

## Paulo Freire Critical Pedagogy and its Implications in Curriculum Planning

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### Abstract

This study tries to investigate Paulo Freire critical pedagogy and its implications in curriculum planning. Freire critical pedagogy, which has been influenced by Frankfurt School, has introduced a new approach in contemporary educational issues. Freire lays a particular emphasis on the role of critical understanding to remove deprivation and injustice from societies. He also believes that development of an educational plan, which is in line with the redeemer education, can pave the hopeful way for a basic evolution in education. The present study, first reviews the history of Freire critical pedagogy, then it introduces philosophical fundamentals of Freire critical pedagogy, and explains some principles of curriculum planning based on Freire critical pedagogy. There are several important principles in Freire curriculum planning. These include attention to traditional and indigenous context of society, coaches' and students' participation in educational plan development, attention to the political position of education in curriculum planning, the role of cultural segments in curriculum planning, and the direct relationship between curriculum planning and economic production process. Also educating adults with focus on giving education to emancipatory people is considered as one of the main priorities of Freire's curriculum planning.

**Keywords:** educational planning, critical pedagogy, emancipatory education, adult education, Paulo Freire

### 1. Introduction

Critical pedagogy is a reflection of Frankfurt school's ideas and principles in education. Critical theory was initially started in the Europe and then was developed by theorists such as Habermas, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Gramsci. The emergence of Frankfurt school is marked with the formation of 'the institute of social researches' in Frankfurt University in 1923. The focus of the institutes was on historical and scientific aspects rather than political issues. During Horkheimer's management in 1930, he had more concentration on the relationship between social philosophy, science and especially interdisciplinary researches. The formative roots of Frankfurt school had been associated with the special events of 1950s. The Emergence of Fascism and Stalinism in Europe, annihilation of labor class in culture and capitalist ideology, stagnation of laborer movements, and the government's domination over economy are the main conditions that contributed to the development of critical thinking. The founders of Frankfurt school set to review Marxism and analyze the superficial layers of culture. To reconstruct Marxism, they approached Hegelian's Marxist ideologies and on the other hand they combined Marxism with Freud's psychoanalytic perspectives. By evaluating positivism and scientism, they practically criticized the existing culture, ideology, and instrumental reason available in the modern societies. The problems emanating from these situations are racial inequities, lack of equal social opportunities for all, gender inequality, fall of the identities in Europe and America in 1960s and 1970s. These were the main concerns of the critical thinkers. In the next steps, critical theory criticizes and evaluates other areas of human sciences such as political sciences, international relations, and education. In Latin America, this perception in the field of education earned enormous support from Illich's and Freire's critical pedagogy. Like Frankfurt school, Critical pedagogy attempts social reformation. Based on the critical pedagogy, schools should be considered as places for social change and evolution. Schools should not only foster critical thinking to the students, but they should also teach them how to change their surrounding environments.

The purpose of critical pedagogy is to enrich students' overall life. In such an approach, students are given the chance to challenge others' accepted hypotheses and also to explore the relationship between their society and the content of their educational environment. Through these opportunities students can comprehend their position in the society and they can take positive steps to amend their society and ultimately eliminate problems, inequities and oppressions in their future life. Critical pedagogy helps students be empowered with and capable of achieving self-awareness and self-actualization to transform their inappropriate conditions into a better one. For this purpose, traditional methods of education are challenged and critical thinking-based education and dialogue and learning-based cooperation education will be replaced with the traditional methods.

Among different approaches of critical pedagogy, Freire's thoughts have played a remarkable role in the development of critical pedagogy. When the social crisis had been prevailing in Latin America, Freire could challenge the inhuman policies of those dominant governments. Through adults' education, he also attempted to

awaken the oppressed people to their human rights. This is why Freire's educational idea of is marked as "emancipatory education."

We have briefly introduced the historical roots of Freire's theoretical framework of critical pedagogy. Now we tend to have a glance on the formative process of Freire's thought and to reexamine and reevaluate some of his fundamental principles in critical pedagogy in the area of curriculum planning.

