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Dialogue in Critical Pedagogy: Generative Word as Counter-Hegemonic Action

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Abstract

The scope of the article is to investigate the role of dialogue in experiences and theories of resistance in societies based on the exploitation of class and in a post-colonial model of relationships. Neo-liberal educational model presents, in its mercantile paradigm, renewed forms of repression: what we can call in Freirean terms as "culture of silence". How can we break the "culture of silence"? How can we build a critical culture of social relationships?

Worldwide social movement and academic groups are working to develop a critical/dialogic culture based on actions of resistance against neo-liberalism, creating spaces of teaching and learning not more based on competitive skills, but focused in a creative, collective and participative experience of popular education.

Keywords: *Dialogue, Critical Pedagogy, Culture of Silence, Generative Word.*

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Education in the "Modern World Market"

While globalisation has exploded in recent decades, its origins may lie in European maritime expansion and the affirmation of the liberal model. The concentration of wealth through trade and manufacturing, which had grown constantly in Europe since the seventeenth century due to the colonial model, created a demand for manufactured goods that existing industrial forces could not meet. This growing demand, outstripping supply, was the driving force for the creation of large-scale industry, together with the essential forces needed for this industry (machinery and the industrial division of labour), giving rise to what Marx called 'the third period of private ownership since the Middle Ages' (Marx, 1968: pag.). With the two liberal revolutions in England in 1640 and 1688, large-scale industry universalised free trade, establishing the means of communication for it and, in Marx's words, the 'modern world market'.

The process first of colonisation and then of industrialisation and the accumulation of international capital encouraged economic liberalisation and swifter bank transactions. The economic consequences of this historical trend include a widening gap between 'rich countries' and 'poor countries'. To increase their production and to set out on the road of so-called 'industrial development', the poor countries began to resort to international money-lenders, building up cumulative debts. Any structural reforms, however, had to be evaluated and approved by the creditor countries and the loan interest rates were very high.

The economic system of dependency in Latin America was the background that Brazilian educator Paulo Freire examined to write *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. A reading of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that did not take the political economic context into account would risk being very partial and abstract. Large landholdings, inequality, poverty, destitution and illiteracy in Brazil were conditions determined by the system of colonization and afterword exploitation. Military dictatorships and populism in Latin America were its self-protection systems.

What type of education could be of interest to this economic and political system? A system of education based oncompetition, individualism, exploitation of classes. An education in which history teaching ignores social conflicts and political movements and recounts only the winners' version of events, such as "the discovery of America" instead of the genocide of innocent indigenous peoples, for example. An education in which geography has no interest in human geography, political geography, economic geography or, as Josué de Castro would say, the "geography of hunger" (De Castro, 1952). A school whose philosophy is relegated to the accumulation of knowledge by specialists, and which forces its students to love to know rather than encouraging them to know how to love. Is the public education really interested in a dialogue to open social consciousness?

Actually the dominant education is primarily interested in training a privileged elite and excluding the majority of the population, who should be trained as no-intellectual workers and have only a weak basic education.

The dualism between intellect and work, elite and proletariat is a fundamental basis for thenew world market proposal, which inherits in Brazil a post-colonial model of education that serves a society in which oppressed and oppressors still exist as condition of class exploitation. An education that serves to reproduce

patterns or values, repeat content and details, transmit information and conserve what has been inherited or what exists: the neoliberal school.

Education and Ideology

In the case of Latin Americanpost-colonial society the dualist school (a school divided in social classes) was and continues to be fundamental in asserting privileges for the elite, the control of power and the post-enslavement.

If we take the Brazilian rural system as an example, we will find historically an educational procedure designed to maintain large landholdings and an extreme concentration of power, just as the capitalist urban system seeks to establish an education that reproduces the inequality and is strategically useful for achieving a consensus and meeting the needs of the modern world market: to produce and consume.

In the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* Marx showed how the transformation of the material conditions of economic production determine the ideological forms of consensus, including education. Consequently, social consciousness can be explained from the contradictions of material life, in the conflict between the social forces and the relations of production. Marx uses the term 'superstructure' to define the ideology of the State, which, in the case of the capitalist system, is created by the dominant classes so as to subjugate the proletariat. By the term 'infrastructure', he refers to the totality of the relations of production, the bourgeoisie economic system (Marx, 1993: 11–12).

The contradictory relationship between State and ideology, system of production and system of consensus, infrastructure and superstructure has influenced the work of sociologies such as Louis Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron who, as known, regard the ideological machine of the State (mainly religion, press, culture, education) as a defence system for the economic exploitation (Althusser, 2001; Bourdieu &Passeron, 1992).

