

Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of Liberation

Regina Cortina

Teachers College, Columbia University

Marcella Winter

Teachers College, Columbia University

To highlight the significance of Freire's pedagogy, this article draws from the work of decolonial thinkers in Latin American and Enrique Dussel's philosophy to understand Freire's pedagogy of liberation. Two concepts in Freire's work, conscientização and praxis, are key to understanding how awakening the consciousness of teachers and learners can empower them in transforming an unjust world. For Freire, the collaboration between teachers and learners is essential to the self-transformation of learners for their own liberation. This innovative and transformative pedagogy inspired literacy campaigns and social justice movements around the globe and constitutes Freire's legacy.

Introduction

“(...) liberation is thus the ‘place’ and the ‘purpose’ of this pedagogy.”
Dussel (2013)

The depth of Paulo Freire's thinking and practice led to advances in the theory of liberation and to the foundation of a pedagogy of liberation. Our aim in this article is to examine Freire's work towards a pedagogy of liberation. We write in honor of Paulo Freire at the 100th anniversary of his birth in 1921 in Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil.

The theory of liberation emerges from a collaboration among Latin American academics aiming to develop a philosophy of Latin America and to question the epistemologies behind Western social sciences. They pursue these aims to create an expansion of perspectives that reflects a Latin American reality autonomous from Eurocentric domination (Escobar, 2010). This article is based on our understanding of the writing of Latin American philosopher Enrique Dussel, who developed what he calls “a Latin American philosophy of education” (Dussel, 2019). In his book, *The Ethics of Liberation* (2013), Dussel presents an extensive analysis of Freire to highlight the significance of his theoretical contributions and his critical perspective. Dussel concludes that the essence of Freire's contribution is that “education is not possible without the self-education of the learner in the process of his or her own liberation” (p. 311).

As Dussel sees it, Freire's pedagogy goes beyond focusing on cognitive and social development. The emphasis is on the growth of an ethical-critical consciousness in the learner that emerges through a pedagogy that respects the other (Dussel, 2013). The ethical-critical consciousness proposed by Freire originates in learners, who are perceived as the privileged historical subjects of their own liberation. It is ethical because it grows

out of the learner's perspective; it is critical because it recognizes their aspirations and dignity (Dussel, 2013). The pedagogy proposed by Freire challenges traditional forms of teaching and learning, which try to domesticate the student, imposing the Other upon the Self, and neglecting their voice. Both Freire and Dussel understand teaching and learning as a process centered on the notion that liberation is the aim of pedagogy. What they mean is that "the ethics of liberation is an ethics of everyday life" (Dussel, 2013, p. 211). Based on dialogue and respect for the learner's perspective, the pedagogy of liberation becomes a powerful tool in raising critical consciousness and transforming the logics of domination in Latin American teaching and learning practices.

To establish Freire's legacy and influence in decolonial thinking and practice in Latin America, we build upon the work of Dussel, the most prominent Latin American decolonial philosopher who interpreted Freire's work. We build upon Dussel's interpretation to advance Freire's pedagogy of liberation. To accomplish this goal and to provide a contextualized and detailed analysis of Freire's pedagogical influence, this article starts by reviewing the Brazilian educator's unique contribution. We use the central tenets of Latin America's decolonial theory and explain how Freirean concepts align with current scholarship on decolonial thinking to illuminate the foundations of Freire's pedagogy of liberation. Freire and Dussel were contemporaries. In this article we review Dussel's analysis of Freire as a seminal thinker to show how he builds on the Freirean pedagogy to develop his thinking. We discuss Dussel's reasoning to understand his analysis of Freire, and we demonstrate why Dussel is central to understanding Freire's contributions. We build on these two thinkers and their arguments to show the importance of teachers in Latin American pedagogy and Freire's overall legacy.

