

PEACE EDUCATION: PEDAGOGY OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

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Progressive educators often try to show their students that much of society is characterized by structures of dominance. They explore major problems such as employment, housing, education, and international trade, and show how some people systematically and regularly obtain a disproportionately small share of the benefits. These educators then try to provoke their students into rebelling and working to overcome this systematic oppression — and fail miserably. Their students are just not interested.

The students cannot be persuaded that they themselves are oppressed. Despite the teacher's pleadings, they decide that they are doing all right. The problems of the world are other people's business, mainly the business of politicians and idealists. Anyway, there is not much that they, mere students, can do about those problems. They just want to get their degrees, and become stockbrokers or plant managers or homemakers.

Perhaps the students are not persuaded because in fact they are not oppressed. They do have some troubles, like not being able to find good jobs as quickly as they would like, but on the whole they are much nearer to the top than to the bottom of society. If social structure is understood in terms of the number and quality of the alternatives it presents to the individual, then young university students must be close to being in the best of all possible worlds.

Among the most attractive alternatives which students face are the options for entering into the highly privileged upper reaches of society. The middle and upper class students that most university teachers face are therefore distinguished by the fact that they are potential oppressors. That is, they can easily take up jobs, a life style, and consumption habits which can only be enjoyed at the expense of other people who will, as a result, be deprived of the opportunity to live their lives up to their own full potential. These students may not be aware of the consequences, and there may be no malice, but nevertheless the effect of their behavior, mediated through the social system, may turn out to be very harmful to others.¹

What then should the educator do with these students? If society is characterized by a structure of dominance, what should be the nature of the education of those at the middle and top of the society? More precisely, what sort of education for these students would help to end the structure of dominance? As Ivan Illich and others have so clearly shown, the present schooling of middle and upper classes is geared to do just the opposite, to reinforce the existing system and to train elites to take their places within that system. My concern here is with the problem of education for liberation, with finding ways in which teaching can be used to help bring an end to oppressive social systems.²

Consciousness-Raising

The question of how the education of those at the bottom of society should be conducted has been addressed directly and effectively. On the basis of his work with illiterate peasants in Latin America, Paulo Freire has developed the idea of conscientization, or consciousness-raising. His thinking is outlined in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and in several other works, and it is being put into practice by Freire and by people working out of the Institute for Cultural Action in Geneva.³

The essential idea is that the underdogs of society do not need to be instructed at all, not in the conventional sense of "banking" education. In this kind of teaching, reflecting in itself the common patterns of dominance, the supposedly better-informed instructors deposit knowledge into the supposedly empty heads of their clients. Instead, Freire argues, people should be helped to see their own situation in their own terms. This is done through posing problems of their relationship to the world, in the framework of a critical dialogue conducted within small discussion groups. The new appreciation of reality, the new awareness, or raised consciousness that results can lead to action toward liberation from the structure of dominance.

For their own humanity and wholeness, people must break out of their passivity and actively engage the world around them. As Richard Shaull put it, Freire's basic assumption is that each person's ontological vocation

... is to be a Subject who acts upon and transforms his world, and in so doing moves towards ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively. This world to which he relates is not a static and closed order, a given reality which man must accept and to which he must adjust: rather, it is a problem to be worked on and solved.⁴

The pedagogy, and thus the liberation, is based on the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.

Adapting Freire

Can Freire's thinking be applied in our circumstances? Shaull comments:

At first sight, Paulo Freire's method of teaching illiterates in Latin American seems to belong to a different world from that in which we find ourselves in this country. Certainly, it would be absurd to claim that it should be copied here. But there are certain parallels in the two situations which should not be overlooked. Our advanced technological society is rapidly making objects of most of us and subtly programming us into conformity to the logic of its system. To the degree that this happens, we are also becoming submerged in a new "culture of silence." . . .

If, however, we take a closer look, we may discover that his methodology as well as his educational philosophy are as important for us as for the dispossessed in Latin America. Their struggle to become free Subjects and to participate in the transformation of their society is similar, in many ways, to the struggle not only of blacks and Mexican-Americans but also of middle-class young people in this country.⁵

If these ideas can be used here, we must ask *how*?

This thinking can be applied most directly in societies like our own by applying it to the oppressed people within our communities. As Freire has remarked, the Third World is not a geographical concept. We can find the victims of oppression all around us in all parts of the globe, if we will only see them. They are in the ghettos, they are in the factories, they are in the schools, and they are beside us among our alienated colleagues. In the pedagogy designed to reach out to them, the language may be different, but the logic is the same as that for the illiterate peasants of Latin America. The adaptation is straightforward.