Regarding education: is truethat tends to uphold the system of the dominant classes, but is it also possible, through education, to create alternatives and antagonism, defend social equality and challenge the dominant ideology? Popular Education and Critical Pedagogy arise as a conquest of power by social movements in search of social justice, the historical meaning of the Paulo Freire's work lives not only as a social critic about the system of dependence and exploitation, but also as a concrete propose of cultural action for the emancipation of exploited (oppressed) classes. Dialogue is a way to build this cultural space.

Popular education and Critical Pedagogy createtheir paths towards a critique against the contradictions of the exploitation of classes. To use one of Paulo Freire's expressions: to 'denounces and announces'. The importance of dialogue in critical pedagogy, in contrast to reproductive education, may be discovered in this denunciation-announcement?

Is it possible, in dialectic (and not deterministic) relationship between infra-structure and super-structure, a revolutionary meaning of education? As Paulo Freire wrote in his book *Conscientização*:

It is true that the infra-structure, created in the relations through which the work of men transforms the world, gives rise to the superstructure. But it is also true that the latter, mediatised by men that assimilate its myths, is converted into infra-structure and overdetermines it. If the dynamics of these precarious relations in which men move and work in the world did not exist, we would not be able to talk of social structure or men or the human world (Freire, 2005: 75–76).

Oppression and Class Exploitation

'Oppression' is a keyword in Freire's work. His main concern was to analyse the political roots of oppression and the potential of pedagogy to emancipate the urban proletariat, the peasants and the exploited peoples. Oppression is set in a complex weave of hegemonic relations and is not something abstract or idealistic. Working class doesn't emancipate itself if the people that compose a class don't work toward an emancipator culture. It is worth asking, however, why Paulo Freire uses the expression "pedagogy of the oppressed" and not pedagogy of the exploited, of the proletariat, of the dominated, of the subjugated.

A subject is oppressed when an overriding reality represses something that exists in he/her and, as a result, cannot express him/herself. Although he/she is aware that a feeling/emotion/condition of freedom exists, he/she cannot give it life because doesn't have, or doesn't know the tools: the freedom exists, it is part of him/her, it is in him/her, but it is blurred, oppressed. Oppression is an impossibility to acknowledge and to express that condition. It arises from social-economic circumstances and goes beyond them, involving scenarios of aesthetic, linguistic and – of course – educational experiences insocial/human relations. So, the proletariat exploited by the bourgeois is oppressed. But it is also oppressed the women subjugated by the man, the pupil humiliated by the teacher, the black people that suffer racism. Is the absence of dialogue a condition for the oppression?

The oppression condition arises, then, from the social and economic structures, but is not limited to this, considering the social, educational and broader cultural relations as part of class exploitation. One of the most profound issues in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* lives in as Freire considers the oppressed—oppressor contradiction: following Freire thought, the oppressed, internalising the myths of the oppressor, desires at the same time to get rid of him and take his place. That creates an internal dualism of experiencing in one's own consciousness the violence of the relations of domination, through feeling both attraction and repulsion towards the oppressor.

Becoming conscious of the contradictions in one's internal experience should be an indispensable step towards a concrete action of liberation, a critical plunge into reality. The main effort to overcome extreme situations of dependence/exploitation would be to be aware of the conditions of oppression and their contradictions. This is a condition that moves to the action (*praxis*) and needs *dialogue*. According to Freire:

It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis.

Critical and liberating dialogue, which presupposes action, must be carried on with the oppressed at whatever the stage of their struggle for liberation (Freire, 1972:52).

Where there is domination, is there oppression? Where there is oppression, can we remain silent? Which is the role of dialogue towards a liberating action? We can consider these questions starting from what Freire defines as culture of silence.

The Culture of Silence

The culture of silence is an important category used and developed extensively by Freire over the course of his work. Particularly in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire emphasised that silence is a consequence of oppression/colonisation in a dependent society. The mechanisms of dependence and alignment affect the relations established within that society.

Influenced by Albert Memmi (Memmi, 1985), Freire argues as culture of silence is formed in the exploitation relationship determined by the dualism in the colonised culture, which is established through attraction and repulsion from the colonized to the metropolis.

There is a direct relationship between exploitation, dependence and culture of silence. That means we have the word inside us but do not have the right to utter it, because we follow the prescriptions of those who project their voices on us. This condition came from economic-productive exploitation, but goes ahead. As a relational phenomenon, dependence gives rise to different modes of being, thinking and expressing oneself, and is reflected in the relations that take shape within the consciousness.

The culture of silence pronounces words of domination. It does not arise spontaneously but is formed in the negation of the authentic word, which includes language, free thinking and subjective expression.

