EDUCATION AS A HUMAN RIGHT:
PAULO FREIRE CASE IN POINT

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May 16, 2003

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Title
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Abstract
The purpose of this paper is to understand why education is a human right. I will look at works by the late Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator. Paulo Freire worked for many years on developing a pedagogy to promote humanity. His goal was to demonstrate that a literate person will ultimately live a better life because she will be free from oppression and domination.

I chose to study Paulo Freire as a tool in proving why education is a human right because throughout his work he demonstrated the need for people to be literate in order for them to be considered “truly human”. I will address this term further in my argument.

This thesis is a work in progress. My goal is to include chapters illustrating Amartya Sen’s theory and ideology, and compare them to those of Freire’s. I would also like to include a chapter specifically dedicated to women and education, since it is common practice for women in many countries to sacrifice their right to education so the males in their families can attend school.

Keyword
Human rights, Paulo Freire, Education, Literacy, Freedom, Liberty, Rights, Human needs
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PREFACE

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank both Dr. Göran Collste and Dr. Bo Petersson at Linköpings Universitet for their guidance and support. Both provided me with insightful feedback and constructive assistance.

I would also like to thank Dr. Richard Ganzel at the University of Nevada Reno for always being available to give good advice and inspiring me to set high standards.

Thank you to my husband, Chris for your relentless support.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights states in Article 26 that, “Everyone has the right to education.” And that education should be, “directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights.”

The concepts of freedom and education have been ever present in western philosophical ideas. In fact, it was Epictetus, the late Stoic Philosopher who said, “Only the educated are free” in book two of his Discourses. Thus these two concepts have gone hand in hand for many years. Some questions that I would like to answer are:

- What is the link between education and freedom?
- Is it possible to have one without the other?
- Can human beings truly be free if they do not know their rights?
- What kind of pedagogy is needed in order for those whose rights are being restricted to have the opportunity to understand they have rights and that these rights are being infringed upon?

The answers to these questions lie in the work Paulo Freire and his pedagogical theories in regards to freedom and humanity. In examining Freire’s work, this thesis will also attempt to clarify some of the key ethical and philosophical terms Freire uses in his work.

This is an important step that must be taken in order to better understand why education and literacy are so important to Freire. Freire’s work has been extremely influential throughout the world. However, it is often difficult to appreciate his work in its entirety without careful analysis of his theoretical concepts. The key terms that are prevalent in Freire’s work, but often go unexplained, are education, freedom, rights, human, truly human, human needs, justice, love, oppression, and conscientização.

These terms will be defined and explained by using literature by philosophers like Amartya Sen, William Frankena, John Rawls, as well as incorporating general articles and philosophical entries from reference books.
and other materials. The work of some theorists will be more prevalent in this thesis and that will become apparent to the reader throughout the course of reading.

I have chosen to incorporate these philosophers for a number of reasons. Amartya Sen is an economist and philosopher from India. His work is centered around economics, human development, and of course philosophy. Sen’s central theme in Development as Freedom is overcoming poverty, deprivation, and oppression. Although his methods differ from Freire’s, the two do have some remarkable things in common. For example, both see education as a means to development. Freire gives us a pedagogical theory describing what kind of education is necessary. Sen, on the other hand, focuses on what is needed monetarily to promote education.

It is important to determine why education is a human right. This thesis will also look at the benefits and reasoning behind education. It will examine what makes education valuable for the learner, teacher, and society as a whole. It will examine the type of education needed in order to maintain a valuable educational system.

Paulo Freire has written, edited, and co-authored many books. I will use the following texts to explain why education is a human right: Education for Critical Consciousness, Teachers as Cultural Workers, A Pedagogy for Liberation, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Cultural Action for Freedom, Literacy: Reading the Word and the World, Letters to Cristina, and, Education as the Practice of Freedom, and The Politics of Education.

In order to understand why education is ultimately considered a human right I will ask and answer the following questions:

- What is Freire’s view of a human being?
- What does Freire mean by the term conscientização?
- What is Freire’s view of Rights?
- What is Freire’s idea of human needs?
- What does it mean for Freire to be free? i.e. What is his idea of freedom?
- What is Freire’s idea of education?
- What does it mean for human freedom and human development to have basic education for all?
What is the link between education and freedom?
What is the link between education, justice, freedom?
The philosophy of education began many centuries ago with the work of the Sophists in ancient Greece. The Sophists believed in order to pursue a truly democratic state, people must be educated. However, in the beginning only those who were part of the bourgeoisies were educated. This began to change little by little with the work of Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle.

Ideas surrounding Plato and Socrates were elitist. Plato, a man who staunchly opposed democracy, believed that only a few wealthy statesmen ought to be afforded an education. Education, he believed, was meant to prepare oneself for a career in politics and government. A formal education would prepare an individual both mentally and psychologically. It would teach the students to become diplomatic and politically aware both socially and politically.

