Freire Critical Pedagogy. Ann Sharp, Liberating Education

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After Work War II when people were astonished at the violence that had devastated Europe, several intellectuals founded the Frankfurt School that proposed the Critical Theory of Society that aimed at the diagnosis of *maladies* of reason with the purpose of saving it.

Enlightenment, understood in its widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity.¹

This *maladie* or sickness of reason comes from the human desire to dominate nature, including human beings. This modern rationality operates under the identity principle: it rejects the different and relates to everything only by manipulation and dominion. "Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings. He knows them to the extent that he can manipulate them."

Horkheimer raised the need of a negative dialect emancipatory project that can diagnose the failure of the Enlightenment and, as a solution, he proposes a new rationality, a new praxis for the construction of a more humane society.

J. Habermas represents the second generation of Critical Theory. He continues the work of the first Critical Theory and adds to the oblivion of nature, the oblivion of communication. He poses a change of paradigm: from modern subjectivity to intersubjectivity by means of "communicative reason."

He acknowledges the emancipatory self-reflection of Critical Theory, but also the Socratic idea of dialogue. Dialogical communication becomes an imperative for the transformation and reconstruction of social institution and practices. Habermas recognizes the importance of educational institutions for the transformation of society. The ideal of a democratic and rational society requires educational institutions that prepare citizens in communicative rationality through dialogue. His interest is mainly in Universities; he thinks universities should go back to the universal formation,

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¹ M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford University Press, 2002), p.1

² Op Cit. p. 3

that is, not only empirical sciences, but humanities, to prepare cultivated men and women capable to be oriented to praxis, ethical and political. Education should stress the critical consciousness of students enabling them to participate critically in social and political life.

Critical discussion of practical social questions is promoted by the formation of a critical community of students and professors in a democratic university. This community is ruled by decision making in the context of a dialogue, free of domination, and could be a paradigm for a democratic society.

Critical pedagogy is influenced by these ideas. It can be defined as an educational proposal that aims to help students to question the dominant practices and beliefs by the development of critical thinking. Its aim is to generate liberating proposals both at an individual and a collective level. It is based in dialogue and aims at the development of a democratic society.

Henry Giroux defines Critical Pedagogy as a theory that prepares students through practice so they can reach a critical conscience in their societies. Critical Pedagogy is an alternative to stop the reproduction of injustice in societies by means of education that promotes the humanization and integral development of students fostering the possibility of a progressive democratization of society and the commitment with those less favored in search of equity and justice.

The context of Latin America in the second half of the 20th century was one of inequality, a high rate of illiteracy, and political unrest. This is the context in which new pedagogical tendencies arose, generally known as "pedagogies of liberation" or "critical pedagogies." They maintain the political character of education, denounce the alienating factors of the economic and political contexts, and propose a critical intervention upon reality. Freire is the most distinguished representant of this movement that is linked with Critical Pedagogy.

Paulo Freire was born in Recife, the capital of Brazil's northeast province, one of the most impoverished parts of Brazil. He was raised in a middle-class family and had educational opportunities that most Brazilians did not. At the university, Freire had contact with the Catholic lay movement, The Catholic Students' Club (JUC) that was one of the most radical organizations at the time. He also began to read increasingly the authors of the Catholic left, like Jacques Maritain, Thomas Cardone, Emmanuel Mounier, and their radical Brazilian interpreters, such as Lace de Amoroso Lima, Henrique Lima Val, Herbert José de Souza and others. He always acknowledged being an eclectic, drawing ideas from many philosophical currents such as Phenomenology, Existentialism, Christian Personalism, Humanist Marxism and Hegelianism. Nevertheless, his central interest was the education of the poor people in his region and so he wanted to develop educational strategies for the poor. Because of his revolutionary ideas, he was considered a menace for those in power and therefore was

imprisoned twice in his own country while becoming famous in other parts of the world.

His ideas and educational praxis brought about his exile in 1964, following some time in prison accused of being a revolutionary. He lived for four years in Chile and then one year in the United States. He then moved to Geneva. In 1980, he returned to Brazil and in 1989, he became Secretary of Education in São Paulo, the most populous state in his country. He then made a great effort to implement his ideas, to review the curriculum, and to increase the salaries of Brazilian educators, and he implemented a literacy campaign, crucial for his country.