What forms of colonisation exist today? What forms of manipulation are there? Is there a culture of silence in the classroom, in the arenas of public politicians? Which relationships with class exploitation? How can we break the silence? How can we build a culture of critical thinking, a culture of the authentic word? Which role has dialogue in cultural action for popular education?

The "Fear of Freedom"

Oppression, through manipulation, according to Paulo Freire, can cause an alienation of the consciousness in its approach to the world of knowledge. The oppressed internalise the myths 'offered' by the dominant system's manipulation and, as a result, take refuge in a fictitious reality. To have fear of the freedom may impede to uncover and reveal this false reality. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire states:

One of the aspects that surprise/astonish us [...] is the "fear of freedom" Not infrequently, training course participants call attention to the 'danger of conscientização' in a way which reveals their own fear of freedom. Critical consciousness, they say, is anarchic. Others add that critical consciousness may

lead to disorder. Some, however, confess: Why deny it? I was afraid of freedom. I am no longer afraid!

[...]Fear of freedom, of which its possessor is not necessarily aware, makes him see ghosts. Such an individual is actually taking refuge in an attempt to achieve security, which he prefers to the risks of liberty. [...] The subject rarely admits his fear of freedom openly, however, tending rather to camouflage it – sometimes unconsciously – by presenting themselves as defenders of freedom (Freire, 1972: 19–21).

The fear of freedom is closely linked to the consciousness. Fear of one is fear of the other, just as the search for freedom begins in the consciousness.

The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. [...]

However, the oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed, and have become resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires (Freire, 1972: 31–32).

Can becoming aware that a difficult situation – as social exploitation – is oppressing us make us feel afraid? We are afraid of acknowledging the state of being oppressed, but beyond that we are also afraid of facing a new, unprecedented and unknown reality. Becoming aware of the oppression itself – discovering its causes, recognising its limits and seeking ways to overcome them – can be frightening. Thus freedom could be frightening: dependence and ignorance would be more comforting. Breaking away from dependence requires us to accept responsibility and set out on the road to autonomy, which leads to fear of the unknown or, in other words, of knowledge.

Dialogue is a social way to knowledge and knowledge for the oppressed is a conquest, not a concession. It is a painful conquest that must be faced *with* dialogue and collectively. It is achieved by the consciousness. Fear of freedom constrains change and, of course, education.

According to Freire, as a new reality that manifests itself in the process of *conscientização*, freedom couldprovoke restlessness in new woman or man that "is borning" into this reality. I am thinking, for instance, of people who take refuge in the world of the past because they are afraid of facing up to present situations.

Difficulties on the path of responsibility and autonomy towards a still unprecedented and unknown kind of life can lead people to create a fictitious refuge, creating unreal, artificial myths. This condition needs a critical intervention.

A mere perception of reality not followed by this critical intervention will not lead to a transformation of objective reality – precisely because it is not a true perception. This is the case of a purely subjectivist perception by someone who forsakes objective reality and creates a false substitute (Freire, 1972: 37).

This false (fictitious) reality contains the manipulating instruments of power that are programmed by hegemony of the words, images and sounds. To be subjects of words is an action of resistance. The manipulating power of the mass media can act precisely on this relationship between oppression, fear of freedom and false

reality. To reinforce the *fear* of freedom, the manipulating power of the hegemonic system creates and encourages the *myth* of freedom: the illusory, false idea of freedom that is reflected in the freedom to own, to buy, to produce and to consume: this is the concept of the modern world market in which the myth of freedom is the dream of consumerism. The myth of neoliberal propaganda creates this dream from which we have not yet awoken.

The Fear of Learning

Nevertheless, the alienation generated by this manipulating fiction is real, not unreal. The problem cannot be solved by pretending that alienation does not exist. That would amount to allowing to be persuaded not to engage with real/problematic situations such as the critical approach to knowledge and education. Would be this an impediment to learning? Inhibits political/dialogic action? In societies packed with alienating messages from the dominant cultural, movement for political action is certainly more difficult. It is easier to take refuge in false realities.

Alienation is mind-numbing, and we have to recognise that. It can generate fear – fear of freedom – but fear is not always an impediment, as it can provoke the subject to react. In other words, cultural action comes out of overcoming fear, just as fear can also give rise to insecurity, meaning a greater or lesser degree of self-esteem.