### **Freire critical pedagogy**

Freire's childhood experience dates back when he had to live among poor children and later when he grew up he had to work among the deprived laborers. These experiences motivated him that ignorance, illiteracy and silence culture are the outcomes of economic conditions, social and political trends that have been prevalent in the society. From Freire's perspective, educational system is one of the main instruments of maintaining silence culture. His new look at the concept of learning, introduces him as a pioneer in critical education and as a humanitarian coach to the world. As a spokesperson, he tried to prove this fact that "it is possible to free people from silence culture and the trap of ignorance only through education and awareness (Nayestani, 2009).

From his perspective, the basic purpose of education is to achieve critical awareness which enables individuals to pave the ground for their progress. In such a progress, concepts such as gender, age, race, and social and political limitations are not taken into account. Indeed, in contrary to those people, who grew up in a silence culture and assume that social, political, and economic structures are sustainable and fixed and he/she cannot overcome them, such person can rely on his/her own capabilities and overcome his/ her surrounding structures.

Freire stresses on the belief that individuals should not see their surrounding structures as a fixed reality where there is no hope to escape from it. But, they should know that there is always a possibility of change to their conditions. In fact, he tries to outline a relationship based on dialogue among individuals that can foster a critical and active atmosphere. This will help education to be a stimulant and progressive process. (Fredrick et al., 2009: 1). This is why that some groups have claimed that Freire's educational thoughts are politically motivated. Freire's revolutionary educational system demands both students and teachers to do their best to modify and change the situations they feel discriminatory and unjust. (Freire, 1984: 34). He believes that to emancipate poor people from oppressors' domination, there needs a gradual cultural revolution, not a revolution that just culminates in a mere rhetorical speech, violence and destructions. But they should practice reform in the concerned organizations. Therefore, the first organization that should undergo such modification and change is the educational system. The cultural revolution is the necessary continuation of the same cultural planning that can be achieved via critical dialogues in schools. (Freire, 1978: 192-193). As a result, his main notion of classroom is to invite students to think critically about the nature of the subject under discussion, the society's prevalent ideas and the process of information transfer in the society, instead of the mere impart of skills, knowledge and truths. (McLaren et al., 2004: 24).

It can be said that the focus of Freire critical pedagogy on critical thinking is based on the objective realities in the individual's life. Unlike other methods, the posed-problem method has been introduced by Freire requires exchange of thoughts and beliefs through dialogue in which both teachers and students have critical cooperation in research. As a result, they will be motivated to think critically about their life. Finally, the process results in Praxis which is the final purpose of education from Freire perspective (as cited in Pozter, 1993: 38). He believes that consciousness is the sign of progress and development. Such a progress and development is the main outcome of good critical education plan. Such a plan is consist with historical, cultural, and political conditions of the society. Development of critical consciousness can be done through a process in which the learners start with mere obedient and finally achieve critical consciousness.

Monologue-based education separates teacher and students and provides rare opportunities for creating meaningful dialogue among them. In such a method, students have not sufficient opportunities for asking questions and thinking about their learned contents. Indeed, their singular function is to memorize contents. Monologue-based education prevents students from any thinking, exploring, and self-actualizing opportunities. Indeed, following monologue method damages teaching-learning process in the educational system and also prevent from social progress and critical thinking among students. Freire imagines the negative image of such educational system as following:

- Teacher educates students and then they are educated.
- Teacher knows anything and students do not know nothing.
- Teacher thinks and students memorize contents.
- Teacher speaks and students listen modestly.
- Teacher develops rules and students command them.
- Teacher selects educational contents and imposes his/her selected contents and students command them.
- Teacher act and students copy his/her actions.
- Teacher selects educational contents and students adapt themselves with these contents.

