform is ultimately futile because it assumes that those institutions are not oppressive by default.

Teachers who use the "**banking**" model—whether they are aware of it or not—do not understand that the model reinforces oppression. But Freire notes that some students may begin to understand that their education is in conflict with their natural drive for freedom. However, educators who truly want to help oppressed people cannot wait for this to happen—they should work with oppressed people, as fellow students, to achieve conscientização together. "Banking" education hinders this process through its assumptions about human beings and the world. In the "banking" model, people do not act on the world: they merely live in it and observe it. Teachers, then, control how their students observe the world and teach them to fit in.

Many people (in this instance, students and teachers) don't realize that they are oppressed, or an oppressor. This is the result of some oppressors working overtime to disguise the true nature of oppression. However, Freire believes in people's ability to convert—to find out that they are contributing to an oppressive system, and then commit to changing it. Freire's pedagogy attempts to make this conversion a key goal of education.

The methods teachers use in the "**banking**" model create distance between them and their students. In contrast, Freire argues for authentic communication in the classroom: teachers cannot impose their ideas on students, but should instead work with students equally. Just like oppression, the "banking" model is "necrophilic" and stifles the life of human beings. But the suffering that results from oppression can spur people to restore their personal freedom and power. Freire calls out the "banking" model as oppressive so that revolutionary leaders do not use it in the struggle for liberation. He notes that revolutionary leaders often use this model already, but urges them to "reject the banking concept in its entirety" and replace it with a new model: the "problem-posing" model.

Freire argues that oppressive structures and institutions can never create real, lasting freedom for oppressed people. By uplifting the knowledge and life experiences of oppressed people, revolutionaries can push oppressed people to develop their own ideas for structures and institutions that work for everyone. And as South America was overcome with regime changes during the 1960s, Freire is wary of "revolutions" that simply replace the people in power while maintaining an oppressive hierarchy.

In stark contrast to "**banking**," a "problem-posing" pedagogy is based on communication and dialogue, and it fosters human freedom. It transforms the relationship between students and teachers, merging them into teacher-students and student-teachers. Everyone in the classroom teaches each other and learns from each other. While the "banking" model consists of active teachers and passive students, the "problem-posing" model makes both groups into "co-investigators" who question reality together. Freire argues that the "problem-posing" model pushes students to gain critical awareness, because it uses topics and problems that are relevant to the students' experiences. This, in turn, challenges students to take action and face those problems.

In the "problem-posing" model, Freire sees the relationship between students and teachers as dialectical. He resolves the differences between active teaching and passive learning by synthesizing them into a single role, where everyone teaches and learns in the same classroom. He also argues that students will naturally take a more active role in their education when it feels relevant to them; as Freire argues in Chapter 3, this active participation is necessary to make the problem-posing model succeed.

When education is designed to foster freedom, it treats human beings and the world as intimately connected. Freire supplies the example of a peasant student in a Chilean class, who argued that human beings must exist in the world to call it a "world" in the first place—and compares the peasant's point to French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre's idea that human consciousness and the world are interdependent. "Problem-posing" education helps people develop their understanding of the world, so that they see the world as constantly in flux. More broadly, Freire reiterates that "problem-posing" and "banking" have entirely opposite goals. While "banking" separates people from history, "problem-posing" helps its students understand their place in history.

It's significant that Freire points out the similarities between the peasant's point of view and Sartre's point of view. Although Sartre was an academic and philosopher, the peasant (who would be considered "ignorant" in a traditional classroom) was able to develop a similar idea without reading Sartre's work. For Freire, this comparison shows how oppressors create a false dichotomy between people who have knowledge and people who don't.

In the "problem-posing" model, human beings are incomplete and are working to fully become themselves. This means that education is also an ongoing process, a big difference from the lack of change in the "**banking**" model. "Problem-posing" is "revolutionary futurity," according to Freire, because it relies on the hope that oppression is changeable and can be defeated in the future. When oppressed people understand this, they can shift from feeling resolved to feeling empowered. Therefore, the movement for liberation must support oppressed people's right to make decisions and ask questions for themselves in pursuit of humanization. It must rely on dialogue at every stage of the process.

