

*Culture, Power and Transformation in  
the Work of Paulo Freire*

Henry A. Giroux

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# Henry A. Giroux

- Holds the view that schools should be proponents of social change.
- Is a leading advocate of *critical pedagogy*, in which theory and practice unite so that students are able to think critically (theory) in order to bring change (practice) (Johnson, Musial, Hall, Gollnick, & Dupuis, 2008, p. 329).
- Here analyzes the work of Paulo Freire, which he sees as bridging the gap between theory and practice.

# Bridging the Gap

- Giroux notes that Freire's work merges work that has been done in two radical traditions:

The New Sociology of Education  
and  
Liberation Theology

# The New Sociology of Education and “The Language of Critique”

- The new sociology of education emerged as a criticism of traditional schooling and educational theory, such as positivist pedagogies that only teach with regard to the existing society.
- Schools become agents that reproduce and legitimize ideologies, such as capitalism.

# The New Sociology of Education and “The Language of Critique” (Cont.)

- Freire’s ideas are in line with this:
  - Domination is not simply the obvious class oppression. Current social conditions can discriminate by race, sex, age.
  - Domination and oppression are worked into the traditional educational setup, through which a “culture of silence” is formed by eliminating the paths of thought that lead to a “language of critique” (Giroux, 2001, p. 80).
- Many proponents of the new sociology say there is no hope for change because traditional education reproduces the current system, so they only have critical theory, but Freire has . . .

# Liberation Theology and “The Language of Possibility”

- Freire has a vision of a liberated humanity that can be achieved through shared struggle. This is a “language of possibility” or “permanent prophetic vision” that looks toward the establishment on earth of the Kingdom of God (Giroux, 2001, p. 81).
- Rooted in Liberation Theology Movement of Latin America: Freire has hope and faith in a God and in Christian love between the exploited that precludes oppression.
- Critique combines with hope to promote action.

# Theoretical Elements of Freire's New Radical Pedagogy

## 1. Power

- Power is not limited to the oppressor. The oppressed have power to react and resist.
- Educators must address repression (formed by habit and training) of this fact.

## 2. Experience and Cultural Production

- No culture is inherently better than another because each person has his or her own unique culture based on unique experiences. Power, rather, is spread disproportionately, leading to misconceptions of cultural supremacy.
- Thus educators must not repress a student's cultural expressions (dreams, hopes, etc.) but work through them toward empowering the student.

# Theoretical Elements of Freire's New Radical Pedagogy (Cont.)

## 3. Transformative Intellectuals and Theory-Practice Relationship

- Every person is an intellectual, developing his or her own concept about the world.
- Many intellectuals theorize but do not struggle with the oppressed. This reproduces the disparity of power.
- The oppressed need *organic* and *transformative* intellectuals amongst them:
  - *Organic*: One of their own
  - *Transformative*: Promotes self-education and opposition to oppression.

In this way, theory and practice work together to move toward social change.

# Discussion Questions

- How do Freire's pedagogical views compare to your own philosophy of education?
- What implications do Freire's views have for teachers in multicultural school systems?

# References

- Giroux, H. A. (2001). Culture, power and transformation in the work of Paulo Freire. In F. Schultz (Ed.), *SOURCES: Notable selections in education* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) (pp. 77-86). New York: McGraw-Hill Dushkin.
- Johnson, J. A., Musial, D., Hall, G. E., Gollnick, D. M., & Dupuis, V. L. (2008). *Foundations of American education: Perspectives on education in a changing world* (14<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson Educational.