- Teacher is the main subject of learning process, but students are things (Freire, 1972), (Neyestani, 2009). Freire (1970) indicates nature of emancipatory education based on the dialogue. He differentiates traditional education from dialogue-based and problem-based education. He also stresses that traditional education is different from dialogue. In other words, problem-based dialogue necessitates dialogue for recognizing reality. In order to avoid traditional education, dialogue between student and teacher is a necessary issue. In such a dialogue, students are involved in social conditions, phenomenon, and conditions of life and criticize their situation rather than involving in mere scientific issues. They also attempt to change their life. Problem-based education pays attention to the existing life of student and concentrates on the surrounding social phenomenon. The outcome of Freire's problem-based education is educating people who achieve vision, recognition, and abilities of changing their life.

### **Curriculum planning from Freire's perspective**

From Freire's perspective, curriculum planning is a fully people-oriented process in which starting point is people and their expectations and wants. He believes that curriculum planning is an ongoing process which can be done through mutual participation if teachers and students. Based on this perspective, curriculum planning is not upward-down process and all of the people who are involved in the education and learning process should play their role in educational plan in the best manner.

In this perspective, both teachers and students have different roles. Bartlett (2005) believes that in Freire's perspective teacher and students able to exchange their roles with each other. But this does not mean that teacher and students are at same level. This means that students are considered as teachers are important in curriculum planning. In Freire's curriculum planning perspective, teaching is an instrument for increasing people's critical consciousness that their mental progress is prevented because of political and social conditions of the society (Shim, 2008: 516). In this regard, conferment of critical consciousness is considered as starting point of curriculum planning process in Freire's perspective. It is possible to achieve such a consciousness through reviewing important principles of curriculum planning.

### **Fundamental principles of curriculum planning from Freire's perspective**

#### **1. Attention to traditional and indigenous context of society**

Freire (1984) indicates that it is necessary to concentrate rural reality in order adapt education with realities of country. Indeed, he has attempted to focus educational planning on this fact that any curriculum planning should be based on existing realities of the low classes of society. It is observed in many cases that educational plan is regulated based on the needs and wants of higher classes of society. It is the main effective factor on developing gap between social classes. This is why that Freire (1989) believes common educational plans, which are not based local conditions, cannot result in deep condition. In addition, when designers of educational contents consider minorities' values in their plans, the educational plans will not equivalent for all social classes (Raghfar, 1980: 22).

#### **2. Coaches and students' mutual participation in educational plan development**

Based on Freire curriculum planning, elites and senior managers are not the singular officers of educational plan development, but curriculum planning is a participative process in which all educational officers and managers are involved in it. Since Freire curriculum plan derived from learners' experiences and their life realities, educational plans should be developed based on the help of professors, experts, parents, teachers, local groups, and needs and realities of social life (Dinarvand and Imani, 2008: 159). In this regard, Freire (2007) focuses on the role of parents and students councils in schools decisions and develops a democratic climate in educational system. He was head of educational assistance of Saopaulo and created many diversities in educational plan and attempted to organize workgroups through movement to reorient the curriculum. He attempted to decentralize central authority and reinforce schools autonomous in developing curriculum and educational plans based on the social-critical issues (McLaren and Leonard, 2005: 3-4).

According to Freire, curriculum planning, in which control has an upward-down process, is an instrument for imposing dominated culture to new generation. So he believes that any education based on the existing standards, in which everything is predetermined, results in bureaucracy in education rather democracy in it (Freire and Faundez, 1989: 41). Freire stresses that students are not mere containers that teachers attempt to full them. In their words, he believes that there is not anybody who knows all things or does not know anything. This is why that he suggests that students' experiences should be used as the main source of curriculum contents (Bartlett, 2005: 347). However, the role of intellectuals is not decreased in developing educational plan, but they should be participated in developing educational plans and revolutionary process through critical dialogue and thinking about issues and division of labor. Gyro (2005) considers such intellectuals as transformative intellectuals. It is should be noted that transformative intellectuals are a group of people who consider themselves as people have qualification of development for all poor people. But they consider themselves as others that are deprived from any rights.

### **3. Attention to the political position of education in curriculum planning**

It is a widely-accepted rule that the most important characteristic of Freire in educational area is his attention on the political aspect of education. He believes that education is a political activity that its mission is to analyze the social relations. Such analysis results in political selection. In other words, actual education develops people's political consciousness. According to Freire's perspective, such questions "what", "why", "how", "for whom", and "for what purpose" have critical role in any educational effort. This is why that in critical education, coach has to ask such questions and then attempt to answer it along with students (Danilova et al., 2004: 39).

