

# Paulo Freire's Educational Thought of Dialogue and Its Implications for Teachers and Teaching

YI-HUANG SHIH<sup>1</sup>

*Ching Kuo Institute of Management and Health, Taiwan*

## Abstract

*Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator and theorist of critical pedagogy. Some thoughtful aspects of Freire's work have a particular significance and implication for contemporary education. This paper aims to explore Freire's educational thought of dialogue, and further illuminate its implications for teachers and teaching to broaden the new teaching vision. In order to complete the above purpose, this paper, firstly, will focus on the exploration, which is mainly concerned with life experiences of Freire, the social and philosophical background of educational thought of dialogue. Secondly, the meaning of dialogue is explored by the author. Thirdly, exploring Freire's educational thought of dialogue to make some suggestions for teacher and teaching, and broadening the new teaching vision. Based on the above implications on teachers and teaching which results from Freire's educational thought of dialogue, teachers and students, in the praxis of humanizing teaching, are able to raise their consciousness to critical consciousness, and they can become more fully human.*

## Introduction

Paulo Freire (September 19, 1921- May 2, 1997) was a Brazilian educator and theorist of critical pedagogy. Over the years, the thought and work of Freire have spread from the North East of Brazil to an entire continent, and have made a profound impact not only in the field of education but also in the overall struggle for national development (Shaul, 2000:29). In fact, Freire's place in history is the most significant educator in the world during the 20th century. Freire is seen as a new kind of intellectual, "organic" in the words of Gramsci (Gadotti,1994:xxii), and his thought represents the response of a creative mind and sensitive conscience to the extraordinary misery and suffering of the oppressed around him (Shaul, 2000:30). In August 1986, the *New York Times* published an article which stressed the importance of Freire in the organization of various educational system (Gadotti,1994:xxii-xxiii).

Education, which is a valuable and meaningful activity, should cultivate the critical consciousness of students, and represent students' subjectivity. As to critical consciousness, which is the heart of Freire's unique view of education. As Goulet (1997:vii) pointed out :

No contemporary writer more persistently explores the many dimensions of critical consciousness than Paulo Freire. Freire never tires of looking for new forms of critical consciousness and unearthing new links between oppression in a variety of settings and the liberating effects of "conscientização."The unifying thread in his work is critical consciousness as the motor of cultural emancipation.

According to the above description, we can realize that Freire paid much attention to develop a critical consciousness, and thought how to promote people's critical consciousness to liberate themselves. Freire stressed the cultivation of critical consciousness is the dialogue between teachers and students in the teaching setting. Especially, the dialogue between teachers and students can enlighten their subjectivity. Freire is mainly concerned with the educational means of freeing people from the bondage of the culture of silence (Taylor,1993:1). For the reason, the exploration of Freire's educational thought of dialogue, which can result in some implications for teachers and teaching, and raise students-teachers' consciousness to critical consciousness. In addition, it can lead to the humanizing teaching, and broaden the new teaching vision.

## **The background of educational thought of dialogue**

As to the background of educational thought of dialogue, this essay, firstly, will focus on the exploration, which is mainly concerned with life experiences of Freire. Secondly, the social and philosophical background of educational thought of dialogue is explored.

### Freire's life experiences

Freire was born in Recife, North-east Brazil, on 19 September 1921. He was one of several children in an established middle-class family (Taylor,1993:14). Freire became familiar with poverty and hunger during the Great Depression of the 1930s. In 1931 the family moved to the less expensive city of Jaboatão dos Guararapes, and in 1933 his father died. In school he ended up four grades behind, and his social life revolved around playing football with other poor children, from whom he learned a great deal. These experiences would shape his concerns for the poor and would help to construct his particular educational viewpoint. In addition, Freire's parents play an important role in his early period. Freire speaks gently and lovingly of his father, Joaquim Themistocles Freire, and of his mother, Edeltrudes Neves Freire. It was they, he says, who by example and love taught him to prize dialogue and to respect the choices of others (Collins,1977:3). Consequently, the educational thought of dialogue is developed under the influence of life experiences.

### The social background of Brazil

The social condition, which Freire lived in Brazil, didn't allow the poor to have an education. The form of government was an autocratic leadership style. Moreover, Freire stated that poverty and hunger severely affected his ability to learn. This influenced his decision to dedicate his life to improving the lives of the poor. Freire's revolutionary aim "to transform what Frantz Fanon terms 'the wretched of the earth' from 'being for others' to 'beings for themselves (Macedo, 2000:25).'"

## **The Exploration into educational thought of dialogue**

In Freire's moral philosophy, praxis and dialogue are closely related: genuine dialogue represents a form of humanizing praxis. Dialogue is "the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world" (Roberts,2000:44). As to the exploration into Freire's educational thought of dialogue, this essay, firstly, explores the constitutive elements of dialogue. Second, the criterions of dialogue are explored.

