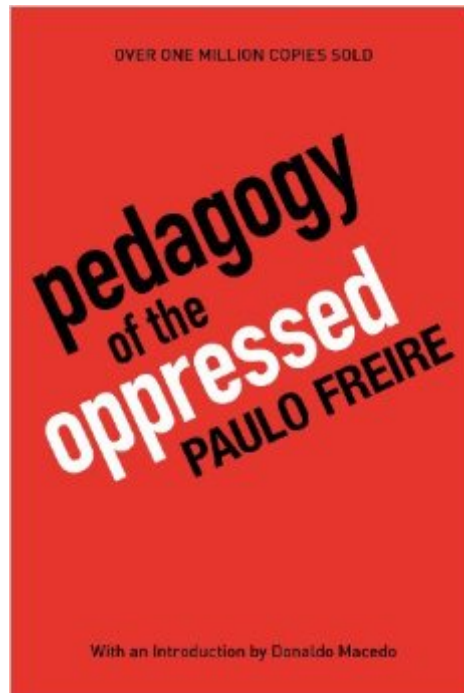


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Pedagogy Of The Oppressed, 30th Anniversary Edition



Synopsis

First published in Portuguese in 1968, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was translated and published in English in 1970. The methodology of the late Paulo Freire has helped to empower countless impoverished and illiterate people throughout the world. Freire's work has taken on especial urgency in the United States and Western Europe, where the creation of a permanent underclass among the underprivileged and minorities in cities and urban centers is increasingly accepted as the norm. With a substantive new introduction on Freire's life and the remarkable impact of this book by writer and Freire confidant and authority Donaldo Macedo, this anniversary edition of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* will inspire a new generation of educators, students, and general readers for years to come. For more information, visit www.pedagogyoftheoppressed.com.

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Customer Reviews

As a neophyte in the rather intimidating world of theory and critical pedagogy, I am both delighted and impressed by the ability Paulo Freire had to effectively communicate in a manner that was powerful yet unpretentious. His seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is indeed a wake-up call to educators everywhere and should therefore be required reading for anyone who ever has, or ever will, set foot in the classroom. Freire's simple message is this: True education is a dialogical process in which teachers become students and students become teachers, all in the name of liberation for everyone involved. The first chapter - while admittedly depressing - introduces ideas and terms that are necessary for the comprehension of the latter three. The basic plot of domination is thus summarized: Through violence and exploitation, an oppressor class "dehumanizes" an oppressed

group that ultimately becomes incapable of recognizing its own oppressive situation. Therefore, in order to overcome this oppressive state of affairs, intervention is not only desirable but necessary. The oppressed must experience an awakening period in which they open their own eyes (rather than have their eyes opened for them) to the true status of their situation. However, Freire contends that in order to achieve true liberation, the oppressors and the oppressed must join together in communion towards a common altruistic goal: humanity. This is the cornerstone of Freire's argument. I have to admit, as an enthusiastic rookie to critical pedagogy, I have little to disagree with or respond to after reading this epic expression of love. Nonetheless, my major critique is that the idea of liberation for all is a bit idealistic given the current state of the American education system. In a culture of high-stakes testing, it is difficult - if not impossible - to envision such a radical shift in paradigm ever coming to pass. So why invest so much time and effort in studying and lauding Freire? I believe that to simply disregard Freire's fundamental argument because its ultimate goal is currently infeasible on a large scale in America would be tragically fallacious. His banking concept of education is a call for all educators to think critically about what they do and say (and, just as importantly, what their students do and say) in the classroom. To ignore this is to ignore our vocation. The second half of Freire's work shares an implementation plan for liberation praxis and concludes with a discussion of the (fine) line between antidiological and dialogical action. This is important substance, as many teachers - I include myself in this - fall into the traps Freire cautions against, even when they are acting in what they believe to be the students' best interest. Every student is a person. The idea sounds simple enough, but it gets complicated when teachers are more preoccupied with test scores and teaching standards than the people themselves. So, in the name of "leaving no child behind," the people are soon forgotten. Who knew that a humble priest from Brazil would have such an impact on American critical teaching theory? The mission now - as Freire's secular disciples - is to spread his word. Freire's message of hope still lives on, but will die out if we allow our voices to be silenced.