According to Freire, education may either act as an instrument for maintaining present condition or acts as an instrument for freedom practice. If it plays the first role, its function is to adapt young generation with existing system. But in the second role, the function of education is to criticize the differences between male and female. For this reason, Freire considers political aspects as a big discovery in his *A Pedagogy for Liberation* book (Shore and Freire, 1987: 46).

### **4. The role of cultural segments in curriculum planning**

As Gyro (2005) indicates, in critical pedagogy perspective, literacy is considered as the main principle for a set of cultural efforts that its purpose is to achieve freedom. Indeed, cultural segments play an important role in teaching-learning process. In cultural segments, students change educational method and curriculum contents radically. Hooley (2009) refers to indigenous learning and Paulo performance in creating a new educational structure. He also believes that Freire has attempted to recognize important issues of daily life by which examine and analyze educational contents.

### **5. Direct relationship between curriculum planning and economic production process**

Based on Freire curriculum planning, process of knowledge expansion and development is done with practical participation in work and economic effort simultaneously. In other words, when educational quantitative and qualitative development based on the critical consciousness can be effective in comprehensive development and expansion of individual and collective life that educational planners correlate school and educational plans to job and economic production process. In modern Freire education, primary school, high school, and university should not be separated from factory, workshop, or champ. Even when education is done outside the factory or champ, it is should not be considered better than practical efforts (Freire, 1984: 125-126). In this regard, Freire attempts to clarify the important role of education in making economic purposes more tangible.

### **6. The importance of adults education**

Freire indicates that if the poor people cannot be emancipated from silence culture, there will not any path to emancipate them from social and political slavery. In this regard, he focused on adults education seriously and introduced many comprehensive literacy plans for informing this class which has a considerable effect on development of adults public consciousness in developing countries such as Brazil. Based on Freire adults education, literacy is not valuable unless it results in critical perception in social areas. In addition, such an education is a favorable form of education for authorities. It is very important in the adults education that learners understand and make their understanding more deeper in critical analysis (Freire, 1984: 33-34).

### **7. Attention to oppressed people education**

Essentially, Freire education is focused on this purpose that it is necessary to attempt to educate oppressed people. He believes that oppressed people have not any critical thinking power because of different reasons. This is why that he attempted to encourage them toward critical thinking through different methods. On the other hand, maintenance of existing conditions by dominated system implies that any effort to emancipation should be eliminated. For this purpose, their existing condition is a part of their natural life (Mansornejhad, 2006: 119). Freire suggested different measures for society in which silence culture is dominated and oppressed people are prevented from their rights. Knowledge of these measures is necessary for curriculum planning. These include:

- **Critical consciousness of massification:** as indicated previously, dominated elite group attempt to make people obedient because of different reasons. It is a function Freire considers as one of the causes of massification. In addition to elites group, mass production is the industrial societies is another effective factors in human massification. Indeed, mass production limits employees' expertise and forces them to behave mechanically and thereby make them to inactive, fear, and surface-oriented human. Freire suggests critical education and then attempts to overcome this problem through critical thinking method. He believes that critical consciousness can be used for eliminating massification (Brodn and Mayo, 1999: 195). He points out that critical discussion is a sensible sample of active participation of oppressed people in education. He introduces two types of the discussion in explaining this approach. The first is dialogue which is predicted by elites and dominated group and has a vertical structure. In such a dialogue, information process is upward-down and people are forced to listen and obey. The second dialogue is known as original dialogue in which a horizontal relationship is based on love, courtesy, faith, hope, and confidence. According to Freire, the first excellence of such a dialogue is that honors learner (Gadotti, 1994: 50). In such a dialogue, there is mutual relationship between learner and coach in which both learner and coach attempt to learn from each other. In other words,

neither coach is not considered singular owner of knowledge nor learner as a mere unaware.