Today, Paulo Freire must be considered one of the most famous educators of our time and one of the most influential thinkers, representative of Critical Pedagogy in Latin America. He believed that all education was part of a project of freedom and eminently political because it offered students the conditions for self-reflection, a self-managed life, and particular notions of critical agency. Freire worked to increase literacy in people, not as means to prepare them for the world of subordinated labor or 'careers', but a preparation for a self-managed life. A literacy campaign implies that the subject achieves critical consciousness liberating himself of the oppression of an imposed culture. Literacy situates the individual in the world and so it must be linked to praxis; it cannot be separated from the political and social reality. It is a way to learn and to change the world, orienting the pedagogical action towards democratization and social justice. More than of a literacy "method," he spoke of "conscientização", conscientization or the redeeming of the oppressed's own voice.

His *critical* pedagogy tries to help the learner become aware of the forces that rule their lives and shaped their consciousness and, in this way, to set the conditions for producing a new way of life where power has been, at least partly, transferred to those who literally make the social world by their work. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, his most influential work, he makes clear that pedagogy at its best is about neither training, teaching methods, nor political indoctrination. For Freire, pedagogy is not a method or an a priori technique to be imposed on all students but a *political and moral practice* that provides the knowledge, skills, and social relations that enable students to explore the possibilities of what it means to be critical citizens while expanding and deepening their participation in the promise of a substantive democracy. Freire's idea of democracy is that of "radical democracy", seeking the participation of the greatest number of citizens as it is possible. That is why he wanted to improve literacy in all parts of Brazil. His ideal is democratic socialism that implies the participation of citizens in all aspects of social life: economy, politics, education, etc.

Practice and reflection led him to affirm that the powerful impose their educational models as elements to stabilize a social system convenient for them, so they will not change voluntarily; thus, education has an ideological character. For this reason, education for the marginalized needs to be

oriented not only by didactical needs, but also and fundamentally for a commitment to liberation.

H. Giroux cites Aronwitz, pointing out that Freire has highlighted the three goals of education:

Thus, for Freire literacy was not a means to prepare students for the world of subordinated labor or 'careers', but a preparation for a self-managed life. And self-management could only occur when people have fulfilled three goals of education: self-reflection, that is, realizing the famous poetic phrase, 'know thyself', which is an understanding of the world in which they live, in its economic, political and, equally important, its psychological dimensions. Specifically, 'critical' pedagogy helps the learner become aware of the forces that have hitherto ruled their lives and especially shaped their consciousness. The third goal is to help set the conditions for producing a new life, a new set of arrangements where power has been, at least in tendency, transferred to those who literally make the social world by transforming nature and themselves.³ (Aronowitz, 2009, p. ix)

Freire is against a way of educating that is organized around the demands of the market, instrumentalized knowledge and the priority of "training" over the pursuit of imagination, critical thinking and the teaching of freedom and social responsibility.

Pedagogy of the Question versus Banking Education

Pedagogy must be based in the reflection of those oppressed about the causes of oppression. It must be elaborated by the oppressed and not for the oppressed. For Freire, traditional education treats the student as if he were a bank which knowledge is deposited, banking education. This kind of education has a subject, the teacher and some passive objects, the students where the teacher deposits knowledge and values. In this relationship there is one that "knows" and the others that are ignorant, but keep the deposits using memory. This kind of education according to Freire cancels the creative power of students as well as their critical thinking. Banking education does not allow action, inquiry, creativity, and, in consequence, leads to the "domestication" of the students, adapting them to reality without the possibility to question and transforming it.

He proposes democratic relationships between teacher and students, undermining the power dynamics that hold the teacher above the students as the one who knows. Such a teacher is not aware of his own fallibilism and ignorance. This kind of education negates the process of inquiry and coming to know. The democratic teacher is willing to admit that his experience is different from that

³ H. Giroux, "Rethinking Education as a Practice of Freedom: Paulo Freire and the promise of Critical Pedagogy," *Policy Futures in Education*, Vol. 8 Num. 6 (2010) www.wwwords.co.uk/PFIE 715 http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2010.

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of the student, and by sharing they both can benefit by learning, and grow as human beings.