This is an excellent book. I do not have a great deal to add to many reviews that have been written on this widely read book. But I would like to say a couple of things here. First of all, this book has often been criticised for being biased. Indeed, Freire expresses a strong bias. But, he makes no attempt to hide this and is often quite explicitly self-conscious of his own bias. All points of view are biased. The reader should be wary on any book that claims to be "objective" or "unbiased" on any subject. Selection and perspective are inevitable. Secondly, Freire did make some quite naive remarks about Lenin and Mao, and he had a very romantic view of the Cuban revolution, but these do

not detract from the insights and intelligence of his views of education and how it can aid human liberation from oppression. Thirdly, this book should be read alongside his *Education for Critical Consciousness*.

The first section of Freire's classic work is easy to read and relevant to most open-minded readers. However, it's the middle section that is simply tedious. He is painfully redundant and doesn't seem to go anywhere for many pages. Sheer determination made me get through this section of the book. But then in the last third or so of the book, he starts to move forward again. It is not well written, but the principals are a different matter. Freire has some really good ideas. He speaks about how the attitude between the oppressed and the would-be revolutionary leadership, must be one of partnership and collaboration. He speaks about how welfare is used to the detriment of the people when it is a way to keep people quiet and dependent. He speaks about how belief in cultural superiority keeps local culture from being appreciated and understood. He says a lot of good things. But the problem comes from the fact that Freire's historical context is incomplete at best. Freire speaks positively about the revolutions of Castro and Guevara. Unfortunately, those revolutions have since turned into the worst of oppression of the people. I've been to Cuba. I have dear friends who are afraid for their lives every day because of the "revolutionary" Castro and his brother. That is not beneficial to the oppressed. It is simply replacing oppression with a new form of oppression. The error comes largely from this statement: "[The revolutionary leadership] group is made up of men and women who in one way or another have belonged to the social strata of the dominators. At a certain point in their existential experience, under certain historical conditions, these leaders renounce the class to which they belong and join the oppressed, in an act of true solidarity (or so one would hope)." The fact that Freire thinks that it is an outsider who is best able to effect true revolution, is naive. In truth, without a strong leadership comprised of PRIMARILY those of the oppressed people, there cannot be true understanding of what needs to be accomplished, and the result is almost always even greater oppression under the new leadership. We can look at the American Revolution which was fought by those who had fled Europe in order to have freedom. These were not nobles, and were not generally of the elite class. In fact, most of the American revolutionaries were common laborers and any wealth was acquired in the New World through hard work. We can also look at the Haitian Revolution which was fought successfully by slaves. There was no one of the "dominant" society leading the revolution. The closest thing would have been some of the mulattos who were generally free and some of whom had acquired sizable wealth. But they had very little in the way of "dominance" within the culture. Looking at religious revolutions, the

most effective have been led by those from within the culture (Jesus, Buddha, etc.). The problem seems to be that Freire refuses to let go of his socialist Marxist ideas of change. His reflections are good until he begins to make statements such as these, and then the whole thing falls apart. It is the situation in Haiti, that they believe Freire is correct. They are waiting for someone outside of their community of oppression, to come and save them. But thousands of foreigners travel to Haiti every year to do "charity work". These people truly love Haiti (if not prior to their trip, then certainly by the time they leave Haiti). They are reading and being educated and learning what they can to help the Haitians. But when it comes down to it, only the Haitians will be able to help themselves. Only by Haitians rising out of the situation they are in, and speaking truth from experience, will Haiti experience cultural revolution. As long as they wait for outsiders to lead them, they will remain in their situation.

When I look at today's current educational practices through the lens of Freire's discussion about 'banking', I feel very sad. The push for increased and higher-stakes standardized testing methods encourage us to use the banking method of education (dropping "facts" into the students' brains, and calling that "education"). Reading Pedagogy of the Oppressed is an important step in illuminating how harmful these practices are to the children we want to help become active members of society. The concept of a ruling class and an oppressed class may be controversial, but is very, very true in the current stratified society of the USA, both within the area of public education, and within other portions of society. Freire may have written this book 30 years ago, but it is just as relevant to the USA today as it was to Brazil in the 1970s.

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