Freire's pedagogy: *conscientização* and *praxis*

One of the most influential education thinkers of the twentieth century, Paulo Reglus Neves Freire (1921-1997) was born in Recife, Pernambuco, in the Northeast of Brazil. Although he was raised in an underserved and impoverished region and experienced a family background marked by financial hardships, the young Freire discovered education as a central element in his life. The lessons learned in his childhood helped him develop ideas about schooling that would shape the educator and the philosopher he would later become. Freire had strong support from his parents to learn how to read and write and became interested in learning from a young age. Reminiscing about memories from Paulo Freire's childhood, his wife Ana Maria describes in a book dedicated to his life and work how Freire's mother and father used words and phrases that were relevant to his experience as a child in Brazil to spark his learning (Araújo Freire, 1996). His parents instilled in him an awareness that would become central in his work as an educator and philosopher: knowledge must be linked to one's daily reality. While in elementary school, his first Portuguese teacher, Eunice, guided the young Freire in developing his writing. She commonly asked him to write all the words he knew, and then both of them discussed their different meanings. She did not aim to make the student memorize grammar rules, but rather to develop a love for the mother tongue and its beauty (Araújo Freire, 1996). Years later, when Freire became a teacher of Portuguese, he put into practice what he discovered with his first mentor; the process of teaching and learning is a collective endeavor in which teachers and students are partners in creating knowledge.

After earning a Law degree, Freire decided to change careers and work as a schoolteacher. As his career developed, he concentrated his efforts on education by targeting a particular group: illiterate workers (Araújo Freire, 1996). Freire initiated a critical approach to literacy, focusing on adult education and promoting the notion that "reading the world

precedes reading the word" (Freire & Slover, 1983, p. 5). In the book *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, written with his long-time collaborator Donaldo Macedo, Freire explains that the organization of literacy programs should be based on what he calls the "word universe" of learners (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 35). By reading the students' world and identifying the most meaningful words in their existential experiences, educators come to recognize how they express their actual language, anxieties, fears, demands, and dreams (Freire & Macedo, 1987). The learning process happens through "codifications," i.e., pictures representing situations related to learners' daily lives (Freire, 1976; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Reading, or "decoding," the images of concrete situations enables learners to reflect on their former interpretation of the world before going on to read words (Freire & Macedo, 1987). More than becoming literate, they learn to read situations of injustice to become agents of change; they insert themselves in the world as capable of subverting a reality that is not favorable to them. According to these notions, Freire developed a method based on critical literacy. The first large-scale implementation of this method took place with 380 sugarcane workers between February and March of 1963 in Angicos,¹ a small town in Rio Grande do Norte, another impoverished state in Northeast Brazil. By helping those marginalized Brazilians to learn how to read and write, Freire was not only educating them but making them aware of their transformative power in their own lives, their communities, and societies.

The Brazilian Constitution of 1946 stated that the non-educated were not citizens and could not participate in elections. Freire's efforts went beyond educating for people to become literate citizens. He aimed at empowering those individuals to become voters and influential actors in local and national politics. During the government of President João Goulart (1961-1964), public officials invited Freire to participate in different initiatives related to public education because of his expertise. He played various roles at the local and state levels and was appointed to spearhead the National Adult Literacy Plan (1964) and reproduce the successful Angicos experience on a much larger scale (Araújo Freire, 1996; Kohan, 2021). However, in 1964, a civil-military coup overthrew Goulart. The new government identified Freire as subversive and forced him into sixteen years of exile.

The civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985) frustrated the plans for making Brazil a more literate and equal country. Still, this chapter in the country's history was central in the emergence of Freire as prominent educator. While in exile, he wrote the book recognized as his masterpiece, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and had the opportunity to promote a pedagogy that aimed to encourage the liberation of individuals not only in his home country but around the world.

Among the many concepts developed within his pedagogy, Freire firmly based his philosophy and practice on two main ideas: *conscientização* and *praxis*. In the book *Conscientização*, Freire (1979) clarifies that he was not the one who invented the term. It was coined by scholars at the Advanced Institute of Brazilian Studies (*Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros*, ISEB), a center devoted to the study of Brazil's development problems. Upon hearing the word for the first time and realizing the depth of its meaning, Freire understood that it should be central to his ideas about education. *Conscientização*, usually translated into English as conscientization, is an act of knowledge, a critical approach to reality that favors education as a practice of freedom (Freire, 1979). He differentiates "consciousness" from "conscientização." Becoming conscious about an issue or apprehending the reality is not enough to develop a critical stance in which individuals