But what of those who are not oppressed? What of those of our colleagues and students who are oppressors or potential oppressors, and who stand to benefit from the structure of dominance?

I first put the question being explored here in terms of the pedagogy of the oppressor, asking how the education of topdogs should be conducted if that education is to help end the structure of dominance. The core dilemma on which I focused was this: While it is plainly in the interest of underdogs to be liberated, it is not in the interest of topdogs, in terms of their prevailing values, to end the system of dominance. They benefit handsomely from it, and are thus motivated to perpetuate it. Even if we argue that the topdog, too, is hurt by the structure, the pleasures surely outweigh the pains. The benefits of liberation for the oppressed are clear. The basis for the liberation, and thus the pedagogy, of topdogs raises more difficult problems.

Some of the people with whom I discussed these issues resisted my formulation of the question. They seemed to want to take the topdog and squeeze him into an underdog position, apparently because they already had clear ideas about how to work with those at the bottom of society. Their response seemed to evade my question, a question which deliberately focused on the top.

I now recognize that the model of topdogs oppressing underdogs is too simple. Instead, it should be understood that both are oppressed and dehumanized, in different ways, by the social structure. Dominance is not simply a matter of one group of people being exploited by another, but finds all of them being oppressed by the social structure in which they are embedded.⁶ Freire sees this when he says that "For the truly humanist educator and the authentic revolutionary, the object of action is the reality to be transformed by them together with other men — not other men themselves."⁷ Liberation does not come simply from converting or slaying the oppressors. The challenge is to find a way to free

ourselves, all of us, from an oppressive social situation.

Despite the very great differences, there are important respects in which the positions of those at the top and those at the bottom are similar. Before conscientization, the oppressed individual, like the oppressor, benefits from and is fully adapted to the system. The person at the bottom may be hurt in comparison with the person at the top, but the one at the bottom may benefit in comparison to what could be obtained outside of that system. The coffee plantation hand or the factory worker who can find no other, better job feels benefitted by that system. It is not until after he or she more fully understands the reality of the situation that the individual takes action to become free from it and to alter the system itself. In much the same way, the topdog, too, needs to go through a stage of conscientization in order to see the great costs which accompany the benefits reaped from the system of dominance.

The liberation of the oppressor derives from that individual's altering his or her consciousness so as to understand the ending of the system of dominance as being in his or her own interest. This means learning to value different things, counting, say, fellowship and helpfulness as more important than owning fancy cars or making smart business deals. For both the oppressor and the oppressed, a sharp distinction must be made between the individual's values (as they are perceived and acted out) before and after conscientization. As observers, we speak of the individual's prior values as a product of false consciousness. We speak of the values following the insight and awareness of conscientization as reflecting the individual's true interests.

The Teaching Agenda

What should be the content of middle class education directed toward the ultimate goal of liberation? Following Freire, it is inappropriate for the teacher to deliver well-formed goals for the students to pursue. That is itself the most oppressive kind of behavior.⁸ But a few broad guidelines are in order.

It seems that teaching at the top of the world should include at least these tasks:

1. **Demonstrating the nature of the social structure.** Students and teachers, working together, should try to make visible those structures, those enduring patterns which characterize local, national, and global societies, focusing particularly on patterns in the distribution of benefits. Their studies can be based in part on their own observations and in part on data collected by others. The information might include, say, data on wage rates or health services for different ethnic groups, or on economic growth rates for different countries. The students should be asked to decide when their information shows systematic skews in the distribution of benefits.

2. **Examining explanations of dominance.** After the students agree among themselves that in certain cases some groups regularly obtain greater benefits than others (e.g., whites over blacks, some countries over others), the students should be asked to

formulate and to find a variety of explanations as to why those situations have come about. They should then compare and critically evaluate the alternative explanations.

The teacher may help the students to locate a variety of arguments, in part by identifying some of the relevant literature, and the teacher may participate in, but not dominate, the critical review of the alternative explanations. It is essential that the students themselves be confronted with the problematic facts of reality and that they should be asked to explain those facts. It is the process of their exploring and testing those explanations which constitutes the creative, experiential education that is needed.

Teachers should not simply present their own favorite theories. Students must never be coerced into adopting particular views. Under pressure, they would only adopt the pretense, the mask of belief, a skill which they cultivate to a high art in all their earlier schooling. Of course students may at times fail to reach the conclusions the teacher wishes them to reach, but that hazard is unavoidable if the students' integrity is to be respected. The task is not to reach the correct answer but to assure that the students play a constructive and critical role in the formulation of their own answers.