Currently we have to understand to what extent neoliberal strategies seek to disseminate false realities to propagate alienation, competition, the myth of successful imposing their power through the ideology of mass-media,low-quality talk shows on current affairs, with politicians as their main guests. Gradually the arena for political debate can shift from the real world (social movements, trade unions, independent associations, political parties, cultural centres) to a fictitious world mediated by the dominant ideology. This power of the fictitious world leaves the subject immobilised and turns him in fact into an object of a fiction (talk show) that is cleverly constructed to form or manipulate his ideas/opinions/conceptions with a view to securing his consensus. He thus loses his strength for political action. Dialogue in talk-show is not real, it is fictitious. Democracy can became a fictitious representative democracy, unless it create critical form of cultural intervention, political action/organization.

What, then, is the role of critical education in thisscenario? Can we discover and rethink education in its creative sense, awakening subjectivity and the political space of creation? Can we recreate an education in which we are subjects of culture and no longer objects of domination processes? How can the international movement of Critical Pedagogy and Popular Education contribute to understanding the relations between the "modern global market" and educational work,proposing, developing and advancing experiences for a democratic, participative, critical autonomous education?

According to the principles of Critical Pedagogy and Popular Education, communitarian action should be guided by a theory based on an active, dynamic, and particularly participatory vision of the exercise of educational praxis in comparative way between the different points of view expressed by an open

system of teaching and learning that enables the exchange of visions and other ways of feeling and acting on learning relationships. Even as an open system, it features a theory of knowledge referenced in social reality, promoting dynamic participation and class consciousness through action based on dialogues and social transformations.

"Generative Word" as Counter-Hegemonic Action

From this framework we can reflect starting from the social-political meaning of dialogue and *generative words*that are a part of Paulo Freire philosophy of education. The social-political meaning of generative words in Paulo Freire literacy method startsexactly from the intention of unveiling the culture of silence, the fear of freedom, the fear of responsibility: conditions present in the post-colonial dependent system such as in the neoliberal fragmentary alienated system: "modern world market".

The word is the founder of dialogue, creativity and possibility. The word is generative and therefore is political and provocative. It is musical like its pauses, which form silence.

Silence can be muted and submissive, or it can be reflexive, poetic and creative. When in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire criticised the "culture of silence", he was not referring to silence as such but to a culture of acceptance, resignation and fatalism. That culture is itself a consequence of another: the culture of domination. The literacy methodology created by Freire sought to overcome the 'culture of silence' through the 'generative word' and the 'anthropological concept of culture', which enables anyone to discover their own potential as a constructive being and a subject of culture.

In literacy experiences, generative words emerged through what Freire called 'researching the vocabulary", which meant discovering what words and expressions were most used by the community. This process was carried out at dialogical culture circles and addressed issues relevant to the people's experiences, activities and work. It did not involve using forms or materials prepared in advance by specialists but a communitarian action of educators and learners. The aim was to reveal the set of themes and words used by the community that was preparing to become literate.

During this research, the educators made their reasons and intentions clear since they were living alongside the people: they found out about their homes, their families, the little local groups and their living and working conditions.

The community played its part by contributing words from everyday life, sayings and popular expressions that formed part of their vocabulary. The aim was to minimise the gap between the researchers and the community and to make the research themes themselves arise from within the community, so that they could all think together about their social reality and the words that described it, in order to express the actual language, desires, concerns, demands and dreams. They should come laden with meaning about their social experiences and not only the educator's experience.

From the outset the priority was to understand the everyday aspects of the context. Language was seen above all as a factor for interaction among subjects living in a particular social reality and for attaching importance to their experiences. This vocabulary research highlights the dialogical nature of learning and teaching, of the "word" and the "world". The smallest unit of the learning act is the word with its deepest meaning, relating to the world, with an idea and a sphere of reality, with its own intention, with the history it transmits, the projects it implies and the experiences it narrates and causes. To read the "word" is to read the "world".

Out of all the expressions found through vocabulary research, the group of educators chose a certain number of words – not more than 20 – that could be used to begin the literacy process. The choice of these *generative words* was based on three criteria: phonetic potential or richness, degree of phonetic difficulty; semantic strength link between the word and its meaning; the potential for reflection that the word generates in sociocultural relations.

Elaborated through a shared/dialogical/critical action between educators and educatees in culture circles, generativewords are relevant to daily life, work, popular experience, language, social relationships and resided in the knowledge/wisdom used by the groups that prepared themselves for the literacy process. There were simple words, such as brick (*tijolo*), for example, or vote, people, fair, corn, goalkeeper, kitchen, bowl, pot, stove...

From the beginning of the process the priority was to understand, through the dialogue, the social context. The language/dialogue was seen as a factor of interaction between subjects inserted in a social experience of learning.

