

Key Principles of Freire

a. No education is ever neutral

Education is either designed to maintain the existing situation, imposing on the people the values and culture of the dominant class (i.e. domesticating people, as one tames an animal to obey its master's will) or education is designed to liberate people, helping them to become critical, creative, free, active and responsible members of society. Education is either domesticating or liberating.

b. Relevance – issues of importance NOW to participants

People will act on the issues on which they have strong feelings. There is a close link, between emotion and motivation to act. All education and development projects should start by identifying the issues which the local people speak about with excitement, hope, fear, anxiety or anger.

A survey team needs to listen to these 'generative themes', or hot issues, in order to tap the energy of the community (for details on survey method see chapter 2).

The role of the educator is to present to the people in a challenging form, the issues they themselves have raised in a confused form.

– Mao Tse Tung

c. Problem-posing

From the beginning all participants are recognized as thinking, creative people with the capacity for action. The aim of the animator is to help them identify the aspects of their lives which they wish to change, to identify the problems, find the root causes of these problems, and work out practical ways in which they can set about changing the situation. The whole of education and development is seen as a common search for solutions to problems. This can be contrasted with the old 'banking approach' to education based on transmission of information from teacher to pupil.

Banking approach

- Teacher seen as possessing all essential information.
- Pupils seen as 'empty vessels' needing to be filled with knowledge.
- Teacher talks.
- Pupils absorb passively.

Problem posing approach

- Animator provides a framework for thinking, creative, active participants to consider a common problem and find solutions.

- Animator raises questions: why, how, who?
- Participants are active, describing, analysing, suggesting, deciding, planning.

Paulo Freire

“Problem posing education is prophetic, and as such is hopeful, corresponding to the historical nature of human beings. It affirms people as beings who transcend themselves, who move forward and look ahead, ... for whom looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are, so that they can more wisely build the future.”

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 57

“Some of the dominant class join the oppressed in their struggle for liberation. Theirs is a fundamental role and has been so throughout the history of this struggle. However as they move to the side of the exploited they almost always bring with them the marks of their origin. Their prejudices include a lack of confidence in the people’s ability to think, to want, and to know. So they run the risk of falling into a type of generosity as harmful as that of the oppressors. Though they truly desire to transform the unjust order, they believe that they must be the executors of the transformation.

They talk about the people but they do not trust them; and trusting the people is the indispensable precondition for revolutionary change. A real humanist can be identified more by his trust in the people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favour, without that trust.

“To substitute monologues, slogans, and communiqués for dialogue is to try to liberate the oppressed with the instruments of domestication.”

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, pp. 36, 41

d. Dialogue

The challenge to build a just, egalitarian socialist society is very complex. No individual knows exactly how to do it. No one has all the answers, and no one is totally ignorant. Each person has different perceptions based on their own experience. The so-called ‘educated’ have a lot to learn from the people since we have been trained mainly through the institutions of the dominant class. To discover valid solutions everyone needs to be both a learner and a teacher. Education must be a mutual learning process.

The role of the animator is to set up a situation in which genuine dialogue can take place – a real learning community where each shares their experience, listens to, and learns from, the others.

e. Reflection and action (praxis)

Most real learning and radical change takes place when a community experiences dissatisfaction with some aspect of their present life. An animator can provide a situation in

which they can stop, reflect critically upon what they are doing, identify any new information or skills that they need, get this information and training, and then plan action.

Often the first plan of action will solve some aspects of the problem, but not deal deeply enough with the root causes of the problem. By setting a regular cycle of reflection and action in which a group is constantly celebrating their successes, and analysing critically the causes of mistakes and failures, they can become more and more capable of effectively transforming their daily life.

“At all stages of their liberation, the oppressed must see themselves as people engaged in the vocation of becoming more fully human. Reflection and action become essential. True reflection leads to action but that action will only be a genuine praxis if there is critical reflection on its consequences.

To achieve this praxis it is necessary to trust in the oppressed and their ability to reason. Whoever lacks this trust will fail to bring about, or will abandon, dialogue, reflection and communication, and will fall into using slogans, communiqués, monologues and instructions. Superficial conversions to the cause of liberation carry this danger.”

