

## PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED (A Revisit of Freire’s Thesis Vis-à-Vis Adventist System of Education)

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### Abstract

The development of any country, society, or community depends upon the system of education that the people go through to prepare themselves to take up various responsibilities. A faulty educational system or an ideal one has consequences on the economic, social, and political systems of that entity, be it a country, society, or community. One person who was interested in studying this trend was Paulo Freire, an educationist from Brazil. Freire’s study was based on an educational pedagogy that oppresses or liberates those involved in the teaching-learning process. An examination of both, the pedagogy to oppress or to liberate permeates many systems of education in the world. This paper revisits Freire’s thesis entitled, “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”, and examines how some of these ideas are in line with the Seventh-day Adventist system of education.

**Key Words:** Pedagogy, banking concept, problem-posing concept, oppressor, oppressed.

### INTRODUCTION

Pedagogy of the Oppressed is a thesis on education that was published in 1968. It was first published in Portuguese. It is the work of Paulo Freire. Freire was an educationist from Brazil. It is said that he was involved in some political tussles with the government, and was imprisoned by a military junta. This made him move away from Brazil to work in other countries including Switzerland. In Geneva, Switzerland he became an adviser on education for the World Council of Churches. His thesis was written in Chile. After spending some time outside Brazil, he finally returned to Brazil, joined politics, and became the Secretary of Education for the City of Sao Paulo.

The core of his thesis is how education manifests itself in the context of revolutionary struggle as it was in South America during his time. Freire was aware of the inequality and lack of equity in the educational structure. For example, he was

aware of the differences in terms of education between the rural peasants and the urban poor. As a social revolutionist, he concentrated on education for rural farmers (Holst, 2008).

#### Freire’s Concept of Society

One concept that features predominantly in his book, “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” as expressed by Sol (2009) is dialectical materialism. He opines that human destiny is to be resolved in a struggle between two economic classes of owners and laborers –the oppressor class and the oppressed class. He was more concerned about the consciousness of the oppressed.

In his discourse, Freire explained that the oppressed class is always submerged having accepted to be subject to the directions and commands of the oppressor. According to Freudenberg (1971), it does not mean that the oppressed do not know what to do or how to

react. The fact is that the oppressed have little to fight with. So even though the oppressed struggle to realize their potential and dignity, it is always the oppressor who has the role of liberating the oppressed. It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. It is not just only intellectual involvement but in action. In a place where there is this kind of system, the leaders of change must dialogue with the oppressed otherwise the relationship is one of domination.

### **Freire's Concept of Education**

Freire's concept about society, coupled with his revolutionary ideas and buttressed by his political ideology, makes him see education from a wider perspective. He identifies two important facets of educational pedagogy

- a) Banking pedagogy; and
- b) Problem-Posing pedagogy.

He states that the banking concept suits the oppressor. Students are treated as empty vessels into which knowledge can be deposited by the teacher. The student becomes the bank and the teacher is the one who has the knowledge to put in the bank. The relationship between the teacher and the student involves a narrating subject (the teacher) and a patient (the student) who is the listening object. In this regard, he categorizes the two groups (oppressor and oppressed) in his concept of society. Here, the teacher becomes the oppressor and the student becomes the oppressed. The teacher is to fill the student with the contents of his/her narration. The student becomes a mere receiver and a respondent. The teacher, therefore, assumes that the student knows nothing; that the student is ignorant. He, the teacher is the custodian of knowledge and the transmitter of information. The teacher excludes the student from any restless, impotent, continuing, hopeful inquiry. It is assumed that the teacher knows because he has the knowledge which he imparts to the student.

In the banking pedagogy, the teacher owns the object of knowledge and prepares a lesson on it. The lesson is then delivered to the students as secondary knowledge. The students are not allowed to find out anything for themselves. They are rendered passive receivers of knowledge. Good students are only those who can repeat the narrative.