3. Examining justifications for dominance. The students should examine different accounts, offered by themselves and by others, as to why these skews in the distribution of benefits are right or wrong, desirable or undesirable, just or unjust. Should management people be paid more than laborers? Should college professors be paid more than high school teachers? Should students with higher high school grades be awarded larger college scholarships? Should some people get better health care than others? Why?

4. Destroying rationalizing myths. False information, false explanations, and unacceptable justifications need to be closely examined, and not simply dismissed as chance errors or misjudgments. It should be appreciated that some myths (e.g., that hard work will lead to wealth and success, regardless of one's origins) are deliberately perpetuated as a means of serving particular interests and of protecting the existing system.⁹

5. Examining individual actions. Students should be asked to locate their own positions within the social structure and to investigate the sources and the effects of their actions and the actions of others. Why do we buy different breakfast cereals? What are the consequences of using a big car? In what ways are we free and in what ways are we not free? In what ways can one person's freedom hurt others?

6. Altering values. Old values, especially those relating to materialism and to personal security, need to be replaced with other values by which new social arrangements are preferred. This constitutes the formation of a new consciousness. Of course this cannot be accomplished in a single deliberate act or as the result of a particular lesson in the teaching. Rather, it should be a natural product of the critical

examination of self and world undertaken throughout the entire learning process.

7. Working to invent and to find new social structures and new courses of action. This new consciousness, based on a new understanding of society and of one's own role in that society, should lead to the search for new forms of social organization and new lines of action in harmony with that new vision.¹⁰

To keep the challenge from being too forbidding, it may be useful to initiate this work with a focus on specialized problems within the local area, and then to move to larger more difficult problems after a sense of self-confidence has been established. The decision as to what should be done should be carefully tuned to match the individual's position, understanding, resources, and talents. It may be useful to conduct group discussions to help individuals rethink their personal work. Teachers, factory workers, stockbrokers, salespeople, and others can be helped in undertaking self-examinations that they themselves wish to make, with respect to what they do and with respect to how they do it. Finally, individuals will have to make their own decisions.

Learning about the structure of society may be seriously impeded by guilt, either through the individual's own guilt feelings or through becoming overly concerned with placing blame on others. A preoccupation with attributing blame, either to oneself or to others, can mask the fact that oppression is largely due to unhealthy social structures rather than to the actions of evil individuals.

This concern with blame falsely suggests that all can be made right by the purging of evil individuals or the ending of particular evil practices. The danger is apparent in studies on, say, white collar crime, or subliminal advertising, or bribes given by multinational corporations. Their focus indirectly suggests that if these practices were ended, the problems would be ended, thus failing to appreciate that it is the everyday, above-board operations of such institutions which are the major problem.

Some individuals may struggle to detach themselves from the oppressor category. Their disclaimer may be that they are only students, or that they are only good employers. Or they may say that they are "only making a living" or perhaps just doing what they are told. Or instead of detachment there may be acceptance of the identity, but with an attempt to shrink into the crowd, based on the infamous "but everybody else does it too," or worse, "if I don't do it, someone else will." Or the individual might pray for absolution while continuing the pattern of oppressive actions essentially unaltered.¹¹

An overdrawn concern with guilt can be paralyzing either because of the fear of one's guilt or because it can lead to a distracting preoccupation with fixing blame on others. Emphasis should be placed instead on the work of explaining the problems and of finding corrective actions: if the system is bad, what ought to be done about it? What

should you and I do?

The Pedagogical Process

As Freire argues, a liberating pedagogy, whether for underdogs, middledogs, or topdogs, should be based on problem-solving, challenging students and teachers together to examine the situation in which they live. Their work must not be confined to the solving of academic puzzles which fragment the world and fail to touch people's lives, but should deal with real human conditions in real contexts. And they should examine the realities critically, asking not only how things are but also asking how things should be. The continuing work is the posing of the problems of individuals in their relations with the world.¹²

A liberating pedagogy must take a form which is itself liberating. It should consist of dialogue. In a monologue, in which a teacher lectures to rather than talks with students there is a clear system of dominance, and both are dehumanized in the experience. In dialogue, not only with the teacher but also among the students themselves, both the students and the teacher are enriched.

Freire observes that dialogue cannot exist in the absence of a profound love for the world and for other people:

Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. It is thus necessarily the task of responsible Subjects and cannot exist in a relation of domination 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.¹³

Although Freire does not seem to recognize it, the role of love is even more critical to the pedagogy of middle class than to the pedagogy of the oppressed. In working with the oppressed, the problems that are posed to begin the dialogue are usually based on the troubles of individuals themselves. If they complain of being underpaid or sickly, they are asked to say why they think it is that they suffer so, and their peers are invited to comment on those views. Thus, the point of departure is the individual's problematic personal situation.