The investigation of the vocabulary universe and generative words reveal the dialogic nature of learning and teaching. The minimum unit of the act of learning is the word with its deep social meaning, relating to the world, an idea and a sphere of reality with his own intention, with the story that transmits, involving projects and experiences narrated and extended through critical reading of social content.

Thus, the word ceases to be an exclusive possession of the educator to become a common good of the group in culture circles that, learning and reading the word, discusses and transformed it through action and reflection on the action: praxis. As Freire says, this praxis counter-hegemonic action:

The critical reading of reality, whether in the process of literacy or not, and mostly associated with certain clearly political mobilization and organization practices, can become an instrument that Gramsci called as "counter-hegemonic action". (Freire, 1982: p. 21)

The history counts that, after the military coupe of 1964, Freire was prosecuted and exiled: the accusation was exactly the use of generative words, as realtedin the official document of military inquiry in which the military officer makes a confused attempt, in a faux intellectual style, at trying to summarise Freire's ideas:

Asked what challenge generative words represent - a challenge to what and to whom - he (Paulo Freire n.d.r.) responded that generative words in themselves don't represent a challenge in terms of a stimulus, but the situation in question (a question posing n.d.r.). The stimulus is made to the illiteracy people. Asked how a man can choose to a literacy method that submit the people to a tremendous

bombardment of class struggle, with sentences already prepared to any group and local (...) Paulo Freire responded that, for the character of method, the participants of culture circle don't have to be indoctrinated.

A simple action, based in dialogue andpopular experience, has caused repression, prison and exile. How can we explain this? If popular education is an education based in communitarian action, the dialogic culture is an action of resistance because learning is not a matter of repeating words, but creating and recreating experiences: to be subject and not object. The experience of express our own word is a political experience. We learn by becoming everyday "subjects of words, images and sounds", builders and inventors of expressive languages.

The military system of class exploitation didn't allow this possibility of expression forilliteracy/oppressed classes. Does the current "modern world market" allow this?

Final Words

Popular/Dialogical/Critical Education is a practice that starts from the critical use of word and transcends the word defending, asFreire said, the pedagogical character of the revolution' (Freire, 1972: 54).To pronounce the word is to pronounce the body. The word is strength, a revolutionary force. The word can be pronounced or expressed with the body, with gestures. The word is also a look, in its depths and in its horizons. The word is a smile or a frown. The word is the crying of a baby who cannot yet speak. The word is the body that narrates and unveils what is imprisoning it. To deny the word is to deny consciousness, to deny the experience.

I remember a reflection of Brazilian philosopher and educator Rubem Alves about the word as power of "awaken the sleeping worlds":

What will awaken is what the word is going to conjure up. Words are magic entities, enchanting forces, bewitching powers that awaken the worlds that lie within our bodies in a state of hibernation, like dreams. Our bodies are made of words. [...]

[...] our bodies at birth are a chaos pregnant with possibilities awaiting the word that will cause to emerge from its silence that which it has invoked. An infinite and silent keyboard that may play meaningless dissonances, one-note sambas, or sonatas and their countless variations...

To this magic process by which the word awakens the sleeping worlds is given the name education. Educators are all those that have this power. That is why education fascinates me (Alves, 2010: 54).

Generative word was a conquest against the culture of silence and subordination. It is a conquest of the consciousness: popular education seeks this conquest, in spite of the fictitious, anti-dialogical strategy of neo-liberalism.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony focuses on the alliance of the dominant classes to form an ideological system of control, manipulation and especially practices and expectations, in other words an ideological system of lifestyles designed to win popular support. The space of hegemony is civil society, including the private systems for spreading the dominant way of thinking (today the mass media are the primary, but not the only, tools used by this way of thinking) that requires a culture of silence from dominated classes.

This manipulative process erodes the people's cultural and social freedom, and illiteracy in Latin America has been and still is very useful for hegemony. In Freire's view, however, the literacy process and popular education represent a critical movement in the complex reality of hegemonic relations and creates the tools to the popular classes rediscover the right to be subjects, to have ideas and opinions, to think for themselves and to open up areas for discussion: through dialogue.

The social and critical character of dialogue is not a simple chat, never atechnical "problem solving"; is not an exercise of "key words" or "empowerment". It is a political way toward a society less brutal and unequal for what dialogue is indispensable as a social, critical process: a counter-hegemonic action. The intention behind Paulo Freire's dialogical and critical practice is to encourage social transformation and counter-hegemonic action. It is not a one-way relationship: it requires circularity to promote participation and open with people social spaces for discuss and open dialogically social consciousness. In this respect, the act of acquiring and transform knowledge is a political act: dialogue is a way to praxis.

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