¹ The documentary *Paulo Freire, um homem do mundo* (Paulo Freire, A Man of the World), directed by Cristiano Burlan (2020), narrates Freire's experiences in Angicos, recounting the stories told by the main characters in the endeavor, teachers and students who participated in the experiment.

see themselves as capable of transforming their reality. Freire also suggests that, because *conscientização* happens in a specific space and time, it must be a reiterative process. The process of *conscientização* brings together human consciousness and the world, perceived as an object for critical reflection and change. It is, above all, the recognition that individuals can take possession of their reality and become engaged in the task of transforming it permanently (Freire, 1979).

Freire proposes that critical education promotes *conscientização*, through which learners become aware of the objective reality that produces oppression. Still, teaching and learning must be closely linked to a liberating *praxis* based on action and reflection. In his most recognized work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire proposes that only through individuals' reflection and action upon the world to transform it, that is, the authentic *praxis*, will the oppressor-oppressed contradiction be resolved (Freire, 2000). Through a humanist and liberationist perspective, the pedagogy of the oppressed happens in two stages. In the first, individuals unveil the world of oppression to which they have been historically subjected, and they commit, through *praxis*, to its transformation (Freire, 2000). After the reality of the oppression has already been transformed, in the second stage, this pedagogy is no longer exclusively related to the oppressed: it becomes a tool for all people towards their permanent liberation (Freire, 2000). Through *conscientização* and *praxis*, individuals dismantle the conditions that lead to oppression and construct a more just and equal reality for all people. As suggested by Freire in *Education, as a Practice of Freedom*, a pedagogy based on *conscientização* and *praxis* favors learning and teaching that translate into forces of change and liberation (Freire, 1976). A critical education leads to more *conscientização* and, through *praxis*, individuals insert themselves into history not as viewers but as actors and authors of their destinies (Freire, 1976). This search for liberation and fostering individuals' capacity to dismantle situations of oppression reflects Freire's intellectual kinship with the thinking of Latin American authors who confront conditions of injustice present in the region.

In the book *Education, the Practice of Freedom*, Freire (1976) reflects on his experience as a teacher in Brazil to propose a pedagogy of liberation capable of awakening the consciousness of teachers and learners to activate empowered human beings who can identify their role in transforming an unjust world. Context is central in his work since "there is no education outside human society and there is no man in a void" (Freire, 1967, p. 35). When considering that traditional forms of education have contributed to colonization, reinforcing practices that encourage students to become passive and acritical, Freire's pedagogy is applicable in other contexts beyond Brazil and primarily allied with the Global South. For all of these countries, he believes, transforming education emerges as an urgent matter. The traditional forms of education brought by the colonizer need to be transformed in order to create practices that favor change and liberation. Adopting new approaches connected to the reality of each society will undergird the replacement of education for domestication and alienation with education practices for freedom. The only option for a society that aspires to decolonization is to transform its people into subjects in their own history, to promote education for the person-subject rather than the person-object (Freire, 1976). In the following section, we discuss the place of liberation in decolonial thought.

Decolonial theories in search of liberation

Decolonial theory questions the narrow conceptions of knowledge produced by academics and research institutions concerned with education. Decolonial theorists have diverse disciplinary backgrounds. They come from and they study different regions in the

world. All of them, though, are united in critiquing an exclusive reliance on Eurocentric epistemologies. The term decolonial is useful to distinguish those whose practices and studies encourage thinking and knowledge production not only *with* but *from* the Global South: worldviews, cultural ways of knowing of historically colonized, racialized or subaltern communities.

Decolonial thinking, in our view, is deeply informed by the concept of “coloniality of power” coined by Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2000). By this he means continuing subjugation in various ways to the racial and gender hierarchies established during colonial times. Those hierarchies started with the arrival of the Spaniards to the Americas in 1492 and continued with the enduring presence of those hierarchies in contemporary societies. The writings of Quijano help to recognize “coloniality” as the darker side of modernity, ever-present in social and political structures today, and to uncover how it operates. This is what Walter Mignolo refers as *modernity/coloniality*. He offers this blend of two key words to identify the “colonial matrix of power” that supports present-day modernity (Mignolo, 2012).

