

# **Revista Internacional de Formação de Professores (RIPF)**

**ISSN: 2447-8288  
v. 2, n.2, 2017**

## **The Relationship between Education, Politics and Society in the Thought of Paulo Freire: A Reflection about Mozambique's Education System**

## **A Relação entre Educação, Política e Sociedade no Pensamento de Paulo Freire: Um Contributo de Reflexão para a Educação em Moçambique**

Submetido em 10/11/2016

Avaliado em 20/11/2016

Aceito em em 31/03/2017

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## **The Relationship between Education, Politics and Society in the Thought of Paulo Freire: A Reflection about Mozambique's Education System**

### **Abstract**

According to Paulo Freire (1989), knowledge requires a curious presence of the subject over the world, it requires a transformative action on reality and it demands a constant search and it implies invention and reinvention. Reflecting critically about this position, one notices that this contradicts with the ideals presented by the Ministry of Education in Mozambique, for the latter is simply concerned about promoting vocational training and the fight against poverty in the country's education system. Based on the thought of Paulo Freire, this essay seeks to reflect on Mozambique's education system, mainly on its concern for focusing people's education on vocational training and the fight against poverty, as it has been presented above. This reflection starts by providing a theoretical background of the thought of Paulo Freire so that afterwards, it can present the criticism he makes against the traditional method of education (banking method). Based on this criticism, in the third part, this paper reflects on how this type of education is helpful for social transformation. In the last part, the article discusses the relevance of Freire's thought to the education situation of Mozambique. In the end, the conclusion gravitates towards Freire's thought for it to be implemented in the Mozambican education system, instead of the ideas presented above.

### **Keywords**

banking method, problematization, awareness, ingenuity.

## **A Relação entre Educação, Política e Sociedade no Pensamento de Paulo Freire: Um Contributo de Reflexão para a Educação em Moçambique**

### **Resumo**

No entender de Paulo Freire (1989), o conhecimento exige que cada pessoa seja um sujeito curioso diante do mundo em que vive. Esta atitude leva a pessoa a desenvolver uma postura “transformadora sobre a realidade”, pois, esta requer uma invenção e reinvenção da situação em que cada um for a se encontrar. Reflectido criticamente sobre este posicionamento, nota-se que este entra em contradição com os ideais apresentados pelo Ministério de Educação em Moçambique, por este último se preocupar em promover a formação profissional e o combate à pobreza. Partindo deste contexto, este artigo procura reflectir sobre a educação moçambicana partindo do pensamento desenvolvido por Paulo Freire. Primeiramente, este trabalho irá apresentar as bases teóricas do pensamento de Freire, para, em seguida, apresentar a crítica que ele faz ao método tradicional (de depósito de conhecimentos). Considerando esta como a base fundacional da crítica de Freire, na terceira parte, este trabalho irá reflectir sobre como esse tipo de educação ajuda na transformação social, e partindo desta, o artigo seguirá para discutir a sua relevância para a situação de educação em Moçambique, para depois apresentar a devida conclusão.

### **Palavras-chave**

método de depósito, problematização, conscientização, ingenuidade educação em Moçambique

## **Introduction**

In a public discussion that Paulo Freire had in India with George Mathew, the latter challenged Freire in the following terms:

There is a myth that has been created and is being perpetuated that traditional institutions, be they in education or in health or in any other work can also do 'conscientization'. But as you know, these institutions are there to perpetuate a particular system. And conscientization [...] must necessarily subvert that system [...]. Any institution that is either supported or protected [...] or financially assisted by the state cannot but work for the state. So Paulo, when you say 'do the work and don't be naïve about the work', you are asking us to walk out of these institutions." (Mathew 1980: 14).

Mathew's concern in this debate was to show Freire that although his ideas are relevant to issues related to social justice and civil society, there are socio-political and economic problems inherent in their application, which may even make people lose their jobs. Having recognized this complication, Freire explained that one of the essential elements of his thinking has to do with "conscientization" because through education, this can help people to become aware of their reality of poverty and oppression, so that they can work to overcome it. This process, according to him, leads people to become free and fulfilled human beings in society (Mathew, 1980).

Freire developed this argument starting from the experience of poverty and uselessness he lived in Recife (Brazil), when his family was forced to leave a luxurious neighborhood to go and live in the outskirts of the city. As a result of this experience, he concluded that the kind of education that most of the poor people receive is a precarious banking education, since it does not help them to overcome their living conditions of misery and poverty (Mathew, 1980).