Freire's model directly invokes the "central problem" of the text: the natural human drive to feel complete as a person. A "pedagogy of the oppressed" should aid its students in the process of humanization, and push them to overthrow the political system that dehumanizes oppressed people. Importantly, this pedagogy must aid students rather than control them, because personal agency is a key aspect of feeling affirmed as a human being.

CHAPTER 3

At the start of Chapter 3, Freire continues his discussion of dialogue from the previous chapter. He asserts that dialogue primarily consists of "the word"—which he equates with praxis, the combination of reflection and action. When reflection is not paired with action, it becomes "verbalism," and the word loses its power. And when action is not paired with reflection, it becomes "activism," and people risk taking action without reflecting on what those actions fully mean. To Freire, human existence ultimately boils down to the process of naming and transforming the world around us, and everyone should be able to start this process. Freire defines dialogue in these terms and he argues that dialogue is necessary for human beings to find freedom and meaning in their lives.

Throughout the book, Freire argues that contemplating the world and taking concrete actions in the world must be linked. It isn't enough to speak out against oppression: if people do not back up their words by actively fighting oppression, then those words are futile. Freire uses this concept of combined reflection and action in his discussions of liberation, praxis, and dialogue, because it is necessary to his vision of a free society.

According to Freire, dialogue is an act of radical love "for the world and for people," because it is a commitment to giving people control and agency as they investigate the world. Dialogue is also an act of humility, because it discourages any one person from having authority over another. Dialogue only exists if every dialoguer acknowledges his/her own imperfections, and understands that everyone has something valuable to contribute. Thirdly, dialogue is an act of faith: faith in people's power to transform their world and create new ways of organizing society. This faith must take into account the oppressors' efforts to prevent oppressed people from using that power. When done correctly, dialogue should lead to mutual trust between the dialoguers; Freire argues that this trust consists of reflection and action, just like praxis.

This rundown of the nature of dialogue points back to Freire's words in the Preface, where he stresses his trust and faith "in the people." Educators and revolutionary leaders must have this faith, along with love and humility, to properly do their job and allow oppressed people to have freedom. If one person in a dialogue believes that he or she is less flawed or less ignorant than the other person, then the dialogue is not authentic.

Lastly, dialogue cannot exist without hope and critical thinking. To Freire, hope comes from human beings' constant drive to complete themselves, and critical thinking comes from the drive to change reality. Within the context of his pedagogy (the "problem-posing" model), Freire says that dialogue begins when the educator decides what he/she will dialogue about in the classroom. Dialogical education should address what students (or "student-teachers") want to know about, and engage with what they know already. The "**banking**" model seeks to change people, but "problem-posing" seeks to change the world with people: in Freire's model, educators present elements of the oppressive system as "problems" that oppressed people then attempt to solve.

Problem-posing education creates hope because it pushes oppressed people to stop seeing oppression as a permanent fact, and begin to see it as a changeable problem. A primary job of educators is showing that the issues that affect people's lives have concrete solutions, and that the people affected can use their own experiences to come up with solutions. For Freire, making oppression concrete makes it solvable: oppressors try to distance themselves from the oppression they commit.

When political leaders and educators begin the process of dialogue, they should try to understand the objective conditions of oppressed people, and how oppressed people perceive those conditions. Because the class presents these conditions as "problems," it pushes the participants to think and act for themselves as they respond to each problem. The class must also use language that is clear and relatable to its participants. From here, Freire switches gears to discuss the subject matter of a "problem-posing" classroom: he says that it should primarily focus on the "thematic universe" of its students. Before defining the term more specifically, Freire grounds his idea of "themes" in how human beings see the world and history. Other animals exist outside of history—they are not aware of a past, present, or future, so they adapt to the world as it is—while humans understand that they can transform the world over time.