For education scholars, decolonial theories open up new perspectives for considering all kinds of knowledge and world views, not only those produced from Eurocentric and colonial perspectives. From the perspective of Latin America, the focus shifts to many students and educators across the world whose knowledge, languages, and cultures have been left out of schools and universities (Cortina & Earl, 2019).

Enrique Dussel’s emphasis in his philosophical work is to understand decoloniality, a term that emerged in Latin America, and to focus on understanding the power structures that support *modernity/coloniality* to build a decolonial society for local and regional communities based on alternative epistemologies. Dussel (2019) indicates that education in Latin America needs to move away from conceptions that are not supported by the region’s cultural and historical heritage. This proposition is at the heart of Dussel’s thinking on how critical thinking and practices of liberation can promote alternative ways of teaching and learning. Dussel’s philosophy emerges from understanding the influence that colonization had on the consolidation of national education systems in Latin America and the subjugation of Indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans. Dussel argues that the colonizers employed diverse processes to modernize and civilize, and pedagogical practice is a crucial tool for understanding how colonized peoples lived and reproduced their lives. Concepts such as modernization, rationality, and emancipation inspired Europeans in their overseas endeavors. While traditional notions of modernity promoted emancipation within European civilizations, the modern project became an obstacle to Latin America’s liberation. Since the first European conquerors set foot in the so-called “new world,” the social, economic, and political structures of Latin America were changed, and still reflect colonization by remaining in many ways dependent and peripheral.

To subvert the colonial logic of domination, Dussel (1995a) proposes to transcend modern reason, which translates into not negating rationality itself but rejecting a “violent, Eurocentric, developmentalist, hegemonic reason” (p. 138). Dussel, then, suggests, through this process the alterity, the Other, receives recognition as an equal. Dismantling the hierarchies formerly established by colonization is at the center of the project to transcend Eurocentrism on behalf of the historically erased alterity. Emancipation and the pedagogy of liberation arises as a central element in this long-term process toward the liberation of those oppressed by racial, culture, gender, ethnicity, or language practices, all of which are hierarchies that support coloniality in the advance of modernity.

Towards a pedagogy of liberation

A new Latin American philosophy of education is based on a pedagogics of liberation. Dussel introduces the word "pedagogics," a term that emerges from his philosophy of liberation as distinctive from European philosophy and a limited negation of that tradition (Marquínez Argote, 1995). In "A Brief Note on Pedagogics," the author suggests that the concept concerns how education needs to move away from conventional pedagogical systems that favor domination in Latin America since colonial times (Dussel, 2018). Similarly, as he has argued some decades before in *Método para una Filosofía de la Liberación*, Dussel (1974) affirms that to acknowledge the illiterate as subjects in the process of teaching and learning is essential to create an original and respectful pedagogy in Latin America.

Pedagogics is based, above all, on comprehension and justice (Dussel, 2018). Contrary to a pedagogy of domination, it is a world of culture and teaching that admits the possibility of different forms of interpreting reality (Dussel, 2018). Because pedagogy is a cultural, social, and familial problem (Dussel, 1995b), the pedagogy of liberation nurtures communities to support the new generation and manage the conflicts that may emerge from the relationship between tradition and innovation. Through the praxis of liberation, it aims to prevent the pedagogical death of the Other, or what Dussel calls "filicide." Every family or any political system that, in the name of tradition or the status quo, prevents the emergence of the new commits filicide (Dussel, 1995b). Pedagogics gives the Other more than a chance to exist, but also the space to speak and to question the culture and ideology of the current system (Dussel, 2018).

Within the pedagogics of liberation, in Dussel's view, the new generation joins the pedagogical process as a critical agent rather than a passive participant. Frequently conceived as empty vessels, students are, on the contrary, subjects in a world of meanings, memory, and resistance (Dussel, 2013). Following an approach to education centered on pupils, teachers become the disciple of the disciples (Dussel, 2018). Professional educators must listen to the perspectives of young people and learn how to be critical of dominant and dehumanizing practices.