Again in the banking system, the experience between teacher and student is dichotomized absolutely. The understanding is that the teacher always has the knowledge and his knowledge is absolute; and because the teacher has absolute knowledge he has absolute authority. This authority is not just subject authority but recognizable authority in society.

It is the teacher who chooses what is to be learned when it comes to curriculum construction. The students in their oppressed situation learn by absorbing what they are told by the teacher, and a good student does not question but does accept all that the teacher tells passively and meekly. Freire calls this, "a ready-to-wear approach" to education. The teacher always imposes himself/herself on the student. The reality in banking pedagogy is static and the student learns about it and adopts it.

On the other hand, Freire talks about what he calls, problem-posing pedagogy. This kind of pedagogy stands in opposition to the banking pedagogy. In the problem-posing method, the students are involved in reality; they inquire into it critically and can transform it. Students' involvement is not denied. This is what Freire describes as "praxis", the idea that a thought is only real when it is generated by action upon the world. It means that knowledge imparted to students without action is useless and ineffective. Education is not all about imparting and receiving the thoughts of others. Educational success is measured by the ability to implement and use the knowledge imparted or received.

In this proposal of problem-posing, the key is the relationship between the teacher and the student. The teacher and the student learn from each other. It takes away the notion that the teacher always knows and the student does not. There is a dialogue between the teacher and the student. In the teaching process, there are times when the student surprises the teacher by revealing what he/she thinks about a topic. The teacher gives time to the student to explain. Through this process, the truth is recognized.

There are two important characteristics of problem-posing pedagogy as emphasized by Freire (1978):

- a) The teacher is guaranteed to learn from the students; and
- b) The teacher works alongside the students as equals, posing problems and working with the students to solve the problems.

By this, the fantasy that the teacher has absolute knowledge relative to the student is removed.

Unlike the problem-posing system, the banking system can only be maintained by mistrust. This happens because students get the notion that they have been forcibly disengaged from the learning process by being denied the right to truth and to make a direct connection with it, which is an assault on their dignity and being.

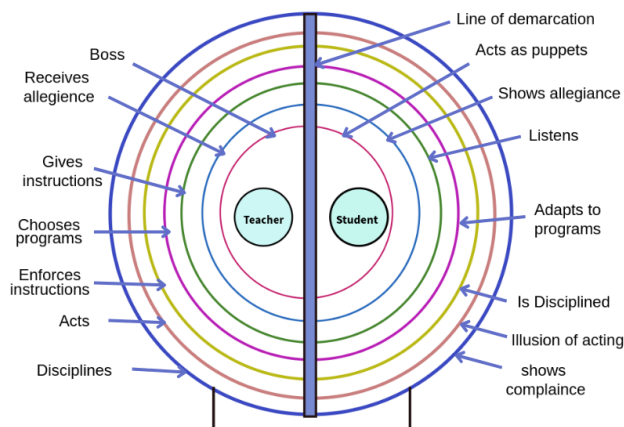
The relationship between the teacher and the student in the problem-posing pedagogy is so cordial that equality is envisaged. After all, a teacher who is not humble has no right to stand in front of the students to teach them ethics and etiquette. Students learn from teachers. A teacher who shares ideas with students can win their confidence and trust. The teacher and student approach a problem together. The two work together to solve a problem. It involves a real critical engagement for the discovery of

truth. Both are subjects. The teacher does not claim to either own or know the world. There is a dialogue between the teacher and the student.

The humanity of students is of great value. This approach to education requires a teacher who can empathize with the students, and who can enter into their activity of inquiry alongside them. Freire says that the problem-posing pedagogy requires patience and love. It also requires cooperation which is an extension of equality.

According to Kirylo (2012), Freire's banking concept of pedagogy has the following characteristics:

- The teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- The teacher thinks and the students think about;
- The teacher talks and the students listen passively and meekly;
- The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- The teacher chooses and enforces his choice and the students comply;
- The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the teacher;
- The teacher chooses the program content and the students, without consultation, adapt to it;
- The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his professional authority, which he/she sets in opposition to the freedom of the students; and
- The teacher is the subject of the learning process and the students are mere objects.