Freire grounds the concrete aspects of his pedagogy in theoretical discussions of things like history, consciousness, and the differences between human beings and animals. While the banking model simply presents facts without contextualizing them, problem-posing education allows oppressed people to connect the big ideas that shape society with their personal experiences. According to Freire, oppressors understand that this connection can threaten their power in the long run: it pushes oppressed people to find new ideas to shape a new society.

As human beings begin to understand their relationship to the world, they understand that they are limited by their concrete experiences in the world—Freire calls these "limit-situations." Limit-situations are a product of history, which means that they are not permanent and can be overcome. Freire, in turn, sees history as the result of praxis, reflecting and acting on the world in order to change it. He divides history into a series of "epochs," periods of time that are characterized by peoples' ideas, values, and beliefs during that time. These ideas and beliefs exist in the world, and Freire calls their representation in the world "themes." Every theme has an opposite theme that reflects an opposing idea or belief. The "thematic universe," then, is the combination of themes interacting with each other during a particular epoch.

Freire argues that history is primarily driven by social change: when we talk about history, we are talking about the ways that people have changed the world, and the ideas that shape human life, over time. Instead of a linear series of facts that are distant from the present, Freire suggests that people are constantly moving through history and becoming a part of it. The social institutions and conditions that people experience are the result of historical choices that continue to affect the present—unless people make new decisions that create new conditions.

"Themes" and "limit-situations" are closely related—sometimes, oppressed people live in conditions that prevent them from understanding the ideas that created those conditions. If they overcome their limits, they could discover an "untested feasibility"—the idea that oppressed people can still exist without the circumstances that limit them. Limit-situations also imply that there are people who benefit from the situation, and others who are harmed by it. In this context, oppressors see the freedom of oppressed people as a limit to their power. According to Freire, the main themes of our historical moment are domination and liberation; the limit-situations are the structures of oppression that limit human freedom. Underdevelopment, for example, would be a limit-situation that impairs Third World countries. Themes can exist on multiple levels, and they exist even if people do not recognize them.

Untested feasibility is also related to hope: the idea that a life without oppression is not only possible, but a concrete goal that can be reached with actions. When oppressed people understand that oppression limits their freedom, they also understand that overthrowing oppression removes the limit, allowing them to become free. At the same time, the idea of "themes" allows oppressed people to see a path to overthrowing oppression: creating new social structures that are guided by liberation, rather than domination.

Education should push oppressed people and political leaders to investigate the "themes" of their time; this will help them understand reality as a whole and in terms of its parts. One way this happens is through "decoding": Freire creates a specific process through which educators can make "themes" more visible to their students as they approach conscientização. Decoding consists of presenting a classroom with a "coded situation"—or a worldly condition that reflects a theme—and the class then responds to and analyzes the situation. But decoding is only one part of the larger "thematic investigation," which happens in stages inside and outside of the classroom. Thematic investigation is how educators and students become critically aware of reality (and of their own beliefs), which helps them begin to take action in the world. Like other parts of Freire's pedagogy, it requires dialogue and mutual trust between everyone involved.

In Chapter 4, Freire argues that oppressors try to make oppressed people see reality as divided. When the oppressed begin to understand what oppression is, they must also understand that their struggle for liberation is connected with other struggles throughout their country, continent, and world. Oppression is made of parts—different institutions, authority figures, and ideas—but it is the single greatest obstacle to freedom for all people.

The process of thematic investigation starts with the educators, who identify an area to work in and begin to observe it and its residents. Freire uses the example of an adult education class "in a peasant area with a high percentage of illiteracy." The educators should observe many different aspects of the peasants' lives, communicating with them and enlisting them as volunteers. Working as a team, the educators and peasants determine the most important conditions that are affecting the peasants, and then determine if the peasants are aware of the area's limit-situations and themes. Next, the educators use visual, auditory, or tactile materials to represent the limit-situations and themes—Freire calls these materials "codifications." The codifications should be simple and relatable to the peasants, but should challenge the peasants to come up with their own analysis. Freire cites a Chilean educator who experimented with "decoding" in his classroom to make his students more critical.