Liberating education is centered in dialogue and the existential conditions of those who engage in a dialogue with reality. Problematizing reality breaks all the traditional models of education that separate the teacher and the student; both educate and are educated, and the dichotomy subject-object in the educational process is eliminated: "no one educates anyone else, nor do we educate ourselves. We educate one another in communion in the context of living in this world." Dialogue is at the core of his thought:

Dialogue is an existential requirement and, being the solidary encounter in reflection and action of subjects oriented to the world that must be transformed and humanized, cannot be reduced to a simple action of depositing ideas from a subject in another subject.⁵

It is love and respect that allow us to engage in dialogue and to discover ourselves in the process. The answers and the truth are not at the beginning, they will emerge as we listen and speak to one another.

The conditions of dialogue are love, faith, hope, and critical thinking. Love because it implies the recognition of the other as a free and creative being capable of naming and transforming the world. This cannot be the privilege of a few, but a right and obligation of all. Hope is not to be confused with a passive waiting; it is dynamic, incessant, communitarian and brave search. It is an ontological need and a historical and existential imperative. It can be an instrument to advance towards the unprecedented: the construction of our future world and our own existence in a free, critical, and amorous way and, finally, critical thinking a commitment with the search for truth and meaning that is generated in dialogue: "Only dialogue that implies critical thinking is capable of generating it. Without dialogue there is no communication and without it there is not true education."

Such an education will not come from those in political power who seek to maintain things as they are. It must come from the base with the oppressed through collaborative efforts and with a dialogical methodology; only so will it be possible to respect people's wisdom, achieve liberation and get rid of the domesticating education of the oppressors.

A culture of silence arises when society is not listened to by the dominators. One's voice is not authentic. It is just the echo of the voice of the oppressors. This dependence is maintained by the international economic system and ideologically reinforced by religious schemes, the cultural industry,

⁴ Freire, *Pedagogía del oprimido* Ed. Siglo XXI, México, 1985, 107. The translation is mine.

⁵ Op. Cit, p. 101. The translation is mine.

⁶ Op. Cit, p. 107. The translation is mine.

militarism, individualism, and consumerism, which impose a symbolic oppressive system on the people.

Paulo Freire and Ann Sharp

Much has been said about the relationship between Freire and Lipman⁷. Most of those who write about this relationship focus on dialogue. It is a fact that dialogue is at the core of both educational proposals and, in both, critical thinking is also a central concept.

In 1988 Catherine Young-Silva, then Director of the Brazilian Center for Philosophy for Children, organized an encounter between Matthew Lipman, Ann Sharp, and Paulo Freire to which I was invited. To be present there and to listen to that dialogue has been one of the most significant experiences I have ever had. Listening to the dialogue showed how following different paths and with truly diverse experiences and theoretical influences, these three educators had found similar problems and proposals.

The need to develop critical thinking in students and the role of language in this development was discussed at length. Dialogue as the heart of educational projects, and how they described it, was another important topic. Freire said that the conditions of dialogue are love, hope and critical thinking. Lipman mentioned respect for others, caring thinking, and critical and creative thinking.

When hope was discussed, Ann agreed in considering it an essential component of dialogue. It is, she said, a part of caring thinking. She shared how she was impressed by Freire's idea of the "culture of silence" and how she could relate it to the voices of women and children. For her, the community of inquiry tries to listen to the voices of all, so it could be a way to fight against the culture of silence in education.

Then there was a discussion about democracy, and in this topic, there were differences. Freire's idea of democracy is that of "radical democracy", seeking the participation of the greatest number of citizens as it is possible through improving literacy in all parts of Brazil. His ideal is democratic socialism that implies the participation of citizens in all aspects of social life: economy, politics, education, etc. For Lipman and Sharp, as we know, the ideal is deliberative democracy fostered by education inspired in the work of John Dewey. But they agreed in the idea that a democratic education implies that the teacher must renounce the tendency to impose their own reading of the world on their students, and embrace the obligation to show students that there are different possible readings of the world.

There have been also some scholars that compare Freire's "cultural circles" with Philosophy for Children's "communities of inquiry". Cultural circles were for adult illiterate persons, and communities of inquiry have been thought of as for children and adolescents, but that does not mean

⁷ Walter Kohan, Cfr., Paulo Freire mais do que nunca: uma biografía filosófica. (Belo Horizonte, Vestigio, 2019).

that adults cannot benefit from the participation in such a community, as we all know.

