**Paulo Freire: Pedagogy of the Oppressed**

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator, philosopher and practitioner who has been a major influence on adult education and especially on the literacy movement throughout the world. His most influential book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* emerged during a time of political and social upheaval in his own country in the 1960s.

In the course of his work on teaching literacy to people in his country living in desperate poverty, Freire concluded that it is not enough to teach oppressed people to read: rather, it is essential to foster learners’ ability to reflect on the world around them, to analyse their own problems, to pose questions and to take action.

**Conscientisation:** this approach to learning leads to a gradual process of consciousness-raising that is the whole purpose and goal of education. For this, the oppressed must liberate their thinking and become conscious of themselves as fully human actors in their own lives. A first step is in recognising that they are oppressed and that this is not a natural, inevitable condition. Understanding their oppressed state leads them to an awareness that they have the capacity to liberate themselves and eventually, to take action.

**Dialogue:** This understanding is fostered through dialogue. For Freire, learning is not something that teachers do to, students or even for them. Rather, their role is to engage the people’s critical consciousness. Through dialogue between teachers and students, the oppressed become fully aware of their condition and of themselves and their own humanity. Dialogue generates reflection which is intertwined with action that can transform their world.

**Banking concept of education:** Freire analyses many traditional assumptions about education and shows how certain values which underpin educational practices have the opposite effect to consciousness-raising. Traditional education views learners as empty vessels, which the all-knowing educator fills with their knowledge. Knowledge is thus transferred from the powerful educator to the weak and helpless learner.

Freire attacks this ‘Banking concept of education’: learners are not empty vessels and to view them as such is to dehumanise and oppress them further. The educator is not the font of all wisdom. Nor is knowledge a ‘thing’ that can be passed over from one human being to another. Knowledge is made, in the dialogue between teacher and learner.

Although rooted in social and political action, Freire’s thinking had also had very significant implications for the practice of education throughout the world, both in developing countries and in Europe. Some adult education programmes in Europe have consciously used Freire’s concepts and practices in urban settings in developed countries. As well as this, these methods and ideas have become very significant in the adult literacy movement worldwide.

*Freire, P. (1967) Pedagogy of the Oppressed.*