“While no-one liberates themselves by their own efforts alone, neither are they liberated by others. The leaders must realise that their own conviction of the need for struggle was not given to them by anyone else – if it is authentic. This conviction cannot be packaged and sold; it is reached by means of a totality of reflection and action. Only the leaders’ involvement in a real historical situation leads them to criticise it and to wish to change it.”

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, pp. 41–42.

f. Radical transformation of life in local communities and the whole society

This type of education aims to involve whole communities actively in transforming

- the quality of each person’s life,
- the environment,
- the community,
- the whole society.

It is not an individualistic academic exercise, but a dynamic process in which education and development are totally interwoven. It recognises that each person has a contribution to make in building the new society, and tries to help each person and each community become more and more capable of, and committed to, the service of the people and national transformation.

No matter how long the night, the day is sure to come.

– Congo proverb

Transformation is only valid if it is carried out with the people, not for them. ...

Liberation is like a childbirth, and a painful one. The person who emerges is a new person, no longer oppressor or oppressed, but a person in the process of achieving freedom. ...

It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors.

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, pp. 43, 25, 32.

The age of nations is past.

The task before us now,

if we would not perish,

is to shake off our ancient prejudices

and to build the earth.

Teilhard de Chardin, *Building the Earth*, p. 42

Steps in Applying this Method

These key principles can be worked out practically in a variety of ways. The following describes how they can be applied in preparing an integrated development adult education program.

Many educators and development workers have wrestled with the problem of apathy and fatalism in the groups they wished to reach. This method has been developed in the course of a serious attempt to understand and overcome the root causes of these problems, both in rural and 'poor' urban communities. It therefore starts with a survey of the community for which the program is being planned.

Survey (developing a program on issues of the community)

As the survey is one of the most important parts of the whole process, it is important that it be done by a perceptive and sensitive team.

The survey is not approached like traditional surveys in which the research workers decide beforehand which facts they are going to find out about and work from very precise questionnaires, etc. In this approach, the team listens primarily to unstructured conversations, in which the people feel relaxed and talk about the things that they are most concerned about. It can be called a listening survey.

The listening situations should be places where the team members themselves will feel unself-conscious. Where possible it is good to let the people know that the team is preparing materials for a particular program and get their full and conscious co-operation. Places like

markets, buses, washing areas, bars, etc. can be places where a team can listen easily. (See chapter 2 for details on how to do a survey.)

Analysis of survey material

The next step is to take the information from the survey and look at it critically. What are people speaking about with strong feelings? Are the issues mainly dealing with problems of subsistence, decision-making or values? Where will action most likely come from? What will most effectively motivate people? In chapters 2 and 9 there are a number of helpful tools for analysing the information from the surveys.

Preparation of problem-posing materials

The team then prepares a series of 'codes' or problem-posing materials to stimulate discussion in the learning groups. These codes can be pictures, posters, slides, short stories, mimes, plays or songs. They should present a scene showing a concrete experience of one of the themes chosen, in such a way that it would be familiar to many of the participants.

Through the use of contrasts, related cause and effect, tension points, etc. the code itself should raise questions in the mind of the participants, and stimulate them to think of different possibilities. The better the code, the more the participants will discover for themselves, and the less the animator will have to 'tell' them the answers.

Most of the success of this program depends on:

- a. whether the themes chosen really are the most important preoccupations of the community, and
- b. whether the codes really do raise questions about familiar situations in the participants' own lives.

Chapters 2 and 3 explain in detail this process.

The learning group

The creation of a good learning situation, taking into account the psychological needs of the adult learner, is vital. Each person should have an opportunity to take an active part in the discussion.

Critical awareness means that people must be allowed to speak their own words. Speaking for other people or making them speak your words, does not promote critical thinking.

It is often very threatening to accept new ideas and one's first reaction is to resist them. People need to be allowed to express this resistance, as this often makes them freer to accept the ideas later. Mistakes should not be mocked, but expected and used as the basis for further learning. But developing this atmosphere of learning takes new skills on the part of the group leader. These are described in detail in chapters 4, 5 and 6 in this book.

