

Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 50th Anniversary Edition

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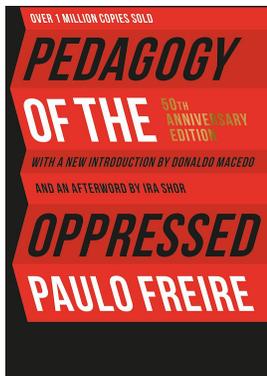
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Book Title: Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 50th Anniversary Edition

Author: Paulo Freire (Myra Bergman Ramos, translator)

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Education is not only a means for spreading and gaining information and skills, but a mechanism for illuminating the premises that define our circumstances. Making these structures visible allows those subject to unseen forces to hold those forces as objects to be examined and, in some cases, to be meaningfully altered toward human growth and freedom. Freire's seminal work on education as liberation can be found in multiple translations and editions, some of which include brief interviews with scholars including Noam Chomsky.

Freire was born in 1921 in Recife, Brazil. He survived adverse childhood experiences and became professor of the history and philosophy of education at the University of Recife. His work with Brazilian people living with illiteracy was so successful that he was jailed for 70 days as a political prisoner in 1964 following a military coup. He was released and told to leave the country. He spent some time at Harvard and by 1969, Freire was invited to become a special consultant on education with the Office of Education in the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland.¹

Pedagogy of the Oppressed reads as a philosophy of education, which is to say it is dense. The core text consists of four long chapters that serve as the foundational pillars of an intentionally "humanist and libertarian" (p. 54) approach to activities of teaching and learning. Reading this text in 2025 is as enlightening as it is disheartening. Speaking to the current circumstances of many people worldwide, it could have been written this year. Freire writes about oppression, how and why authentic transformation must originate from the oppressed, and the human condition of oppressors. Within the details of the work of authentic transformation, a deepening consciousness of the wholeness of the situations in which we live, medical educators in particular will find Freire may be speaking directly to them.

Primary concepts of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* include ensuring that interactions promote the agency of all stakeholders, particularly those who have been objectified as things lacking knowledge (patients and learners); and avoiding the banking model of education (sage on stage, teaching to the test) through intentional praxis of "problem-posing" education (p. 79), or what we might call problem-based learning. When we work problems together, we are better able to devise mutually beneficial solutions. Freire insists that all students have something to teach and that all teachers have something to learn; within this exchange, we help one another grow into a more fully human state of being.

Freire's focus is the problem of oppression writ large. He lays out the foundational concepts for this problem in Chapter 1; how to build curriculum and praxis for freedom from oppression in Chapter 2; his model in detail via his work with illiteracy in Chapter 3; and a whole-text theoretical analysis in Chapter 4. Within these chapters lies wisdom directly applicable to the development of curriculum, faculty, learners, and ultimately the profession and ethics of medical education. He explains with precision how some students balk at flipped classroom concepts and what educators can do to invite them into a mutual workspace. He outlines how a scholar of education might replicate his process down to the makeup of the "thematic investigation circles," groups of no more than 20 (with as many groups needed to engage 10% of the target population) who together will work through composing "the program content of educational action as liberating cultural action" (p. 117).

Not often does a book on teaching and learning earn a place among banned titles, but such is the case for Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. First published in 1968 in Portuguese and then in English in 1970, the text has been banned in various decades, countries, and by entities including the Tucson, Arizona Unified School District as recently as 2012. From self-directed learning to master adaptive learners, from entrustable professional activities to competency-based education, the trajectory of medical education has been largely defined by the expectations of those in the position to deposit knowledge. Hopeful candidates for consideration of joining those ranks often stand ready to perform as vessels of recitation that recoil when asked for earnestly reflective engagement. Truly shared decision-making is successful in patient care because it takes the realities of all decision-makers into account. Freire simply asks educators to extend this same possibility to learners and to count themselves as learners in a process that may make us all free.

REFERENCE

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