

Freire Glossary

Note: The following glossary is quoted in full thanks to Tom Heaney.

Alienation:

The term is derived from Marx and refers to the domination of people by power elites, material constraints, political structures, and thought itself. Ultimately, alienation is the separation of humankind from its labor. It interferes with the production of authentic culture (see Culture). It is affected by any process which limits a person's power to know the world, and thus dehumanizes the world itself (see Humanization).

"Banking" Education:

In the "banking" method of education passive learners receive deposits of pre-selected, ready-made knowledge. The learner's mind is seen as an empty vault into which the riches of approved knowledge are placed. This approach is also referred to as "digestive" and as "narrational" education.

Codification:

A codification is a representation of the learner's day-to-day situations. It can be a photograph, a drawing, or even a word. As a representation, the photograph or word is an abstraction which permits dialogue leading to an analysis of the concrete reality represented. Codifications mediate between reality and its theoretical context, as well as between educators and learners who together seek to unveil the meanings of their existence.

Conscientization:

Conscientization is an ongoing process by which a learner moves toward critical consciousness). This process is the heart of liberatory education. It differs from "consciousness raising" in that the latter frequently involves "banking" education--the transmission of pre-selected knowledge. Conscientization means breaking through prevailing mythologies to reach new levels of awareness--in particular, awareness of oppression, being an "object" in a world where only "subjects" have power. The process of conscientization involves identifying contradictions in experience through dialogue and becoming a "subject" with other oppressed subjects--that is, becoming part of the process of changing the world.

Collegiality:

Collegiality is a form of social organization based on shared and equal participation of all its members. It contrasts with a hierarchical, pyramidal structure, and is represented by a series of concentric circles. Authority resides in the center-most circle, not over the others, but equidistant from each, so that authority can listen and reflect the consensus of the whole (see Consensual Governance). A collegial model has been frequently associated with liberatory education programs .

Consensual Governance:

Decision-making by consensus requires the discussion of issues until all are in agreement-- this in contrast to decision-making by voting in which rule by the majority is imposed on those who dissent. Decision-making by consensus is time consuming and difficult. At times, consensus represents the willingness of a minority "not to oppose" a decision, but the ultimate benefit of this model is that no one is excluded by a decision. This model is characteristic of participatory democracies as occasionally exemplified in U.S. history by the town hall meeting.

Critical Consciousness:

This is a level of consciousness characterized by depth in the interpretation of problems, through testing one's own findings with openness to revision, attempting to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and preconceived notions when analyzing them, receptivity to the new without rejecting the old because it is old. In striving toward critical consciousness, the individual rejects passivity, practicing dialogue rather than polemics, and using permeable, interrogative, restless, and dialogical forms of life. Critical consciousness is brought about not through an individual or intellectual effort, but through collective struggle and praxis.

Culture:

Culture is used in its broadest, anthropological sense as including all that is humanly fabricated, endowed, designed, articulated, conceived, or directed. Culture includes products which are humanly produced, both material (buildings, artifacts, factories, slum housing) and immaterial (ideology, value systems, mores), as well as materially derived products such as social class and the socio/political order. The key aim of liberatory education is to regain dominion over the creation and use of culture.

Culture Circle (Circulo de Cultura):

The círculo de cultura is a discussion group in which educators and learners use codifications (see Codification) to engage in dialogue about the reasons for their existential situation. The peer group provides the theoretical context for reflection and for transforming interpretations of reality from mere opinion to a more critical knowledge.

"Culture of Silence":

The "culture of silence" is a characteristic which Freire attributes to oppressed people in colonized countries, with significant parallels in highly developed countries. Alienated and oppressed people are not heard by the dominant members of their society. The dominant members prescribe the words to be spoken by the oppressed through control of the schools and other institutions, thereby effectively silencing the people. This imposed silence does not signify an absence of response, but rather a response which lacks a critical quality. Oppressed people internalize negative images of themselves (images created and imposed by the oppressor) and feel incapable of self-governance. Dialogue and self-government are impossible under such conditions.

Decodification:

(see Codification) Decodification dissolves a codification into its constituent elements and is the operation by which learners begin to perceive relationships between elements of the codification and other experiences in their day-to-day life and among the elements themselves. Thus, decodification is analysis which takes place through dialogue, revealing the previously unperceived meanings of the reality represented by that codification. Decodification is the principal work of a círculo de cultura (see Culture Circle).