The concept of pedagogics refers to how education aims to nurture communities to support the new generation. A critical component is that teachers must listen to the perspectives of young people, the new generation, and to learn with them how to be critical of dominant and dehumanizing perspectives. To recognize pupils both as the historical continuity of their community and the risk of that tradition's alteration is to put the system of domination in question so that a new system can be organized (Dussel, 2018). Within the pedagogics of liberation, children are understood according to their temporality and locality—their voices must be heard and the novelty they bring must be considered (Dussel, 2019). Following this approach to education, students and teachers construct knowledge through a partnership; teachers speak, but above all, they listen—if dialogue is not present, liberatory learning is impossible (Dussel, 2019). Thus, educational practices must be linked to an ethics of liberation, which emerges from "the victims," the excluded Other, the oppressed (Dussel, 2013, pp. 294-295). To recognize pupils both as the historical continuity of their community and the risk of that tradition's alteration is to put the system of domination in question so that a nonhierarchical system can be organized (Dussel, 2018). In doing so, we must give strength to the new generation, for them to dismantle a fetishized system based on oppression and to pass to a new one, in which they can liberate themselves and discover how to build the new order through education (Dussel, 2019).

After Dussel's detailed inquiry into the sources of Latin American pedagogical systems conducive to domination, one question remains: how would pedagogics materialize? Instead of proposing an alternative method, the philosopher highlights Paulo Freire as an example of an educator who aims to make ethical-critical consciousness emerge through his pedagogy (Dussel, 2013). Drawing on Freire's seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and the concept of "critical consciousness" or "*conscientização*," Dussel (1974, 2019) asserts that the problem-based pedagogy proposed by the Brazilian educator meets the requirements for a respectful pedagogy for Latin America and offers what is essential for "education as the practice of freedom." Discussing how a pedagogy of liberation should look in the age of globalization, Dussel (2013) emphasizes Freire's definition of education as a transforming and critical activity by which the emergence of ethical-critical reason becomes an integral part of the education process. He describes Freire not only an educator, in the strict sense of the term: "he is something more—an educator of the "ethical-critical consciousness" (Dussel, 2013, p. 304).

In Freire's pedagogy, the aim of education is not to foster theoretical or moral intelligence, but to educate in a historical, communitarian process connected to learners' daily lives. Through a pedagogy of liberation and its teaching and learning practices, individuals can identify themselves as oppressed, acknowledging the possibility of transforming social reality and becoming empowered, "through which they abandon their condition as victims" (Dussel, 2013, p. 312). To analyze the causes of oppression means to increase awareness of the objective reality that produces oppression and how it connects to individual's experiences. Freire is not interested in creating hypothetical examples to help learners identify what a context of oppression would signify. On the contrary, he highlights the situations of subjugation experienced by students as the foundation of the pedagogical practice (Dussel, 2013).

The education process creates an awareness of the objective reality that produces oppression; however, it must be closely linked to a liberating *praxis* that connects subjects in a community that dismantles the conditions for oppression (Dussel, 2013). By articulating the process of teaching and learning through the concrete reality lived by the oppressed, education emerges as the place where students see themselves as the origin of the transformation of reality. The critical consciousness proposed by Freire originates in the students, conceived as the privileged historical subjects of their own liberation. Upon understanding their reality, students through their *praxis* and actions gain critical consciousness, and this is an illuminating moment for their life and the practice of freedom in their community (Dussel, 2019). Dussel describes Freire as an original thinker who situates the learner in a community engaged in the process of *conscientização*. From this perspective, the Brazilian educator opposes mainstream traditional and acritical education. Since Freire is concerned with social transformation, his pedagogy translates into a radically original position compared to other educators who neglect that education is not possible without the self-education of the learner in the process of their own liberation. In this sense, liberation is thus "the place" and the "purpose" of Freirean pedagogy (Dussel, 2013, p. 320).

Freire's Legacy

Freire's work has had lasting influence in Brazil and many other countries of the world. His pedagogy and philosophy have inspired social movements and literacy campaigns to construct more just societies. Paulo Freire participated both directly and indirectly in many of these endeavors.