At times this approach can work with middle and topdogs too. It might be discovered that some students are worried about their job prospects, or about the future care of their parents, or about finding a way to travel abroad. It then becomes possible to investigate why these things are problematic. Is there someone doing things which cause these troubles? Are students creating their own obstacles? The explanations and critical analyses which the students develop can provide the opportunity for exploring the structures of society. The issues on which information is collected and critically analyzed may be selected on the basis of their personal concerns.

In dealing with people from the upper reaches of society, however, it may be that at the outset these people do not see themselves as having any serious problems. Then what can be the initial point of contact?

There seems to be only one feasible answer, that individuals should be invited to take up social problems even though they are not directly connected with their immediate personal concerns. Some people, for example, might show interest in the fact of widespread hunger and malnutrition, even though they themselves do not suffer from hunger. Of course such problems will not be taken as seriously as those which affect the individual directly. At the outset, the question may be taken up simply as another academic puzzle. This time, however, the individuals should be challenged to pursue it, not as a question to be glibly answered and discarded, but to be explored deeply through sustained critical reflection and dialogue with others. Where some individual's views are different from others', they should be asked to pursue those differences to find out why they exist.

This approach is not based on finding some way in which the middle class university student is oppressed. Rather, it relies on finding some way to arouse the student's sympathy, or even love, for others who are more directly hurt by the established social system. Creating a link to others in this way is not easy to accomplish, but this sort of approach would at least be true to the student's role and circumstances.

The core difficulty in the pedagogy of the middle class is in reaching an understanding that human interests should be shared, that we should participate in each other's fate. The point is not that our separate fates are intertwined by our sharing of the common Spaceship Earth. That is only a mechanical connection. Rather, the issue is shared feeling, feeling that your joy is my joy, and that even if I am safe, any harm which comes to you hurts me. That is love. As I have argued earlier:

We should be concerned with the fact that some are harmed by the existing global system for its own sake, and not simply for instrumental and narrowly selfish reasons. The concept "they" should become part of the concept "us." The most honest argument for working to benefit the disadvantaged is the altruistic one, the one by which virtue is an intrinsic reward and beyond that, real sacrifices are made. People should be able to live in dignity because they are people. No other reasons should be necessary.¹⁴

The dialoguing experience should itself be liberating for students. Even if inquiry is not at the outset an act of love, it can become that as a result of engagement with the issues and with the people who are affected most directly. Through this kind of work, students may come to see hunger in the world as part of their own situations. The love which dialogue requires may be released by that dialogue.

Objectives of Middle Class Pedagogy

Freire argues that the structure of dominance cannot possibly be broken from the top:

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. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both.¹⁵

Some feel that in terms of the ultimate goal of achieving a liberated society, any effort to educate topdogs can only be a waste of time. Indeed, showing them exactly how the system works would allow them to become even more effective oppressors.

There can be no dialogue between antagonists, no meeting between those whose interests are in polar opposition. Reconciliation cannot be achieved through communication alone, with no significant changes in the structure of social relations. My purpose here is not to try to find a way to establish dialogue across the chasm between oppressor and oppressed.

But just as there is often ambiguity in the position of the oppressed because of their internalization of the oppressor, so too can there be some ambiguity in the position of those at the top. It would be absurd to dismiss everyone in the top half of society as an absolute oppressor, at the polar extreme, and wholly beyond redemption. The challenge posed here is the middle class, in which there is some openness and for which there is some hope. They are worth the time.

With their interests and outlook being so vastly different, the middle class may never be capable of engaging in full dialogue with those at the bottom of society. It may be a mistake to try. The argument here is that the process of critical reflection and dialogue within the middle class can help its members to become more fully aware of the relationships between the upper and lower segments of society. The pedagogy of the oppressed is designed to give the dispossessed back their own voice, their word, so that they can speak. The task of the pedagogy of the

middle class is to help them to hear and to understand what the poor are saying, and thus to become more vulnerable to them.

Liberation certainly cannot be achieved through the pedagogy of the middle class, by itself. But it may be that a teacher of the middle class can do something to assure that his or her contribution is a force toward rather than against a greater humanity for all people. There are many sympathetic educators who will not, and probably should not, cut their ties to go to work directly with the oppressed. They would at best function awkwardly there. Rather than try to become something which they are not, they need to achieve some clarity as to how they can best use their talents in the times and places in which they are positioned. There must be some sense in which finding oneself before a classroom of typical university students can be seen as an opportunity.