Freire conceives of a comprehensive process through which educators can enter a place and develop a curriculum that is relevant to that place's population. Just as oppressed people should be active participants in the classroom, Freire stresses that oppressed people should be active participants in the development of the curriculum, to ensure that it is truly relevant to their lives. He also cites the Chilean educator to show that even his own pedagogy can change over time, or can be improved in concrete ways by different perspectives.

As the peasants and educators analyze the materials together, they reflect on each situation and their views toward it. Rather than prioritizing their view over the peasants' view, the educators must allow the peasants to speak freely about how the situations make them feel. Freire uses the example of a "codification" about alcoholism—while the educator might see it as automatically bad, the peasant might see himself in a person who drinks to cope with an oppressive job. Throughout this process, the educators listen and document the responses, and eventually begin to study them to find the themes they discussed earlier. Eventually, the educators use these results to make new class materials, which they present to the peasants as part of a more organized curriculum. This curriculum is a product of the educators' research, and reflects the topics that the peasants care about most. Most importantly, this curriculum allows the peasants to have authority and to think for themselves.

Here, Freire concretely shows how problem-posing education can resolve the contradictions between teacher-students and student-teachers. While the educators and peasants have conflicting perspectives on alcoholism, both perspectives are necessary to create a fuller picture of how and why people become alcoholics. If those educators had simply told the peasants that alcoholism is bad, they would have missed the economic anxiety that informs the peasants' viewpoint. Freire would argue that a one-sided discussion can prevent those peasants from feeling comfortable sharing their authentic perspective.

CHAPTER 4

Freire spends the final chapter discussing his theory of cultural action, or how people create changes in their culture and society. He starts by reiterating the need for praxis (combined reflection and action) and argues that praxis requires theory (a critical framework) in order to be complete. Revolutionary leaders and oppressed people should both use praxis while struggling for liberation so that the leaders are not merely imposing their will onto the oppressed. Otherwise, the struggle will be hollow—Freire says that a "revolution *for* the people" is equivalent to "a revolution *without* the people." A revolution that sees oppressed people as ignorant, or objectifies them, buys into the myths oppressors use to keep their power. To Freire, the key to an effective revolution is dialogue: both oppressors and revolutionaries have methods of changing society, but the oppressors' methods are inherently "antidialogical." Just as "problem-posing" education relies on dialogue, an effective revolution must be educational in nature.

Freire spends much of Chapter 4 comparing his theories of cultural action with the characteristics revolutionary leaders must have to be effective at creating change. Just as he does with educators in previous chapters, Freire creates a critical framework for revolutionaries that establishes right and wrong ways to interact with oppressed people. It's significant that the two frameworks are incredibly similar: in Freire's view, education and revolution should use similar methods, because both should have the goal of reaching freedom with the oppressed.

Conquest. "Antidialogical action" is a way of changing culture that serves the interests of oppressors. The most important aspect of antidialogical action is conquest: oppressors try to control people and the world by conquering and owning them. To prevent any further cultural change, they create myths about the world—such as the idea that oppression is permanent and encourages freedom, and that oppressed people must adapt to it. These myths are found in everything from religion and economics to education and property. Propaganda and mass media ensure that oppressed people internalize these myths, and cannot have authentic dialogue about the true nature of reality. Freire then emphasizes again that any oppressive situation is opposed to dialogue.

Conquest forces people to view the world on the terms of their oppressors, which is why oppressors use mass media and propaganda to spread their views as widely as possible. Of course, mass media can work in the interests of oppressed people, but Freire does not seem to consider this a significant factor. This may be because mass media is most effectively used by people in power—namely, the oppressors. Freire also critiques propaganda in Chapter 1 because it tells oppressed people how to think and hinders their agency.