### The constitutive elements of dialogue

The constitutive elements of dialogue are illustrated as follows:

1. Each one have the right of speaking words

Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming — between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them (Freire,2000:88). In addition, anti-dialogue does not communicate (Freire,1997a:46).

2. Dialogue cannot be the act of one person's "depositing" ideas in another

Dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be the act of one person's "depositing" ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants (Freire,2000:88-89). In this way, dialogue cannot become the act of domination, and form a challenge to domination.

3. Dialogue is not a hostile and polemical argument

Dialogue is not a hostile and polemical argument between those who are committed neither to the naming of the world, nor to the search for truth, but rather to the imposition of their own truth. Because dialogue is an

encounter among women and men who name the world, it must not be a situation where some name on behalf of others (Freire, 2000:89).

#### The criterion of dialogue

Education must be democratic and dialogical. Freire emphasizes the importance of dialogue between teachers and students. As to the criteria of dialogue are illustrated as follows:

##### 1. Love

Love is an act of courage, not of fear. Love is commitment to others. In addition, love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. Dialogue cannot exist in the absence of a profound love (Freire, 2000:88-89), and must involve a “love” of the world and of other human beings (Roberts, 2000:44).

##### 2. Humility

Dialogue cannot exist without humility. The naming of the world, through which people constantly re-create that world, cannot be an act of arrogance. Dialogue, as the encounter of those addressed to the common task of learning and acting, is broken if the parties (or one of them) lack humility (Freire, 2000:89).

##### 3. Faith

Dialogue is nourished by faith (Freire,1997a:45). Faith in the ability of others to “name the world,” together with trust between participants, and a hope that dehumanization can be overcome (Roberts, 2000:44). Without this faith in people, dialogue is a farce which inevitably degenerates into paternalistic manipulation (Freire, 2000:91).

##### 4. Hope

Hope, as an ontological need, demands an anchoring in practice. As an ontological need, hope needs practice in order to become historical concreteness (Freire,1994:9). Further speaking, from the point of view of human condition, hope is an essential component and not an intruder (Freire,1998:69). Hope is the matrix of dialogue (Freire,1997a:45).

Hope, as it happens, is so important for our existence (Freire,1994:9). Hope expressed in action (Freire,1992:24). The coherently democratic and competent teacher who is full of life and hope for a better world (Freire,1998:69).

##### 5. Humor

Dialogue is not to invade, not to manipulate, not to “make slogans (Freire, 1997a:115).” However, dialogue will be enriched by humor. Humor is the matrix of dialogue. Freire used humor a lot in his experiences in Brazil thirty years ago, in adult literacy. Freire never used irony, but humor. For Freire, irony reveals a lack of security. Sarcasm betrays an insecurity in the speaker. Humor also unveils reality with such illumination! We should use it because of this (Freire, 1997a:45;Shor & Freire, 1987:161).

##### 6. Silence

In dialogue, one has the right to be silent (Shor & Freire,1987:102). The importance of silence in the context of communication is fundamental. On the one hand, it affords me space while listening to the verbal communication of another person and allows me to enter into the internal rhythm of the speaker’s thought and experience that rhythm as language (Freire,1998:104).

##### 7. Critical thinking

Freire thought that imagination, guessing, intuition, cannot be dichotomized from critical thinking (Shor & Freire, 1987:185). Dialogue creates a critical attitude (Freire, 1997a:45).

True dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking — thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity (Freire, 2000:92).

Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education (Freire, 2000:92-93).

## **Implications for Teachers and Teaching**

The liberatory teacher who makes an invitation to the students for transformation, who teaches in a dialogical way instead of an authoritarian way (Shor & Freire, 1987:133). By dialogue, people can transform and create their lifeworld, and raise their critical consciousness. This essay aims to explore Paulo Freire's educational thought of dialogue, and further illuminate its implications for teachers and teaching. The implications are illustrated as follows:

### Practicing the love-based teaching

Freire (1993:97) pointed out:

The more you are loved and you love, the more you can love. The less you are loved and love, the less you can love.

According to Freire's illustration, teachers should practice the love-based teaching, and students are loved in the climate of love. Teachers liberate students from the oppressive teaching reality that crushes them. The love will be nourished, and the true dialogue will be developed between teachers and students. Only by abolishing the situation of oppression is it possible to restore the love which that situation made possible. If I do not love the world — If I do not love life — If I do not love people — I cannot enter into dialogue (Freire, 2000:90).

### Developing the humility-based teaching

Interpersonal dialogue is important, and people in dialogue can recreate themselves. Dialogue itself is a create and recreate process (Shor & Freire,1987). If men and women who lack humility (or have lost it) cannot come to the people, cannot be their partners in naming the world (Freire, 2000:90). So, if teachers want to come to students, can be their partners in naming the world. Dialogue is important for them, and they must realize humility is the matrix of dialogue (Freire,1997a:45). From the above perspective, humility is so great for teacher-student in teaching.