Dialectic:

Dialectic is a term referring to a dynamic tension within any given system and the process by which change occurs on the basis of that tension and resulting conflict. Based on the writings of Hegel, every concept implies its negation; that is, in conceiving anything (thesis), we must be able to imagine its opposite (antithesis). Change occurs as this tension leads to a new conception of reality (synthesis). It should be noted that Marx, in contrast to some liberatory educators, postulated that such tensions and contradictions were embedded in concrete culture (thus, dialectic materialism) and not merely found in contradictions between the existential world and our thoughts about the world.

Dialogical Method:

The dialogical approach to learning is characterized by co-operation and acceptance of interchangeability and mutuality in the roles of teacher and learner, demanding an atmosphere of mutual acceptance and trust. In this method, all teach and all learn. This contrasts with an anti-dialogical approach which emphasizes the teacher's side of the learning relationship and frequently results in one-way communication perpetuating domination and oppression. Without dialogue, there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no liberatory education.

Empowerment:

Empowerment is a consequence of liberatory learning. Power is not given, but created within the emerging praxis in which co-learners are engaged. The theoretical basis for this discovery is provided by critical consciousness; its expression is collective action on behalf of mutually agreed upon goals. Empowerment is distinct from building skills and competencies, these being commonly associated with conventional schooling. Education for empowerment further differs from schooling both in its emphasis on groups (rather than individuals) and in its focus on cultural transformation (rather than social adaptation).

Generative Themes/Words:

Generative themes are codifications of complex experiences which are charged with political significance and are likely to generate considerable discussion and analysis. They are derived from a study of the specific history and circumstances of the learners. In a literacy program, generative themes can be codified into generative words--that is, tri-syllabic words that can be broken down into syllabic parts and used to "generate" other words. Generative words have been most useful in relation to languages which are phonetically based (e.g. Spanish, Portuguese).

Humanization:

The central task in any movement toward liberation is to become more fully human through the creation of humanly-enhancing culture--in a word, "humanization." This historical task is countered by the negative forces of dehumanization which, through oppressive manipulation and control, compromise human values for personal gain and power. The task of the oppressed is to liberate themselves and, in the process, liberate their

oppressors. Revolutions are humanized to the extent that the new regime confronts its tendency to replicate the oppression of the old (see Transformation of the World).

Liberatory Education:

Education which is liberatory encourages learners to challenge and change the world, not merely uncritically adapt themselves to it. The content and purpose of liberatory education is the collective responsibility of learners, teachers, and the community alike who, through dialogue, seek political, as well as economic and personal empowerment. Programs of liberatory education support and compliment larger social struggles for liberation.

Mystification:

Mystification is the process by which the alienating and oppressive features of culture are disguised and hidden. False, superficial, and naive interpretations of culture prevent the emergence of critical consciousness. Educational systems are key instruments in the dissemination of mystifications: e.g. unemployment is "mystified" as personal failure rather than as a failure of the economy, thus making it difficult for the unemployed to critically understand their situation.

Participatory Research:

Participatory research is an approach to social change--a process used by and for people who are exploited and oppressed. The approach challenges the way knowledge is produced with conventional social science methods and disseminated by dominant educational institutions. Through alternate methods, it puts the production of knowledge back into the hands of the people where it can infuse their struggles for social equality, and for the elimination of dependency and its symptoms: poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, etc.

Praxis:

Praxis is a complex activity by which individuals create culture and society, and become critically conscious human beings. Praxis comprises a cycle of action-reflection-action which is central to liberatory education. Characteristics of praxis include self-determination (as opposed to coercion), intentionality (as opposed to reaction), creativity (as opposed to homogeneity), and rationality (as opposed to chance).

Problematization:

Problematization is the antithesis of "problem-solving." In problem-solving, an expert takes distance from reality and reduces it to dimensions which are amenable to treatment as though they were mere difficulties to be solved. To "problematize" is to engage a group in the task of codifying reality into symbols which can generate critical consciousness and empower them to alter their relations with nature and oppressive social forces. Problem-posing is a logically prior task which allows all previous conceptualizations of a problem to be treated as questionable. Problematization recognizes that "solutions" are often difficult because the wrong problems are being addressed.

Transformation of the World:

To transform the world is to humanize it (see Humanization). All transformations do not result in liberation. Transforming action could dehumanize the world with an oppressor's curious and inventive presence (e.g. the development of the V-2 rocket in World War II). Only history reveals the problematic nature of being human and the consequences of having chosen one path over the other. The transformation of the world is humankind's entry into history. As people act upon the world effectively, transforming it by work, consciousness is in turn historically and culturally conditioned. Conscientization is the result of action which transforms the world and leads to humanization.