

TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION AND FREIRE'S PEDAGOGY OF LOVE: A PhD GRADUATE'S EXPERIENCE

A ROUND TABLE PRESENTATION

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The goal of this presentation is to begin a conversation about the transformative value of the combined use of Freire's pedagogy of emancipatory love and Mezirow's transformative learning theory and to apply this to real life educational practices involving both adult and non-adult learners.

The following concepts are considered in this discussion: (a) pedagogical transformative love as a humanizing alternative to the *banking model* of education. (b) Pedagogical transformative love as a way of closing educational achievement gaps in the U.S. (c) Pedagogical transformative love as an alternative violent struggles, rage, and anger as a means of socio-political liberation. (d) Love versus hate; love versus violence; love as a means of creating a more humanizing social reality; (e) love as a pedagogical model for classroom instruction at all educational levels, both adult and non-adults alike.

Pedagogical love for Freire is a basic requirement for dialogue, and dialogue is the primary foundation on which this liberatory educational model is constructed. Freire stated that "if I do not love the world—if I do not love life—if I do not love people—I cannot enter into dialogue" (Freire, 2003, p. 90). He argued that if there is no loving dialogue, education is incapable of being transformative and humanizing—incapable of moving learners from a cognitive level of naïveté to the level of critical consciousness needed for liberation (Freire, 2011).

Freire did not define the term *love*, but described it as part of the pedagogical process leading to sociopolitical liberation. Our definition of the term *love* in the Freirean sense represents a combining of three separate concepts as one. First, it utilizes the epistemological and axiological concepts inherent in the Greek idea of agape love. Agape love allows one to move beyond egotistic love of self, and to extend one's love to all humanity—it is rare and difficult to achieve, but it is the ideal in the Freirean model required for liberatory education.

Secondly, the secular ontological, axiological, and sociopolitical implications embedded in both Kierkegaard's (1995) and Fromm's (1992) interpretations of the command to "*love thy neighbor as thyself*" are added. Like agape, this love is selfless and is born out of a conviction that the greatest love is that for humanity. This type of love has moral and sociopolitical responsibilities attached to it, such as that reflected in Nelson's Mandela's sociopolitical and moral groundings that led to his 27 years of imprisonment, for example.

Finally, this definition of love includes the ontological and axiological implications embedded in Kohlberg's (1981) concept in the sixth stage of moral development, where a principle of *justice* guides actions. Kohlberg's moral ideal that is rooted in justice at stage six, is parallel in most ways to agape and Kierkegaard's and Fromm's concept of selfless love for others. In education this translates to a

relationship in which teacher and student join “in a community in which value decisions are made on a shared and equitable basis,” and as in Freire’s work, it does not result in a *banking* model.

Utilizing the above definition of love in a research-to-practice application in order to make “transformation visible,” the real-life experiences of an adult learner’s progression through a PhD program is presented. Here, a combination of elements from Mezirow’s (2009) and Freire’s (2003; 2011) theories on transformative/ liberatory education will create a conceptual and theoretical framework for discussions of events rooted in pedagogical love that occurred on this graduate’s journey through a transformative process, that led to a emancipatory/ liberatory experience resulting from graduating from this program. This student, an African-American male, stated that, his PhD journey and the outcomes of graduating from this program “was the first time in my educational process going back to kindergarten, where I actually felt like I was in control. That I was learning something... because I was using my tools to create something fresh. It was like a liberating experience, and I have never had that before.” Examples of pedagogical love abounds in this graduate’s journey from the time a university faculty member called him, congratulating him on his initial acceptance, through to where he described his committee members as helping him to “liberate myself...[and] accept my inevitable role as a leader”.

Questions for discussion include: How do we define the term *love* in the Freirean pedagogical model? How would we describe the educative process in a practice guided by Freirean pedagogical love? Why is the practice of Freirean pedagogical love a useful model for transformative/liberatory education? How does this PhD graduate’s experience reflect both the practice of Freire’s pedagogical love, and Freire’s and Mezirow’s (2009) concepts of liberatory transformative education?

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