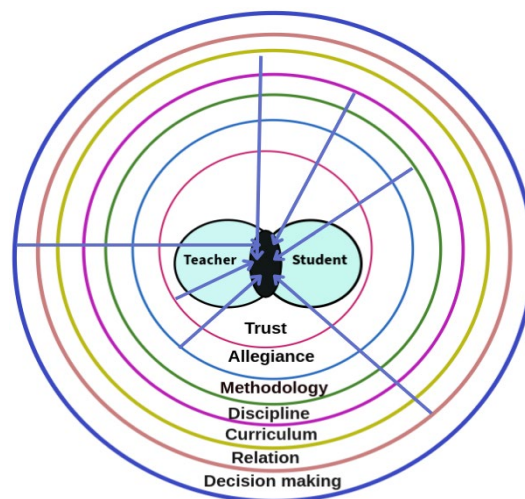


Involvement at different levels  
**Figure 1: Banking Approach Pedagogy**

Figure 1 depicts the dichotomy between the involvement of the student and the teacher at different levels. Each behaves at a different level; the teacher at a higher level and the student at a lower level. There is a line of demarcation that shows that the student and the teacher do not operate at the same level; one is oppressed by the other.

On the other hand, the problem-posing theory of pedagogy has the following characteristics:

- The teacher and the students are involved in reality;
- The teacher appreciates the involvement of students in the teaching-learning process;
- A thought generated both by the teacher and students is implemented together;
- The teacher dialogues with students;
- The teacher works alongside the students as equals;
- The teacher builds a cordial relationship between himself/herself and the students;
- The teacher and students build confidence in each other;
- The teacher and students are both subjects in the teaching-learning process; and
- There is love, patience, and cooperation between the teacher and the students.



Involvement at the same level  
**Figure 2: Problem-Posing Approach**

On the problem posing pedagogy as depicted in Figure 2, there is a collaboration between the teacher and the student. Both of them are involved in all the activities in the teaching-learning process. It is a fusion of ideas from the teacher and the student creating a cordial relationship between the two.

### THE CONCEPT OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST EDUCATION

The Seventh-day Adventist Concept of Education is built on a distinctive Christian philosophy of education. It is not just based on some religious activities like chapel services, religious classes, and other activities. It is not just a Christian education which is a program of pagan education with a chocolate coating of Christianity, as Tye (1989) noted. It is wholistic and holistic - totally complete and spiritual in nature.

It defeats the banking concept of pedagogy where the oppressed class (students) is always submerged having accepted to subject to the directions and commands of the oppressor (teacher). As we have already noted, it is not a concept of education that suits a teacher alone. It is a concept that suits both the teacher and the student. Each is a part of the knowledge-sharing

Experience. It shows, therefore, that the Seventh-day Adventist concept of pedagogy follows the path of problem-posing pedagogy as proposed by Freire over the banking concept of pedagogy.

The Seventh-day Adventist education believes that man is created in the image of God. Even though fallen, man is capable of rational thought. It believes that human beings are capable of making correct interpretations of issues and applying the perceived knowledge to one's daily lives.

Let us now examine the concept of Seventh-day Adventist education, especially in the area of pedagogy vis-à-vis the problem-posing concept of Freire's pedagogy. Freire proposes that in pedagogy both the teacher and the students must be involved in reality. The Seventh-day Adventist system of education, in the same manner also believes that the material content of pedagogy must be real. Here, reality means how true and workable the content of the subject matter is. White (2018) describes Seventh-day Adventist Education as a system that reveals the truth - workable truth.

Freire stipulates that in the problem-posing pedagogy, the relationship between the teacher and the student must be cordial. Seventh-day Adventist education also propagates a good relationship between the teacher and the student inside and outside the classroom. There should be a sense of personal concern which includes tactfulness, patience, sympathy, insight into problems of each other, ability to gain respect, confidence, firmness when needed, flexibility, and impartiality. The relationship must be reciprocal. The teacher must not undermine the student and vice-versa.