A liberating pedagogy of the middle class can be initiated in the "free spaces" to be found within the existing system. Teachers complain about their stifling school systems, but too often fail to fully use the freedom they do have. The risks tend to be greatly exaggerated. Teachers must overcome the fear of freedom that they have learned if they are not to infect their students with that fear.

Of course, as that freedom is used, and students and teachers become more aware of the character of their society, that free space is likely to shrink. A successful pedagogy is dangerous to the teacher at the same time that it is dangerous to the system. The teacher simply must accept some risk. Rather than being grounds for withdrawal, the limits are the very reason for undertaking the pedagogy. The pedagogy must test and probe and stretch its own constraints (Freire's "limit acts") if it is, in itself, to be a lesson in the exercise of freedom.

NOTES

1. A good sampling of the literature on dominance among nations may be found in Charles K. Wilber (ed.), *The Political Economy of Development and Underdevelopment*, New York: Random House, 1973. A representative study of the way it works within nations is offered in William K. Tabb, *The Political Economy of the Black Ghetto*, New York: Random House, 1970. A comprehensive theoretical framework is suggested in Johan Galtung, "A Structural Theory of Imperialism," *Journal of Peace Research*, No. 2 (1971), pp. 81-117.
2. Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*, New York: Harper & Row, 1971. The problem of educational strategy raised here has also been examined in Magnus Haavelsrud, "Raising Consciousness Through a Global Community Curriculum," *Bulletin of Peace Proposals*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1974), pp. 274-279.
3. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Seabury Press, 1970; Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, Middlesex: Penguin, 1972 (published as a monograph by Harvard Educational Review in 1970); Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, New York: Seabury Press, 1973.

Also see David Millwood, "Conscientization 1: What's It All About?" and David Reed, "Conscientization 2: An Experience in Peru," both in *New Internationalist*, No. 16, June 1974. *Risk*, a quarterly published by the World Council of Churches, has published materials on and by both Illich and Freire in 1970 (No. 2 and No. 4) and in 1975 (No. 1). An opposing view is offered in John L. Elias, "A Critique of Paulo Freire's Revolutionary Theory," in *Cutting Edge: Journal of the Society for Educational Reconstruction*, Spring 1975, pp. 12-21. A broad variety of perspectives on Freire and a comprehensive bibliography are offered in Stanley Grabowski (ed.), *Paulo Freire: A Revolutionary Dilemma for the Adult*

Educator, Syracuse: Syracuse University Publications in Continuing Education and ERIC Clearinghouse, 1972.

The Institute of Cultural Action, IDAC, conducts research, organizes workshops, and publishes a series of IDAC Documents to develop and apply the political pedagogy based on conscientization. Their document titles include, for example, "The Liberation of Women," "Political Education: An Experience in Peru," and "Revolt in Repressive Society." IDAC's address is 27 chemin des Crets, 1218 Grand Saconnex, Geneva, Switzerland.

4. **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**, Foreword, pp. 12-13.
5. **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**, Foreword, pp. 14, 10.
6. A good explanation of the way in which our society is "rapidly making objects of most of us" may be found in James S. Coleman, **Power and the Structure of Society**, New York: W. W. Norton, 1974.
7. **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**, p. 83.
8. "Every prescription represents the imposition of one man's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the man prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness. Thus, the behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor." **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**, p. 31.
9. On myths, see **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**, pp. 135-136, 144.
10. A broad outline of actions which can be taken from near the top is presented in Tissa Balasuriya, **Development of the Poor Through the Civilising of the Rich**, Wellington, N.Z.: Wright & Carman (CORSO Informations Service), 1972.
On the problem of designing new social structures, see, for example, Saul Mendlovitz (ed.), **On the Creation of a Just World Order: Preferred Worlds for the 1990s**, New York: Free Press, 1975; or Louis Beres and Harry Targ (eds.), **Planning Alternative World Futures: Values, Methods, and Models**, New York: Praeger, 1975. The Beres and Targ volume includes an essay of mine on "Political Design."
11. "And each converted sinner saves the system from a much deeper conversion." Johan Galtung, "'The Limits to Growth' and Class Politics," **Journal of Peace Research**, No. 1-2, 1973, pp. 101-114.
12. **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**, p. 77.
13. **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**, pp. 77-78.
14. George Kent, "World Order Design: What Could Be More Practical?" **Peace and Change**, Vol. II, No. 3 (Fall 1974), pp. 3-9.
15. **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**, p. 28; also see p. 42.