Divide and Rule. Oppressors divide and isolate oppressed people to prevent them from organizing together for liberation. This creates rifts among different groups of oppressed people and discourages them from dialogue. One example Freire uses is community development projects that separate local communities from each other—when communities cannot see that their problems are related, they are less likely to fight the oppressors' agenda. Another is the way that governments approach communities by selecting leaders, instead of treating everyone in the group equally. And since oppressed people are already trained to see their oppressors as good, this can alienate community leaders from the people they are supposed to serve. In this context, oppressors use "false generosity" to make the oppressed believe that they are being helped. However, this false generosity relies on conquest to keep the oppressed in need of help.

Oppressors alienate oppressed people from the oppressor class, and also alienate oppressed people from each other. This process makes it easier for the oppressors to convince the oppressed that hierarchies are the best way to organize society. Hierarchies do not consider humans beings as a single group of equal participants, but rather they give some groups superiority over other groups: teachers have superiority over their students, the wealthy have superiority over the poor, and community leaders are superior to the rest of their communities.

Manipulation. Oppressors use manipulation to control oppressed people and to prevent them from challenging the oppressors' power. The myths used in conquest are one example of this manipulation, but it also shows up when oppressor and oppressed classes make pacts (or other formal agreements) together. This creates the illusion of dialogue, but in reality the oppressors determine what the agreement is and then often don't follow it. Manipulation occurs when oppressed people first start to question the oppressive system. To combat it, revolutionary leaders should use critical awareness to constantly question the oppressors' authority. Freire contrasts revolutionary leaders with populist leaders, who claim to be an intermediary between the oppressed and their oppressors. Freire sees populism, along with things like welfare programs, as tools for manipulation that ultimately distract the oppressed from understanding the actual cause of their problems: oppression itself.

Manipulation relies on the fact that oppressive systems push oppressed people to trust the words and perspective of their oppressors. Freire distinguishes between suppressing oppressed people in an oppressive system, and manipulating them when they begin to lose faith in institutions of power. This is why Freire sees populism as a kind of manipulation: populist leaders attempt to work in oppressed people's best interest, but they also convince oppressed people that the oppressor class is more trustworthy with a populist leader in power.

Cultural Invasion. In cultural invasion, oppressors impose their own values and beliefs onto an oppressed culture. Cultural invasion makes oppressed peoples' perspective align with that of the oppressors, so that the oppressors' culture seems superior. This pushes oppressed people to become more like the oppressors, and stabilizes the oppressors' position. Freire argues that cultural invasion is both a tool and a result of oppression, and that traditional homes and schools also use forms of the oppressive hierarchy. However, he says that the revolution can also convert "professionals" in education and government who come to understand the nature of oppression. Freire then breaks down the revolutionary process into two stages: "dialogical action" that combats the oppressors' power, and a "cultural revolution" that forms a new reality after the oppressed have won. While oppressors try to invade, and transform society, revolutions try to develop society in partnership with the oppressed.

Freire's discussion of cultural invasion in the home is particularly interesting: he argues that the traditional dynamic of the home (in which parents are dominating authorities over their children) can be traced back to the social conditions that dominate oppressed people. Both homes and schools are spaces where young people learn how the world works, so Freire argues that they are spaces where people learn to adapt to an oppressive reality—not only oppressed people, but also "professionals" who unwittingly use an oppressive culture to try and help the oppressed.

Cooperation. From here, Freire discusses "dialogical action," which is what revolutionary leaders should use to attack the oppressors' antidialogical methods. Revolutionary leaders must have the support, dialogue, and trust of oppressed people to be effective, and cooperation is how this happens. Unlike conquest, cooperation allows a revolutionary group to focus on oppression as a primary problem to solve. Leaders should account for oppressed peoples' internalized beliefs while validating their knowledge—and Freire includes a quote from Che Guevara that emphasizes how oppressed people helped create his political ideology. When done properly, this cooperation can create a fusion of the oppressed and their leaders into a united force.

