

Paulo Freire's Pedagogical Theories useful for Developing a Critical Pedagogy

Kyu Hwan Lee

Kyu Hwan Lee is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Education in Ewha Womans University, Seoul. He is also Director of the Korean Education Research Institute. His main works are: *Social Development and Democratization of Education*(1985), *A Critical Sociology of Education*(1989) and *Critical Understanding of Korean Education*(1993)

Paulo Freire's pedagogical theories of and for the oppressed have been studied affirmatively by progressive educators, progressive church leaders, democratic social workers, and popular education workers, of South Korea. For me, South Korea is still a developing country despite her miraculous economic development. I often meet foreigners who say that South Korea is no more a Third World country; however, I would like to argue that economics is not the only factor of being a Third World country as well as that history and politics are not less essential factors which make a nation belong to the category "the Third World". The Third World can be defined as nations or countries historically colonized, politically and militarily dependent on imperialist powers, and economically developing. It is my view that South Korea should be more democratized in politics, more self-defensive in military, and equalization-oriented in distributing the fruits of economic growth, if she can get out of the category "the Third World".

The pedagogical theories of Freire can be applicable to develop a critical pedagogy in developed countries as well because the oppressed are still existing there; however, his theories are more significantly applicable to Third World countries where the oppressed are much more greater in number.

It has been my scholarly ambition to develop, from the Third World perspective, a critical pedagogy useful for the qualitative change of the South Korean society. I do not hesitate to say that Freire has given me great influence on developing my critical pedagogy based on the historico-social reality of South Korea. I wrote two books entitled "*A Critical Sociology of Education*" and "*Critical Understanding of Korean Education*". 1) In writing these books I referred to the Freire's pedagogical theories, quoting occasionally sentences from his works in order to sustain my new ideas of education and society. I hope my two books may be able to make a contribution to developing a critical pedagogy. The purpose of writing this article is to draw out from the Freire's works essential theories of his pedagogy considered useful for developing my critical pedagogy.

I understand that humanization of the oppressed through liberating them from the oppressor is at the core of Freire's pedagogy. For him, humanization is man's vocation. This vocation is "thwarted by injustice, exploitation, and the violence of the oppressors; however, it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity". 2) It is worth noting that Freire defined the popular culture in the dehumanized world as the "culture of silence". He asserts that the oppressors make every efforts to make the people adapt to the contradictory ruling order, deprive them of their own languages, and destroy their subjectivity with the result that they become men of silence or men of importance who lack in social consciousness, being powerless in resistance.

It is self-evident that those submerged in the "culture of silence", as he says, think that the dominated are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything—that they are sick, lazy and unproductive. This is nothing but self-abandonment. Freire argues that education for the critical conscientization can be the first key to overcoming the "culture of silence" of the dominated. According to

him, "critical consciousness represents things and facts as they exist empirically, in their causal and circumstantial correlations; it is integrated with reality; and it leads to critical action".3)

What is the best way to develop critical consciousness in the oppressed and overcome their culture of silence? Freire answers: it is problem-solving education. He argues in the book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed": "in problem-solving education, men develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation."4) He adds that "problem-posing education, as a humanist liberating praxis, posits as fundamental that men subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation".5) It can be said that problem-posing education is a type of education that would enable the oppressed to perceive social injustices critically. It would also enable them to overcome their false perception of reality and the world would become the object of transforming action by them which results in their humanization. Problem-posing education has a liberating character. Freire refers to its liberating character as follows:

Education of a liberating character is a process by which the education invites learners to recognize and unveil reality critically. The domestication practice tries to impart a false consciousness to learners, resulting in a false adaptation to their reality. The domestication process is in itself prescriptive; the liberating dialogical. Education for domestication process is an act of transferring "knowledge", whereas education for freedom is an act of knowledge and a process of transforming action that should be exercised on reality.6)

It is imperative that the reproducing task of the dominant ideology be overcome by problem-posing education. According to Freire, "the reproducing task of the dominant ideology implies making reality opaque, to prevent the people from gaining critical awareness, from reading critically their reality, from grasping the *raison d'être* of the facts they discover.7)

The problem-posing education advocated by Freire is aimed to develop critical thinking of reality and critical intervention in reality, in the oppressed. He seems to have a firm belief that "dialogue" is the most productive way for the formation of such a critical personality. For him, true dialogue cannot be put into effect, unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking which perceive reality as process, as transformation of the world full of contradictions. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education. Dialogue, as the encounter among men to name the world, is the fundamental precondition for their true humanization.8) Laying stress on dialogue as the process of humanization, Freire argues:

Dialogue is to devote oneself to the constant transformation of reality.

In that dialogue is the content of the form of being which is peculiarly human, it is excluded from relationship in which people are transformed into beings for another by people who are false beings for themselves. Dialogue cannot imprison itself in any antagonistic relationship. Dialogue is the loving encounter of people, who, mediated by the world, proclaim that world. They transform the world and in transforming it, humanize it for all people. This encounter in love cannot be encounter of irreconcilables.9)

Freire criticizes the banking education, because it is antidialogical. He argues that those who use the banking approach fail to perceive that the deposits themselves contain contradictions about reality. According to him, "whereas in the antidialogical theory of action the dominators are compelled by necessity to divide the oppressed, the more easily to preserve the state of oppression, in the dialogical theory the leaders must dictate themselves to an untiring effort for unity among the oppressed—and unity of the leaders with the oppressed to achieve liberation".10) Finally it should be noted that he developed the dialogical theory of education united with a liberation or revolutionary praxis.

Notes

- 1) Kyu Hwan Lee, A Critical Sociology of Education(Seoul: the Hanwul Publishing Co., 1989): Kyu Hwan Lee, Critical Understanding of Korean Education(Seoul: the Hanwul Publishing Co., 1993).
- 2) Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed(New York: The Seabury Press, 1970), p. 28.
- 3) Paulo Freire, Education for Critical Consiousness(New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), p. 44.
- 4) Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p. 71.
- 5) Ibid., p. 74.
- 6) Paulo Freire, The Politics of Education-Culture, Power and Liberation(South Hadley in Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc., 1985), p. 102.
- 7) Paulo Freire and Ira Shor, A Pedagogy for Liberation(London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1987), p. 36.
- 8) Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p. 133.
- 9) Paulo Freire, Education for Critical Consciousness, p. 115.
- 10) Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, pp. 172-173.