To overcome these difficulties, Freire believes in a transformative education for people's lives. In this type of education, what people live serves as the stuff of reflection for both students and teachers, and these reflections, in turn, should serve to help people to overcome the problems they face in their corresponding communities. In this regard, with this kind of education, students become agents who reflect on the problems that afflict their communities/society, and from these reflections they seek, in dialogue with others, to find solutions to such problems in order to improve their lives, and the lives of their communities (Mathew, 1980). To better understand this thought in depth, it is important to appreciate the theoretical background of his thought, which is what motivated him to reflect about this problem in education.

### **The Theoretical Background of Freire's Thought**

Freire's philosophical-pedagogical thinking is profoundly inspired by the existentialism of J. P. Sartre and Martin Heidegger, the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and by the thinking of Karl Marx and Frantz Fanon, because these scholars believe that what justifies the existence of education in any given society is the fact that it should bring about social changes that, in essence, should be beneficial and liberating mainly for the most disadvantaged people in society. Such changes are intended to help the popular masses to overcome both social exploitation and the alienation of the human person from the logic of capitalist, political and economic manipulation. For Freire, however, this "is not obtained by chance: it is a construction that never ends because, this requires that we always strive for it. It requires commitment, political clarity, coherence and decision" (Freire, 2005, p. 46). For this reason, Freire argues that a democratic education cannot be achieved outside an education for citizenship because what justifies the existence of a democracy is the exercise of citizens' political rights for their own wellbeing (Freire, 2005).

Apart from the aforementioned currents of thought, Freire was also influenced by the Christian Catholic tradition of liberation theology (mainly developed in Latin America) and by the Christian Pedagogical vision of Alceu de Amoroso Lima and Anísio Teixeira with whom he worked in different parishes [and] in Catholic initiatives. This work was developed in educational projects for the most needy of that society. One example of this is the "Casa Amarela" project, developed in Recife, which involved the development of different projects on education, and these projects went from daycare to adult education.

Freire's mission in these projects was to develop an education curricula for seven levels developed there, as well as he was supposed to create teacher training education projects for the same people. Having achieved this goal, their plan was to expand and develop it further and in other parts of Brazil (Freire, 1959).

With this work, Freire became one of the most influential educational theorists of the twentieth century, especially in adult education (Palmer, 2001). Having understood the foundations on which education was based, he came to reflect on the role that education plays in the conflicts between the oppressed and oppressors. This reflection made him realize that education can also be used not only as an instrument of domination against the least disadvantaged, but also that it can be used as a tool of liberation mainly in democratic and capitalist societies like ours. To better understand the

novelty brought about by his thought, it is imperative to analyze the criticism he makes to the traditional (or banking) education as opposed to problematizing. This is the task of the following paragraphs.

### **Problematization vs the banking method of education**

Unlike a type of education that does not invite people to question and to reflect on the institutions that serve them, to reflect about the political system that regulates their lives and to reflect on the reality they live in, Freire argues that problematization is an essential element for education because it helps both the educators and the learners to enter into a world that is full of possibilities for the transformation of individual and collective lives, and these possibilities end up enriching society and each member living in it (Freire, 1970). Freire understands problematization as a process through which the educator invites his students to depart from a concrete reality that they live in by identifying the problems that they experience, so that through the use of some scientific tools at their disposal, they can be able to reflect on such problems, so as to bring about concrete solutions to such problems. Freire explains this by saying that

The more the learners problematize as subjects in the world and with the world, the more they will feel challenged... Challenged, they understand the challenge in their own action of capturing it [...] not as something petrified. The resulting understanding tends to become increasingly critical to the lives of the participants (Freire, 1987, p. 70).

Understood in this way, education ceases to be a simple act of knowledge transmission, or mere accumulation of facts and / or information, becoming the process of each person's self-building and self-enrichment as a subject in a world where he is invited not only to read words, but also to read the world so as for him to be able to question it and transform it for the better (Palmer, 2001). With this perspective, Freire believes that, in the broadest sense, education needs to be understood as part of the project of political liberation, since it offers the students the conditions for self-reflection and self-criticism, for them to better manage their lives, thus providing fundamental notions of how people can become critically reflexive subjects, able to transform their lives and to improve society as a whole (Giroux, 2010, p. 2 *apud* Freire, 1970).

This type of education stands in opposition to the banking method or traditional method of education because, in the latter, students are not expected to reflect on what they are taught at school. Rather, they are expected to reproduce what is transmitted to them. In this regard, the

banking method resembles John Locke's epistemological thinking about the 'tabula rasa' because, in this situation, students are simply seen as empty containers that must be filled up with knowledge from their teachers. With this type of education, Freire argues that “an educator replaces self-expression with a ‘deposit’ that a student is expected to ‘capitalize’. The more efficiently he does this, the better educated he is considered” (Freire 1970, p. 70 and 1985, p. 21).

