

# Freire's Reflective Action and Critical Consciousness: Educational Intervention and Contemporary Application Examples

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**Abstract—** As is widely known, Paulo Freire was one of the most important educators and philosophers of the twentieth century. His work has been studied and researched worldwide, influencing particularly the fields of intercultural education and adult education. The fundamental concepts of social change, democracy, critical awareness, and emancipatory learning are the key pillars of his educational theory. This paper will discuss a hypothetical educational intervention based on Freire's theory, including its main elements, such as the topic, the target group, the means, the presentation of a written exercise, and its answer. Subsequently, the concepts of Freire's "banking" and "problem-posing" models of education will be analyzed in relation to the term "critical awareness." Finally, recent examples of target groups and topics where Freire's educational theory can be applied will be documented.

**Keywords:** Freire, "Banking Education," "Problem-Posing Education," Critical Awareness, Educational Intervention.

## TOPIC 1

### 1.1 Description of Educational Intervention

My choice to apply Freire's approach in an educational intervention would involve a literacy class for adult Roma individuals. The target group would include Roma people who are functionally illiterate (University of Ioannina, 2004). Although they were taught reading and writing in their early school years, they did not further utilize these skills, resulting being forgotten or significantly limited (Jarvis, 1987). This situation has many negative and unpleasant consequences, the most prominent being social isolation, exclusion, racism, and others (Δαφέριμος, 2006).

The intervention would initially involve a six-month program, with the possibility of extension, and the activities would be designed based on Freire's learning method, as well as a holistic approach focused on promoting intercultural education, fruitful and productive dialogue, experiential learning and interaction, as appropriate, between Roma and non-Roma groups.

Therefore, the primary theme of my educational intervention would involve ways to enhance literacy among the Roma, with specific goals:

- Smooth social integration
- Combating illiteracy
- Developing and producing oral and written language
- Critical awareness

### 1.2 Application of Freire's Approach

One of the primary goals of Freire's educational and emancipatory theory is the targeted and organized effort to challenge and develop critical awareness among learners, ultimately aiming to transform their reality and liberate themselves from any form of coercion and power (Μάνθου, 2007). Thus, the basic purpose and teaching method focus primarily on topics that exemplify the contradictory and oppressive experiences and lives of the participants (Illeris, 2016).

In relation to my educational intervention, I would initially focus on the life experiences of the participants and study their living conditions to identify their deeper problems. Subsequently, in close collaboration with the learners, I would select several generative words that hold particular significance for them, reflecting their way of life and inner concerns.

In other words, the main generative theme I would choose for discussion would be the phrase "living conditions".

From the generative theme phrase (surface structure), sub-themes of the deep structure would emerge, such as poor housing quality, health, education, rejection, marginalization, social exclusion, racism, etc., directly related to their lived experiences. Based on the generative words and selected poems<sup>1</sup> related to these and their lived experiences, from which dialogue and the learning process begin (Βαϊκούση, 2020), the learners would be invited to think, express themselves, discuss (Shor & Freire, 1987), reflect, reconsider, and critically approach their situation (critical processing of the encoded situation - critical awareness). The goal of critical awareness is for the Roma to understand the causes of their illiteracy and poor living conditions (Γκότοβος, 2004).

<sup>1</sup> The Gypsies" by Dimitris Siatopoulos and Spyros Giannatos, as well as "The Bronze Gypsy" by Giorgos Oikonomou, see <https://ennepe-moussa.gr> (retrieved on 10/25/2023).

Simultaneously, they would deepen their use of language (Baker, 2001), as the main themes and words could be subdivided and analyzed more broadly, connected with other concepts, and targeted activities that process their lived experiences of their sociocultural reality (Στασινός, 2004), gradually leading them to their educational and social emancipation (decoding) and active participation in the reconstruction of society (Freire, 2009).