The role of the animator

The animator's main work is to help the participants to 'unveil' their situation. They will remember much better what they have said and discovered for themselves, than what the

‘teacher’ has told them. Therefore the animator should not talk much, but should encourage discussion in the group, through asking the right questions. No one is ever completely ignorant, and no one ever has all the answers.

The animator needs to summarise when necessary and build on the contributions of the participants, once they have investigated the problems as deeply as they are able, and learnt all they can from one another.

The animator has a very important role to play in setting a good learning climate. (S)he needs group leadership skills so that (s)he is sensitive to the dynamics in the group, can draw in the shy people and prevent the talkative ones from dominating. Training for animators to develop these skills is found particularly in chapter 6 in this book.

The direction of the discussion

Once the group has settled down and a friendly learning atmosphere has developed, the animator presents the code (picture, story, play, etc.) to the group. Six basic steps form the framework for the discussion:

- description
- first analysis
- related to real life
- deeper analysis
- self-reliant action planning.

This whole process develops in the group a critical awareness of their own situation and stimulates the search for solutions to their own problems. This is the basis of ‘conscientisation’.

See chapter 3 for the practical ways to do this process.

Reflection – Action

Whenever a group is able to suggest something concrete that they can do about one of their problems, the animator encourages the action, participates as fully as possible in it, and helps the group to evaluate it together afterwards. All sorts of self-reliant projects such as credit unions, water projects, co-operatives, etc. have arisen out of this approach to adult education and development.

But the projects are not ends in themselves. They are the beginning of the process for critical awareness and always need to be seen in this light. See chapter 3 which elaborates this process. Chapters 7 and 8 include helpful tools for planning, decision-making and evaluation which are needed skills in making ideas become concrete.

Literacy projects

Paulo Freire became famous for bringing together the process of developing critical awareness and literacy. Literacy teaching is linked to the reflection and action discussions by using a series of 25 to 35 keywords, very closely related to the generative themes, which cover between them all the sounds in the language. From the ‘families of syllables’ the

literacy participants can build their own words and thus learn reading and writing through a process of discovery. This process is described fully in chapter 4.

“Literacy work, like education in general, is a political act. It is not neutral, for the act of revealing social reality in order to transform it, or of concealing it in order to preserve it, is political.”

The Declaration of Persepolis, International Symposium for Literacy, September 1975

Guidelines for Community Workers¹

1. Work with the poor and oppressed, not for them

Help them to understand, analyse, plan, carry out. But do not do it for them. They have a right to reject expert advice and to make mistakes. Development comes from within a people’s own understanding of their needs and rights. So they must decide the major issues and the basic needs and how to tackle them.

2. Development is an awakening process – a way in which people see themselves and awaken to their right to live as human beings. Without this awakening, there is little the animator can do – or should try to do. The people are intelligent and have much experience. Draw out their strength. Listen to them.

3. Let the people grow

Development is building up the people, so that they can build a future for themselves. Development is an experience of freedom as people choose what to do. It is a difficult experience for those who have lived in dependence and without hope for a long time. To decide and do something brings dignity and self-respect. Development efforts should therefore start with the people’s potential, and proceed to their enhancement and growth.

Small socio-economic programs are not only for economic achievement. Achievement is important because it builds confidence and makes next steps possible. The most important benefits are for the people to pinpoint the areas of exploitation, learn the processes of planning and implementing, and above all practise decision-making as a community.

4. Build up the people’s solidarity

Development occurs as liberated people build together with other people, in solidarity. As oppressed people, moving into freedom and opportunity, we can either become selfish and oppressive ourselves, or move into relations of solidarity with others, sharing and caring for one another, and marching together towards a new society in which our own full humanity is assured.

¹*Guidelines for Development*, edited by Harvey L. Perkins, Christian Conference of Asia, Singapore, 1980, pp. 24–25.

5. Build up the people's organisation

People must carry out liberating activities which keep their local community free of exploitation.

Establish links with other groups, and with national coordinators, in order to increase bargaining power, and make it possible to participate more widely in the struggle for a new society.

Cross the river in a crowd and the crocodile won't eat you. – Madagascar proverb