Both Freire's theory about problem-posing pedagogy and the Seventh-day Adventist concept of pedagogy in the area of the relationship between the teacher and the student

are the same. It is all about trusting each other, respecting each other, and having concern for each other. The teacher's role is to encourage this relationship by making the students feel at ease when interacting with each other.

On teaching methodology, Freire's problem-posing pedagogy, unlike the banking concept helps the teacher and student complement each other. The teacher appreciates the involvement of the student in the teaching-learning process. A thought is generated both by the teacher and the student, and it is implemented together. In the teaching process, according to Freire, the teacher dialogues with the students. The teacher works alongside the students as equals, building confidence in each other and encouraging each other. It means that the teacher and the student are both subjects in the teaching-learning process. This is also one of the characteristics of the Seventh-day Adventist system of education.

Freire's banking theory on pedagogy postulates that it is the teacher who chooses what is to be learned when it comes to curriculum selection. The students in their oppressed situation learn by absorbing what they are taught by the teacher. However, in the problem-posing approach to pedagogy, the student is made to understand that they have not been forcibly disengaged from the learning process by being denied the right to truth or to make a direct connection to/with it.

The Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education, like the problem-posing pedagogy, involves the student in the selection of programs. The teacher does not claim the curriculum or enforce the curriculum on the students. It is an engagement between both. The activities of the curriculum must be related to the self-preservation of the student. Therefore, in the process of curriculum selection consideration must be given to the needs of the student, the nature of the student, and the strengths and

weaknesses of the students. There should be a balance in the selection of the curriculum.

On discipline, Freire's problem-posing proposes that the humanity of the student is of great value. this kind of approach requires patience and love. The student learns ethics and etiquette from the teacher who cooperates with the student. The Seventh-day Adventist concept of education is based on the restoration of the image of God in man socially, spiritually, mentally, and otherwise. If the student is to be fully human, he/she must be controlled by his/her mind rather than by instincts. They should be guided to make better choices not to be coerced to act. It is the system of education that recognizes and respects the individuality, uniqueness, and personal worth of each student. The teacher must, therefore, guide the student to the truth. The teacher should seek out and attempt to help those lost and caught in the realms of vices. The teacher acts as a parent directing the student under his/her care. Instead of disciplining the student he/she should be taught to apply the perceived knowledge to his/her daily life.

## CONCLUSION

Freire's work, 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed', is not visited by many Western scholars as yet. Many scholars may take it to be more of a socio-political rendition of a man who was involved in political battles and social transformation rather than being an educationist. Green (2016) cites Freire's thesis as one of the most cited publications in social science. In fact, more of enlightenment to the socially disadvantaged class of society. However, a critical examination of his work brings to light that his idea about social transformation was based on education for society because education forms the foundation of the economy and politics of every nation.

He was keen on distinguishing between what is oppression in education and what is academic freedom (the banking concept and the problem-posing concept of pedagogy). According to Freire, the banking system produces masters and

It requires a teacher who can sympathize with students, and who can enter into their activity of inquiry alongside them. He continues to say that

slaves in the society oppressors and the oppressed. He advocated for the problem-posing system of pedagogy where there is equity and equality which produce a vibrant democratic society.

The Seventh-day Adventist system of education overrides Freire's banking concept of pedagogy and embraces the problem-posing concept which is a pedagogy of liberation, freedom of expression, equality, and equity. Examined along the lines of a teacher-student relationship, treatment of material content, curriculum, method of discipline, and teaching method, one can visualize that Freire's problem-posing concept of pedagogy aligns with the Seventh-day Adventist system of education. This is the ideal model of pedagogy suited for any society which considers itself democratic. It fosters academic freedom which helps students and teachers to think together and work together for the advancement of society.

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