In such situations, however, students are not encouraged to think and reflect on the subjects provided to them and on the world and situations that surround them. Rather, they are expected to reproduce it when required (Freire, 1970 and 1985). With this type of education, Freire believes that the learning process is simply a tool of forcing students to accumulate information without necessarily having to reflect about it. In this regard, this cannot be considered as learning process at all (Freire, 1970).

Freire is against this type of education because it does not encourage learners to reflect, to be creative, to transform and to want to know more. On the contrary, this is a very strong pillar that can help in the construction of socio-political and economic structures of oppressive situations in society (Freire, 1970). This happens because with this type of education, the student becomes a mere ‘*mister yes*’, conformed about the socio-political and economic situation of the society in which he / she is involved, even if his is undesirable and oppressive, instead of being confronted by it (Darder, 2001). Thus, Freire's revolt against this type of education is due to the fact that it promotes the *culture of silence*, since it supports the abovementioned structures. This means that instead of education helping both learners and citizens to critically reflect on situations of oppression, social exclusion, injustice, among other problems, the banking method encourages them to see these situations not only as natural and normal, but also as acceptable and unchangeable (Freire, 1970).

To subvert this situation, Freire believes that schools or educational institutions should be transformed into places where problems affecting citizens' lives are presented and discussed so that the results of such discussions can serve not only the individuals concerned but also the societies in which they are inserted (Freire, 1970). For him, this type of education can help to bring about social justice because, in the process of reflecting about such problems, these reflections can help people to overcome socio-political and economic injustices that are linked to the political and economic structures of society (Darder, 2002). To better understand this issue, the following

paragraphs will discuss how Freire's education can influence people to achieve the transformation that is being mentioned here.

### **Paulo Freire and Education for Social Transformation**

Considering that Freire developed his thinking between the 1970s and 1980s when Brazil was characterized by "extreme socio-political and economic inequalities, where millions of people were excluded from certain socio-political and economic benefits, while others were enjoying the same benefits, "he believes that the purpose of education is not to get pupils to know things through memorization" (Palmer, 2001, p. 129). On the contrary, as it has been observed in this discussion, he believes that education should help them to detect the problems that they face in their society so that later on, after having reflected on such problems, they can become protagonists who bring about honest and well-reflected solutions to such problems (Palmer, 2001).

For Freire, this act is fundamental for education because he believes that "education is a political act [...] that involves social relations, and these relations imply political choices" (Palmer, 2001, p. 129). These choices have serious socio-political implications because they can "either help to perpetuate social exclusion and injustice, or they can help to lay strong foundations for a constructive and inclusive social transformation in society (Palmer, 2001). This is why Freire's opinion is that "questions such as what?, why?, for what purpose?, and for who? are central to any activity that involves education because answers to these questions may serve as critical guides for any project related to an education for social transformation (Palmer 2001, p. 129).

Thus, any education for transformation, as Freire has devised it, is essential for any society because it may help to free the human person from all kinds of oppression, since this does not help people to live their lives in a dignified way due to oppressive socio-political and economic structures therein existent. Freire is an apologist of this criticism because he believes that in some situations, education may consciously or unconsciously be used as an instrument that can "facilitate the integration of younger generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity" or that it can help them cope with this reality in a critical and creative way in order to encourage them to discover how they can participate in the transformation of the world in which they live (Freire, 1970). In order to achieve this, Freire believes in a problematizing education [which has already been discussed above] because it helps to perceive what is wrong in society, and why even though

it is wrong, it is sustained and defended by some people. In the end, the same kind of education is important, for Freire, because it can help people to devise means on how they can overcome the problems that they face. In order to show the linkage between the significance of this thought to society, the following paragraphs will discuss the significance of the ideas discussed in this argument to the situation of Mozambique.

### **The Relevance of Paulo Freire's thought to Mozambique**

At this point, it is clear that on the basis of his analysis about education, Freire discovered a close connection between knowledge and political power. This connection manifests its effects on the relation that citizens have with the prevailing political system of their society, with their experience of freedom and citizenship, and with their economic development (Freire, 1970). This link exists due to the fact that in Freire's view, there is no education system that is purely neutral. For the most part, the education that the majority of the population receives serves to "shape" their minds so that they may become mere passive, submissive, and obedient "instruments" of the socio-political and economic interests of the ruling elites. However, this type of education is not concerned about their fulfilment as human beings who, through it, must develop critical thinking skills, so that they can overcome the problems that they face in a more rational and participatory way in their communities.