Teachers require an intense faith in students, faith in their vocation to be more fully human Dialogue further requires an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and recreate, faith in their vocation to be more fully human (which is not the privilege of an elite, but the birthright of all). Faith in people is an a priori requirement for dialogue (Freire,2000:90). In teaching, teachers require an intense faith in students, faith in their vocation to be more fully human. Basically, the aim of education is to cultivate students, and thereby become more fully human.

### Nourishing the hope-centered teaching

Hope is the matrix of dialogue (Freire,1997a:45). In dialogue, if students have no hope then they won't have any inspiration. Or if they lacked hope, without which they do not struggle.

Not yet can dialogue exist without hope. Hope is rooted in men's incompleteness, from which they move out in constant search — a search which can be carried out only in communication with others. Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it. The dehumanization resulting from an unjust order is not a cause for despair but for hope (Freire,2000:91).

As the encounter of women and men seeking to be more fully human, dialogue cannot be carried on in a climate of hopelessness (Freire,2000:91). In other words, the teaching climate of hope is important for teachers. Teachers should nourish the hope-centered teaching.

### Enriching the humor-based teaching

A humorist is not just a smile-maker, someone who makes people laugh. No! Even sometimes, good humor leads you not to smile or laugh. But, on the contrary, good humor does not make you laugh as much as it makes you seriously think about the material. Humor is Chaplin (Shor & Freire, 1987:162). The sense of humor makes you laugh at yourself. This for me is strongly necessary for an educator in the dialogical perspective (Shor & Freire,1987:162). Besides, humor is richer and more demanding than joking. Humor

helps make the learning moment “real,” a quality that can reverse the artificial school experience (Shor & Freire,1987:162). That is to say, teachers should enrich the humor-based teaching

#### Developing the silence-based teaching

The world of human beings is a world of communication (Freire,1997a:137). When people avoid encounter they become inflexible and treat others as mere objects; instead of nurturing life, they kill life; instead of searching for life, they flee from it. And these are oppressor characteristics (Freire, 2000:129). On the other hand, silence makes it possible for the speaker who is really committed to the experience of communication rather than to the simple transmission of information to hear the question, the doubt, the creativity of the person who is listening. Without this, communication withers (Freire, 1998:104). So teachers should develop the silence-based teaching

#### Constructing the ability of critical thinking of students in teaching.

As to education, which is communication and dialogue (Freire, 1997a:139). With regards to dialogue, which implies a critical posture (Freire, 1997b:100). True dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking (Freire, 2000:92). So teachers are encouraged or required to develop their students’ critical thinking. Namely, teachers should construct the ability of critical thinking of students in teaching.

### Conclusion

Dialogue as a human phenomenon (Freire, 2000:87). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire illuminated the importance of dialogical education. This essay aims to explore Freire’s educational thought of dialogue, and further illuminate its implications for teachers and teaching to broaden the new teaching vision. The implications can be drawn:

1. Practicing the love-based teaching.
2. Developing the humility-based teaching.
3. Teachers require an intense faith in students, faith in their vocation to be more fully human.
4. Nourishing the hope-centered teaching.
5. Enriching the humor-based teaching.
6. Developing the silence-based teaching
7. Constructing the ability of critical thinking of students in teaching.

Finally, based on the above implications on teachers and teaching which results from Freire’s educational thought of dialogue, teachers and students, in the praxis of humanizing teaching, are able to raise their consciousness to critical consciousness, and they can become more fully human.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Department of Early Childhood Educare, Ching Kuo Institute of Management and Health, No. 336, Fu Hsin Rd., Keelung, Taiwan. Email:shih123@ems.cku.edu.tw; shih262@gmail.com

### References

- Collins, D. E. (1977), *Paulo Freire: His life, works, and thought*, (New York, Paulist Press).
- Freire, P. (1993), *Pedagogy of the city*, (New York, The Continuum).
- Freire, P. (1994), *Pedagogy of hope*, (New York, The Continuum).
- Freire, P. (1997), *Education for critical consciousness*, (New York, The Continuum).
- Freire, P. (1998), *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage*, (New York, Rowman & Littlefield).
- Freire, P. (2000), *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, (New York, The Continuum).
- Gadotti, M. (1994), *Reading Paulo Freire: His life and work*, (Albany, NY, State University of New York Press).
- Goulet, D. (1997), Introduction, in P. Freire (ed.), *Education for critical consciousness*, (pp.vii-xiv), (New York, The Continuum).
- Macedo, D. (2000), Foreword, in P. Freire (ed.), *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, (pp.11-27), (New York, The Continuum).

Roberts, P. (2000), *Education, literacy, and humanization: Exploring the work of Paulo Freire*, (London, Bergin & Garvey).

Shaul, R. (2000), Foreword, in P. Freire (ed.), *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, (pp.11-16), (New York, The Continuum).

Taylor, P. A. (1993), *The texts of Paulo Freire*, (Philadelphia, Open University Press).