Beyond such considerations, here I would like to focus on the ideas of Ann Margaret Sharp that I think are close to the liberating education proposed by Freire. From early on, Sharp's academic activities and relationships were characterized by a sensitivity to injustice. She became adept at reading "the face of the other" for signs of suffering. She noted that women and children typically belong to what Paulo Freire describes as a "culture of silence"⁸

Such individuals view themselves as impotent. They keep their eyes down when the powerful walk by. They don't look you straight in the eye. They know they are outside the real conversation, the conversation that matters. Cut off from the flow of ideas, hopes, dreams of those in power, the oppressed are powerless to question the assumptions or have a role in defining the concepts that affect their daily lives.⁹

Listening to Freire in the encounter in 1988 and reading the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, she found coincidences with her own concerns about education. According to Ann, the task of education becomes one of political ethics: it is defined by the need to do justice to the oppressed, by bringing to the surface their perspective. The perspective of those who suffer injustice is the critical perspective and, therefore, the perspective of hope. This silence must be interrupted by the questions of the oppressed, who must, in turn, learn how to break from the culture of silence imposed on them.

Similarly, for Freire, education must help the oppressed to use their own voice, to conquer people's right to pronounce the world and to assume the direction of their own destiny. For him, as for Ann, education is an act of love, therefore it is an act of courage.

Language is in both, Freire and Sharp, an indispensable tool for a critical, reflective process of conscientization that leads to liberation. And language in the form of dialogue as a critical and caring encounter of consciences searching for truth, meaning and hope for the future is also essential for both.

They also shared the importance of hope in education. Sharp's political hope was also inspired by Simone Weil, 10 who promoted education to free women, workers, and peasants from oppression. Weil joined the International Brigade in support of the Spanish Republic, fought the structures of patriarchy, rejected gender roles, and worked tirelessly to put her ideal of education for social justice into practice.

⁸ Ann M. Sharp carefully read the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and was inspired by it as shown in the next quotation.

⁹ A.M. Sharp, "Women and Children and the Evolution of Philosophy," Analytic Teaching 10 (1989): 46-51.

¹⁰ A.M, Sharp, "Simone Weil on Friendship," Philosophy Today, Winter (1978) 266-275; "Work and Education in the Thought of Simone Weil," Pedagogica Historica 24 (2) (1984): 493-515

Democracy and the construction of a democratic society was a shared ideal for Freire and Sharp, despite some differences of approach. Freire says: "...the point of departure must always be with men and women in the 'here and now,' which constitutes the situation within which they are submerged, from which they emerge, and in which they intervene." ¹¹

A democratic quality may be characterized by openness, equality, and a willingness to share, learn, and create together, which needs the practice of virtues such as open-mindedness, listening, empathy, courage, humility, trust, receptivity to others' experiences, and a willingness to be transformed by the experience. As other proponents of radical democracy, Paulo Freire thinks that it is through our relationships and within the immediate experience that we have of each other that our ideals have the capacity to become actualized experiences. Democracy must be more than merely a procedure to elect a few individuals to represent the community's political interests. Radical democracy criticizes liberal theories for equating democracy with legal guarantees, or with the procedure of periodic voting, as well as for the belief that it is through private property that individual liberty is achieved. Even when critical democracy is informed by liberal democracy, it is also critical of it. It is developed in colonized experiences of dehumanization, oppression, corruption, and abuse of power. Paulo Freire says that democracy is based on faith in humanity, in the belief that all are capable to discuss together and to find new ways to recreate the world. He acknowledges some of Dewey's ideas, proposed in *Democracy and Education*, for example, the idea that originality is not the fantastic, but rather the new use of known things.

There is a social interest in Dewey's theory of democracy that could relate to Sharp's idea of it, especially the idea of the participation of all for the creation of a more just and freer world, as we can see in this quote from Dewey:

Democracy as compared with other ways of life is the sole way of living which believes wholeheartedly in the process of experience as end and as means; as that which is capable of generating the science which is the sole dependable authority for the direction of further experience and which releases emotions, needs and desires so as to call into being the things that have not existed in the past. For every way of life that fails in its democracy limits the contacts, the exchanges, the communications, the interactions by which experience is steadied while it is also enlarged and enriched. The task of this release and enrichment is one that has to be carried on day by day. Since it is one that can have no end till experience itself comes to an end, the task of democracy is forever that of creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and to which all contribute. ¹²

¹² J. Dewey, Creative Democracy. The Task Before us. In M. Fish, "Classic American Philosophers" (New York Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951), p. 394

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¹¹ Freire, Paulo. Pedagogía del oprimido. Ed. Siglo XXI 2nd. Edition, México, 2005, p. 98. The translation is mine.