For Freire, this type of education does not help them to overcome the situation of poverty and destitution that they are living, because, for him, liberation cannot occur when the oppressed are passive. This is why it is necessary for people to develop awareness and intervention in the world. As quoted by João Pereira (2012, p. 47), Freire argues that "the poor have no way out of poverty if they do not find out critically that they are unjustly poor". It is only after they have become aware of this situation that they can begin to fight against the structures that sustain this injustice. This means that for Freire, "people should be educated in order for them to develop a critical and reflexive view of the society in which they are inserted, in the same way that this type of education should free them from naive acceptances of life and the dehumanizing effects existing in it (Nyirenda, 1996).

This argument has its practical application and implications to the Mozambican context because the Ministry of Education believes that investing in Mozambican economic growth is the best

alternative to fighting poverty in the country (PARP 2011-2014, PARPA II, 2006, GdM, 2011, p.38). For example, the Action Plan for Poverty Reduction in Mozambique (2011-2014) considers the reduction of poverty incidence from 54, 7%, in 2009 to 42%, in 2014, as its main target. This also applies to the Action Plan of 2015-2020. The same document defends that in the context of Mozambique, this growth is possible if there is good investment in agriculture, in economic diversification, while creating more employment and more connections between foreign investment and the local economy. Simultaneously, this growth is believed to reduce food insecurity, children's chronic malnutrition, while enforcing the defense mechanisms against endemic diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria (PARP, 2011).

To achieve the above-mentioned aims, education is considered as one of its tools since the government intends to invest more on professional traditional learning as a method or means for people to achieve the intended goals. This is thought to be done by expanding access and creating a National System of Certification for Professional Competencies (GdM 2011, p. 26 2011). However, as it has been argued in the course of this discussion, this position contradicts the thought of Paulo Freire in various ways. From the Mozambican perspective, Pereira believes that the emphasis that this kind of argument makes, mainly in socio-economic aspects hides the political side of poverty, mainly those that are linked to unjust methods of political participation, representation, political inequalities, those related to the articulation of poor people's interests and the political difficulties that poor people meet for them to change their own destinies and their lives (Pereira, 2012).

In this regard, he observes that the suggestions offered by the documents presented above do simply focus on the country's economic growth, without focusing on the need to improve the functioning of the democratic system in terms of the public sphere, public participation, representation and the promotion of an associative civic culture" (Pereira, 2012). This means that the improvement of poor people's life depends, not only on the improvement of their income, but also in their capacity to create social networks and civic organizations, where they can involve themselves in public discussions, negotiations about political issues that affect their interests and needs. Moreover, the improvement of people's lives also depends of the expansion of their civic rights, not only in terms of their access to basic quality services, but also in terms of their participation in mechanisms of public consultation, such as political parties and public spaces

(Pereira, 2012), which cannot positively happen with the presented by the Ministry of education in Mozambique, where the emphasis lies on the fight against poverty, yet there are also other levels of *socio-political poverty* that should be the priority of our education systems.

In this regard, the thought of Paulo Freire becomes relevant to the situation of Mozambique in that for people to be able to form associations and reflect about the problems that Pereira is referring to, these need to have an education that is based on the Freirian approach of conscientization. In essence, this process of reflection is meant to help citizens work individually and collectively so as to bring about positive changes to their society. Developing such capacities may help many people to be able not only to reflect about the challenges that they meet in their daily lives, but also these would help them to feel compelled to solving these problems in view of bringing about a better and inclusive society where the existing resources are meant to benefit everyone in the country.

Moreover, these would also be able to participate in discussions and solving problems related to socio-political and economic challenges that are created by the people who hold positions of office and influence in their corresponding communities (Nyirenda, 1996). In this view, instead of human life being guided by external forces or political and economic interests, this would begin to be guided on the basis of the interests of the common good, which would be rooted on justice and equality so as to bring about a better living and democratic situation in the country.

### **Conclusion**

This article has discussed the thought of Paulo Freire within the context of the education system in Mozambique. The reflection developed in it shows that although there have been a lot of reflections around this matter in the country, the alternatives presented, mainly those developed along the lines defended by the Ministry of Education are not viable to the development of a democratic consciousness in the country. In this regard, considering the advantages observed in Freire's concept of education, this paper suggested his approach as a better alternative to be implemented in the country, rather than the one presented by the Ministry of Education in the country.

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