After being imprisoned in Brazil for seventy days under the charge of being "subversive" and "a traitor," Freire began a peregrination. Following a brief stay in Bolivia, he lived in Chile for five years, where he worked with the Christian Democratic Agrarian Reform Movement and found a conducive environment to develop his ideas. In the book *Pedagogy of Hope* (2014), Freire recalls that the intensity of the Chilean social atmosphere made him rethink his Brazilian experience and inspired him to write *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* between 1967 and 1968. Later, he spent some time working as a Professor at Harvard and moved to Geneva to serve at the Office of Education in the World Council of Churches (WCC). During his time in WCC, Freire worked as an advisor for recently independent nations in Africa. In the 1970s, he collaborated with the establishment of postcolonial education systems in countries such as Zambia, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau (Gadotti, 2019). Freire recalls some of his experiences in Africa in the book *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau* (2016). He argues that the education systems established by European colonizers contributed to colonized peoples' dehumanization and low self-esteem. The objective in restructuring or "rehabilitating" those nations' schools would then be closely linked to the decolonization of peoples' minds. According to Moacir Gadotti (2019), Freire's work in Africa was decisive for his trajectory and made him undertake new perspectives in the field of adult literacy.

Even when in exile, Freirean pedagogy significantly influenced how social movements progressed in Brazil under the dictatorship. Discussing how the Landless Workers' Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem-Terra, MST) developed its pedagogical approach, Rebecca Tarlau (2019) clarifies that the MST defined education as one of its main concerns based on the ideas offered by Freire in *Pedagogy of The Oppressed*. Local landless leaders came to know the popular and liberatory education he proposed through Catholic Church's study groups (CEBs) in the 1970s. Religious leaders drew on Freire's writings on literacy to teach rural workers to read the world and the word, starting with their daily experiences and then progressing to discussions on inequality, economy, and politics (Tarlau, 2019). The strategies used by educators, included drawing on the language of the community, creating pedagogical activities based on students' realities, and promoting learning through dialogue (Tarlau, 2019). Confirming the notion that education is simultaneously an act of knowing and a political act (Freire, 1985), those ideas also influenced MST's struggle for rural workers' rights and political agenda recognition. Sharing her fieldwork notes, Tarlau (2019) quotes one of MST's national leaders, who explained how Freire influenced their quest for social justice: "Paulo Freire taught us that we are the subjects of the process of social change, not objects. He believes in peasant workers. (...). Paulo Freire taught us that (...) everyone has to be an agent in their own liberation" (p. 51). Freire continues to be a source of inspiration for MST and the movement's pedagogical practices (Vieira & Côco, 2018; Tarlau, 2019).

Freire contributed to reconstructing democracy in his home country upon returning to Brazil in 1980, after sixteen years of exile. When the civil-military dictatorship started to show signs of weakness, leading the way to a gradual return to democracy, the educator became a crucial voice in building a new country. Given his experience with grassroots initiatives and his worldwide fame, Freire was invited by members of the Constituent Assembly to participate in the discussions that would lead to Brazil's new democratic constitution. Addressing the Education and Literacy Subcommittee, Freire (1987) focused on adult literacy and the need to extend public education, qualitatively and quantitatively, to all Brazilians. He added that literacy alone would not create social change; however, a major transformation in society would not be feasible without it (Freire, 1987, p. 488). The subcommittee's president, Hermes Zaneti (1987), emphasized that although this was Freire's first visit to the Constituent Assembly, "he had always been

present in the subcommission's work, through his thought and work" (p. 483). This quote might explain some of the innovations related to literacy brought by the new Constitution. Superseding the Constitution from 1946 that restricted voting to literate individuals, the 1988 Constitution from its inception gave voting rights to Brazilians without literacy skills (Aleixo & Kramer, 2010).

Upon his return to Brazil, Freire also participated in the founding of the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT) and served as the secretary of education for the city of São Paulo in Luiza Erundina's administration (1989-1992). During the years he assumed political leadership as the secretary of education, Freire confirmed the central imperative in his philosophy: public education must play a decisive role in the continuing reformation of a democratic society. In *Pedagogy of the City* (1993), Freire reflects on how he tried to translate his ideas into policy and to create a democratic school system "where one practices a pedagogy of the question, where one teaches and learns with seriousness, but where seriousness never becomes dullness. (...) where, in teaching necessarily the content, one also teaches how to think critically" (p. 19). He resigned from the position in 1991 and dedicated his life to teaching at universities based in São Paulo until his death on May 2, 1997 (Rohan, 2021).