- **Education based on problem and narrative education:** according to Freire, education is not only stash of information and knowledge in mind. But, learning implies that a learner is a doer in world. In other words, Freire attempts to change oppressed people from object to subject. He suggests different solutions for this purpose that posed-problem is one of them. John Dioei suggested this method for passing from traditional education to problem-solving education. In this regard, Freire refers to problem-solving as a static process in education which does not results in critical consciousness development. The reason is that in problem-solving education, learning is a one-way process in which vertical relationship between coach and learner limits simultaneous development of coach and student. But in Freire educational approach, people are not considered as perfect subject and have ontological vocation for being perfect. For this reason, teachers and students are not perfect subject and are able to learn and teach a large part of knowledge in education process. But it does not means that teacher forget his/her important role as director of learning process. Teachers should challenge existing values so much that provide a discussion and dialogue environment based on critical thinking in which all people able to achieve a clear vision of realities. For this purpose, creation of a democratic climate in schools is one of the main principles of Freire in curriculum planning (November et al., 2009: 6).

Although learning process is an individual one-way process in solving problem, but students can pose and solve problem simultaneously. Problem-posing can be done through dialogue. In such a condition, mere participation of teacher is not sufficient and it is necessary to achieve mutual dialogue between teacher and learners. In such a condition, the role of teacher is to provide a climate in which learning conditions is provided through participation (Blackburn, 2000). For example, Freire believes that it is not sufficient to read contents. Teacher should ask questions such as “how”, “what”, “when”, “when” and so on. As a result, Freire critical pedagogy is focused on the application of dialogue in posing problem. In such an approach, teacher not only learns students, but also he/she learns something. All in all, the following approaches refer to the dialogues in Freire critical pedagogy:

- Education starts with social issues and students’ life conditions.
- Education attempts to emancipate students from unfavorable life and social conditions.
- Students are the main core of education and education cannot be done without their participation.
- The role of teacher in dialogue-based education is to involve students in social issues.
- Facing situation, recognizing problem seriously, developing hypotheses for solving problem, and finding a solution for emancipating students from problems are the most important educational approaches in emancipative dialogue. It can be said that classroom dialogue in emancipative approach includes challenging questions and its purpose is exploring problems which should be tested. A dialogue which is done in educational areas usually effective on development of people’s awareness of social inequities and challenges. Indeed, social dialogues focus on especial problems or crisis which is common among social and political groups. The purpose of such a dialogue is to discuss about different reasons and perspectives so much that recognition of rational perspectives and causes is possible.

### 3. Conclusion

Curriculum planning is one of the main necessities of development and revolution of educational systems in every country for maintaining dynamic and efficiency. This is why that knowledge of different approaches of curriculum planning can be effective on the development and improvement of curriculum planning area. In this regard, the authors of this study were determined to review some aspects of curriculum planning based on the emancipative education of Freire. From both theoretical and practical perspectives, Freire is one of the most famous and effective authors in terms of critical education. He rejects traditional methods education and introduces a revolutionary method in changing educational structure and system and thereby curriculum planning. Based on his perspective to curriculum planning, student is considered as the main core of education and has active participation in selecting educational contents. All in all, Freire curriculum planning is a horizontal process in which all of the participants in educational planning (such teachers, students, and even parents) are involved in curriculum planning. The main purpose of Freire is emancipative, as his curriculum planning should has correspondence with traditional and cultural context. Based on his perspective to curriculum planning, school cannot be separated from economy and productive institutes. In this perspective, two groups of adults and oppressed people are focused more than others. However, main principles of different types of educational planning are somewhat similar and their main difference is in educational methods. All in all, the considerable effect of Freire on the curriculum planning can be found in creation of appropriate context for students, parents, and others’ participation in educational issues. In this regard, curriculum planning has a horizontal aspect in which all people have to participate in curriculum planning process. Although social conditions of Freire’s life are different from today’s conditions, but his focus on adults education is attended in the present macro educational planning. This approach can be effective for developing countries in which formal education is

focused on young generation rather than adults.

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