It's important that Freire frames his entire theory of cultural action around dialogue: it emphasizes the responsibility of revolutionary leaders to act in partnership with oppressed people, not on their behalf. By citing Che Guevara, one of the most prominent revolutionaries in Latin American history, Freire shows in a concrete way how regular people have historically made vital contributions to liberation movements—and how Guevara recognized this as a leader.

Unity for Liberation. While oppressors see unity as dangerous, revolutionary leaders must seek unity in every part of the liberation movement. This is a difficult task, because oppression inherently divides and alienates people from the world and from each other. For example, when oppressed people believe that the future is fixed, they will believe that changing the future with others is impossible. Therefore, achieving unity requires oppressed people to understand how and why they hold these beliefs—they must become aware of the myths that the oppressors have imposed on them. If successful, oppressed people will begin to see themselves as member of an oppressed class, a larger group that stands in opposition to the oppressor class. This diminishes the oppressors' power, and enables the oppressed to more easily organize.

A key theme of Freire's theory is that oppressors keep people separate, while revolutionaries must rely on bringing people together. This process of bringing people together often occurs in stages: Cooperation can lead to Unity for Liberation, which then leads to Organization. When oppressed people unite, they cannot simply see themselves as members of an oppressed class—they must also feel compelled to take action against the oppressor class. Otherwise, the difficult task of unifying the oppressed can be threatened, because oppressors can use institutions of power to manipulate and suppress.

Organization. Organization is the opposite of manipulation, and is the natural result of unity. While unifying the oppressed, revolutionary leaders are also trying to organize them to view liberation as a common goal. These leaders must show "witness" to oppressed people—they must express the importance of liberation, and show that they are acting out of love and faith in the oppressed. Freire points out that oppressors do organize themselves apart from the people, which is why revolutionary leaders must organize "themselves *with* the people." Although these leaders should use discipline and guidance to keep their group focused, they cannot manipulate or conquer the oppressed along the way. To Freire, organization is a "highly educational process" that teaches both oppressed people and their leaders how to wield authority and freedom in service of each other.

In Freire's view, oppressed people should not blindly trust the authority of a revolutionary leader, just as they should not blindly trust oppressors. Instead, revolutionaries have an obligation to prove their humility, trustworthiness, and love for people through "witness." The act of witness ensures that oppressed people have the power to accept or reject anyone who wants to guide them in the struggle for liberation. Ideally, educational and political leaders work on the terms of the oppressed people they seek to serve.

Cultural Synthesis. Lastly, cultural synthesis is the opposite of cultural invasion. Freire says that all cultural action either attempts to preserve or change society; when it includes dialogue, cultural action can overcome the contradictions of oppressive society and achieve liberation for all people. Cultural synthesis does this by treating different cultures equally, and giving them both the same authority. Freire then points back to the "thematic investigations" in Chapter 3, noting that the process can help create cultural synthesis among the oppressed. It pushes people from different cultures to support each other and engage in dialogue, and it brings oppressed people's goals together with those of revolutionary leaders. Freire ends by returning to the broader ideas behind his cultural action theory: it is necessary to theorize methods for freedom because the oppressors need to theorize methods for domination. This theory of dialogical action is the direct result of praxis and dialogue among the oppressed and leaders, with the goal of humanizing all people.

The term "synthesis" recalls Freire's notion of dialectics, and the idea that people can synthesize competing perspectives into a single resolution. Although cultural synthesis follows a dialectical logic, the scale here is larger than at other points in the text: cultural synthesis does not only rely on dialogue between people, but also on dialogue between entire cultures. The end of Chapter 4 mirrors the beginning of Chapter 1, as Freire returns to the "central problem" of humanization. Cultural action, and dialogue, for Freire, are not only theories—they are a concrete set of tactics that people can, and should, use in the radical struggle to humanize.

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