From Freire's perspective, a pedagogy of liberation will not happen without the cooperation of the teacher, since the teacher needs to be respectful of the self-transformation of the learner that will take place through their own *conscientização* and educational *praxis*. Freire (2000) interprets teachers as the "revolution leaders," who translate into relevant actors for changing the status quo.

Teachers as learners

Teachers play a decisive role in Dussel's and Freire's conception of the pedagogy of liberation. Although Freire recognizes that the students gain consciousness from "within," he acknowledges that the same "consciousness" is unfolded by the teacher through a dialogical process of teaching and learning (Dussel, 2013). In traditional European pedagogy, teachers are the educators par excellence, the ones who will promote not only children's instruction but also their civilization and Europeanization (Dussel, 2019). The pedagogy proposed by Freire opposes traditional forms of teaching and learning that aim at domesticating the student, subsuming the Other into the Self, and neglecting the voice of the oppressed. Through dialogue, educators abandon the "banking model of education" in which the student is seen as an empty recipient that must be filled with teachers' knowledge and worldviews (Freire, 2000, p. 72). Adopting a critical epistemology and a "problem-posing" method, the pedagogy of the oppressed helps the oppressed understand their place in the process of oppression and construct diverse forms of knowledge alongside teachers (Freire, 2000, p. 69). According to the Freirean framework, education becomes the tool through which teachers and students learn and teach simultaneously, without submission or knowledge hierarchies.

Dussel (2019) adds that popular culture can function as an alternative context for the processes of teaching and learning, and in its context the war against domination starts and decolonization might flourish. In the author's conception, critical teachers are central in the project for liberation, building a new system of schooling that privileges the local community cultures (Dussel, 2019). Being at the service of the people's culture, the pedagogical *praxis* allows the teacher-disciple relation to grow mutually and convert from a hierarchical relationship to a relation founded in a fraternal politics (Dussel, 2019). To disassemble the hierarchical forms of teaching might ease the cross-generational

encounter and clarify that teachers are not only the only educators in a community. Both Freire and Dussel understand teaching and learning as a process centered on the notion that the pedagogy of liberation becomes a powerful tool in raising the individuals' critical consciousness and, therefore, eliminating the logics of domination present in Latin American traditional teaching and learning practices.

Education emerges as the place where students become the origin of the transformation of reality. The critical consciousness proposed by Freire originates in the students, conceived as the privileged historical subjects of their own liberation. Upon comprehending their reality, students structure their *praxis* and act, understanding that gaining critical consciousness is an illuminating moment for their life and the practice of freedom of their communities.

In this essay on Paulo Freire's pedagogy of liberation, we have shown how Freire's pedagogical practice has led to the foundation of innovative, transformative pedagogy. The article also provides an opportunity to reaffirm that Freire's legacy is not limited to an education theory or method. Decades after his death, Freire continues to inspire education initiatives around the globe. In Brazil, his ideas have been under attack since the election of the country's right-wing president, who attributes the failures of public education to the Freirean pedagogy, even though it was never adopted as an education policy nationwide. All over the world there is a need for a critical education that makes individuals develop *conscientização* and, through *praxis*, subvert unjust social orders that maintain coloniality. Freire's teaching is alive, and his ideas exemplify hope for those interested in promoting social change through dialogue, critical thinking, and a pedagogy of liberation.

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Regina Cortina is Professor of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her Presidential Address, "The Passion for What is Possible in Comparative and International Education," was published in the *Comparative Education Review* in November 2019. Professor Cortina's teaching and publications are advancing the field by focusing on Decolonial Theories in Comparative Education. Most recently, two of her articles were published in 2019 and 2020 in *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*.

Marcella Winter is a Ph.D. student in the International and Comparative Education program at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her research interests include decolonial theories, women's and girls' education, race and inequality in Brazilian schools, and topics related to Brazilian and South American educational policies.

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