Based on the above, a targeted written exercise that would help the group members in their critical approach and decoding could involve giving them key words related to their lives and asking them to connect them and freely and associatively write a short story, poem, or fairy tale, or alternatively record their thoughts guided by their imagination. The written exercise at an advanced level could also be done collaboratively using, under the teacher's guidance, the creative writing software Digit Tale.

The proposed key words could be: caravans, gypsies, age, marriage, poverty, hard work, down, tribe, Datsun, heart, education.

My own choice, as an indicative answer to the exercise I designed for the learners, would be the following poem:

### "In the fire..."

In the fire we live  
like the poor relatives  
Anonymous gypsies in caravans  
at marriageable age like street kids  
Hard work, calm down at night  
Gypsy tribe, without a caress  
In a Datsun, we load dreams and hopes,  
God's light and sunbeams  
to cover us in storms  
But we, too, have a heart,  
Even if we are uneducated, without joy...

## TOPIC 2

### 2.1 Freire's "Banking" and "Problem-Posing" Education and Critical Awareness

Freire's work "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" is one of the most significant works on critical, reflective, problem-posing, and emancipatory learning to date. In it, he extensively discusses the "banking" concept of education, characterized by memorization, simple recording of knowledge without in-depth analysis and processing, student passivity, isolation, lack of substantial communication between teacher and students, sterile memorization of knowledge, and the depositing of the teacher's input. In this way, students'

creative abilities are nullified, their resistance is reduced, and consequently, their ability to react against any authoritarian and oppressive models (Freire, 2009).

In contrast, the emancipatory form of learning or problem-posing education, through a dialectical relationship between reflection and action, encourages learners to engage dynamically and creatively in the learning process, in autonomous learning conditions, to think, reflect, analyze the data of their reality and the broader one, judge, liberate themselves emotionally and intellectually from any limitations and constraints, achieve critical perception of themselves, and take an active role in modifying and transforming social structures. Thus, their real-world experiences are utilized to acquire necessary knowledge, critically analyze the natural and social reality, and act transformatively (Βαϊκούση, 2020).

This way, critical awareness emerges, wherein individuals understand the causes of negative life conditions and gradually, through directed dialogue, critical reflection, and the reconstruction of their cognitive frameworks, change their living, emotional, and spiritual state (Smith, 1976).

### 2.2. Contemporary Examples of Application: Target Groups and Topics

According to the aforementioned, some recent indicative examples where Freire's theory could be successfully applied, are primarily vulnerable and at-risk social groups, such as the homeless, long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, prisoners or ex-prisoners, drug users and former users, individuals belonging to religious or cultural minorities (Roma/Gypsies, single-parent families, juvenile offenders, abused women, etc.), refugees, immigrants, disaster victims, etc. (Ναγόπουλος & Μπούζας, 2005).

This choice is due to the fact that these individuals have minimal social goods and are unable to live a decent life and improve their quality of life. Freire's critical pedagogy theory, supported by a just Welfare State, could be the appropriate educational philosophy (Freire & Faundez, 1989) to help them further realize their current situation in relation to the broader socio-political environment, potentially leading them to develop an awareness not only of their limitations but also of the knowledge and skills they can cultivate, in order to take an active role and social action to promote social justice, for their benefit and that of the community (Freire, 1984).

Finally, suitable topics for the aforementioned groups include mental resilience, housing, employment, income, education, medical care, social security, social integration, living conditions, etc. (Freire & Shor, 2011).

## Conclusions

In this study, we analyzed topics primarily related to Freire's educational and pedagogical theory, referring to a hypothetical educational scenario based on this theory.

Additionally, the key concepts of Freire's theory, banking, and problem-posing education were presented and developed in relation to critical awareness and human emancipation and liberation. Simultaneously, examples of groups and topics were documented, where the theory of the great Pedagogue would be appropriate for application.

Finally, it was evident that Freire's Theory and educational views are particularly relevant and can find fertile ground in the contemporary multicultural environment, as there is an immediate need for an organized social change that will allow us to build an improved identity and lead us to a deep understanding, multiple interpretations, critical thinking, and ultimately, to creatively transform the surrounding world.

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