For Sharp, the use of Philosophy for Children for the empowerment of women and children became a dominant theme in her scholarship. As she wrote, "[f]or Feminism and Philosophy for Children, the doing of philosophy within a community is a critical and creative enterprise aimed at criticizing and changing the beliefs and practices of the dominant culture that sustain the unjust conditions that characterize the oppressed."¹³

She was also thinking of a democratic way of life and liberation through thinking together critically:

Philosophy for Children is an attempt to take the discipline of philosophy and reconstruct it so that children ... can learn to master its tools and concepts and appropriate its content for themselves in such a way as to bring about their own liberation.¹⁴

Sharp argued that: "Participation in such a community [of inquiry] is a *democratic* approach to moral education, preparing youngsters to speak their voice in shaping the institutions of their society. A strong democracy must rely to a great extent on the critical, creative and ethical intelligence of each generation." This is to be expected if ethics and politics are understood as dimensions of everyday experience—including the experience of children—and if philosophy is construed as inquiry into these dimensions.

The community of inquiry prepares children to participate in a democratic society, and to rebuild it, thus giving rise to what Sharp called "the child as critic," in two senses. As critics of society, children move from personal claims of injustice to theories about the conditions of structural injustice. As critics of one another's ideas, children's perspectives become broader and more complex. Both involve self-correction and the construction of new political, moral, and aesthetic ideals. Sharp was aware of the radicalness of her idea but she thought that: "With time and practice in communal inquiry they come to realize that their teachers and classmates really do care about them as persons. They believe in their potential ability to make a difference. In turn, this realization makes it possible for children to care about a variety of things and motivates their acting with courage and hope in the world." ¹⁶

Paulo Freire thinks that one of the characteristics of an education for liberation is love. In a similar way, Sharp focuses on the practice of care:

Sharp claims that learning is more than an accumulation of knowledge. It involves education of the feelings and emotions so as to promote growth of the capacity to care.

¹³ A.M. Sharp, "And the Children Shall Lead Them," International Journal of Applied Philosophy, 18 (2) (2004): 177-187.

¹⁴ Op. Cit. 177

¹⁵ Sharp, Ann, "The role of intelligent sympathy in educating for global ethical consciousness." In *In Community of Inquiry with Ann Margaret Sharp*. Childhood, Philosophy and Education. Maughn Rollins Gregory and Megan Jane Laverty, Editors. (Routledge International Studies in the Philosophy of Education, 2018), p.230

¹⁶ Ann M. Sharp, "The other dimension of caring thinking," *Journal of Philosophy in Schools* 1(1) University of New South Wales 1997. P. 16

Without such growth we cannot develop as persons. The capacity to judge, value and be motivated to act are all of necessity tied to care.¹⁷

Critical, creative, and caring thinking are all developed through the participation in a community of inquiry and can contribute to the creation of a new social ideal.

The community of inquiry, at its best, offers an immersion into a democratic and aesthetic experience that can serve as funded experience of the group in envisioning new possibilities and making judgments. The sensitivity, the appreciative discerning of parts and wholes, the imaginative manipulation of elements to construct something of harmony and vision, will be dependent on the consciousness and quality of this immersion. As we become more conscious of the social and aesthetic dimension of the inquiry process, we find that it takes on more and more meaning and we truly care about its process and its outcomes.¹⁸

To foster caring thinking, we need more than logic, and in the environment of the community of inquiry, children become aware of the richness of their relationship with each other and with the world, and they view themselves as capable to create together a new way of life.

In a real sense what we care about is manifest in how we perform, participate, build, contribute and how we relate to others. It is thinking that reveals our ideals as well as what we think is valuable, what we are willing to fight and suffer for.¹⁹

Despite coming from different countries, contexts, and different philosophical influences these two thinkers, Freire and Sharp, shared the dream of a liberating, critical education that could lead to a true democratic society.

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¹⁷ Philip Cam, "Commentary on Ann Margaret Sharp's 'The other dimension of caring thinking," *Journal of Philosophy in Schools* 1(1) (University of New South Wales, 1997), p. 15

¹⁸ Ann M. Sharp. "The other dimension of caring thinking," *Journal of Philosophy in Schools* 1(1) (University of New South Wales, 1997): 16-21, p. 17

¹⁹ Philip Cam, "Commentary on Ann Margaret Sharp's 'The other dimension of caring thinking'," Journal of Philosophy in Schools 1(1) University of New South Wales, p. 15

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