Plato felt it was crucial only to allow those who were in the upper social and economic class to participate in such dialogue. Those who were of an elite group ought to be the only people (men in his times) to take part in discussions on politics and social change. The men who were allotted the right to education were be part of the ruling few, to dominate over the remainder of the population. (Nussbaum, 1997)

Socrates, on the other hand, took a different path. While often portrayed as an elitist, he “(was) committed to awakening each and every person to self-scrutiny.” (Nussbaum, 1997:26)

In today’s classroom, a method known as ‘Socratic Dialogue’ does wonders for class participation. It allows the students to voice their opinions one by one with the help of a facilitator. ‘Socratic Dialogue’ encourages students to reflect and think independently and critically, which as we will see is what Paulo Freire calls conscientização. Plato was opposed to this method of social and educational participation because he feared it would make democracy weak and would allow and provoke revolution.

The Socratic method and Plato-ionic method differ greatly. Socrates stated that all citizens (e.g. ordinary people) should have a moral
understanding in order to conduct their activities of everyday life. By moral understanding he meant that people ought to be able to have the ability to reason. They also ought to be able to distinguish between right and wrong. He believed that “rights belong to everyone” and in order to achieve a true democracy societies much strive to instill respect, autonomy and integration in its citizens (Nussbaum, 1997:27). Therefore, in order for democracy to exist, education must play a key role in the development of a society.

How might this ideal system of education and citizenship be created? Aristotle believed that justice and well being must be initiated by education. Like Socrates, Aristotle believed that education would permit people to become virtuous citizens and enhance social unity by promoting a collaborative community. In addition, education would teach people to solve their problems verbally instead of physically thereby creating a non-violent social structure. Moreover, education is needed for the completion or development of a human being. Education is what makes a human truly human. I will discuss both the normative theory of a human being as well as the criterion in Chapter 4. “(It) is the cultivation of individuals. Individuals with their own realities must cultivate a specific pedagogy of education in order for it to be purposeful. Education is only realistic when it “derives its reality…from its connection with life.” (Howie, 1968/9)

Aristotle felt education provided structure for the individual. Thus, he constantly presented the possibility of remolding people who had debased themselves by focusing on lower values and never having the opportunity to develop a true concept of the good for man. The good for man is different for everyone. Each person will have a special good, which may be determined by the individual’s own experiences and reflections.

Once a person has lost touch with her own life and is unable to foresee any other path, the individual may debase herself by limiting her goals and rights to what is perceivable. Once a person has fallen into this cycle of bad habits and attitudes, it is difficult to change them. Moreover, re-teaching good values and good habits in place of bad values or habits is a very challenging task as it must seek to re-shape the individual’s view of herself. The concept will be examined more closely when we discuss Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed and other works.
As we know, it educational theory has existed for many years. Plato believed only the few upper-class elite should be educated and those who were well-educated would continue on to become politicians to govern the masses. By today’s standards this theory may appear to be contradictory in that it is unreasonable to teach only the upper-class, leaving the lower-class to fight for its survival. The rich are often the individuals who are educated while the poor are dominated by elitist ideas and oppressive measures. In contrast the Socratic method views education differently.

Socrates did not believe in only educating the rich. He felt education and citizenship were human rights. He believed all people ought to have the right to an education in order to become well-rounded moral participants in society. This ideal, as we shall see, is a prominent theme throughout Freire’s work.

The philosophy of education is important because it gives us a better understanding of the formation of Westernized educational thought. Through the works of Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates we can understand why education is important to both an individual and his society. Although each of these men had different concepts of education and democracy, they all contributed greatly to contemporary theories on education and democracy, as we shall see in the upcoming chapters.
CHAPTER 3

RIGHTS

There are many different definitions of rights that are available to us. Rights are "claims" that can be made upon others or upon society. To clarify or differentiate the meaning of rights, it is best to categorize them based on the specific provisions provided by each. According to the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “rights provide a significant protection of interests of individuals against the state and against other persons, they give a person something to stand on.” (Routledge, 1998:25) Rights provide people with a solid foundation so that they are able to live a good life.

The concept of rights coincides with moral philosophy and the ideas associated with fulfilling rights or infringing on rights. A fulfilled right occurs when the corresponding duty is carried out. For example, the right to life means that a person may not kill an innocent person and also that people not allow others to die if death can be prevented. This means preventing death, whether it is by malnutrition, illness, even in old age or pre-mature birth. The right to life suggests that if perhaps one were to see a child dying of starvation on the streets of México, it is that person’s duty to ensure the child has the necessary means in order to survive.

In reality, the right to life is often infringed upon. An infringed right results when the duty of another person, with respect to one’s right, is not carried out nor permitted. Thus, the right to an education for children is not fulfilled when people attempt to justify why a poor child should be required to work in order to support her family, instead of attending school. In turn, the richer child is provided with a better educational environment. For example, teachers are more qualified and motivated; the learning environment is clean and well-kept; and greater community support. In the case of the poor girl who must work, her right to education is being infringed upon because she is unable to attend school. There seems to be very little difference between an infringed right and a violated right in this situation.

A moral right is one that refers to a person’s personal status. For example, women’s rights, animal rights, children’s rights, etc. (The Internet
Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2001). The law cannot enforce moral rights; the people themselves can only enforce them.
Human rights are moral norms that are relative to a culture. Human rights serve no function in a culture where the moral norms are not correlative to the human rights laws within a country. Human rights are objective, coherent, and reasonable moral principles (Routledge Encyclopedia). Thus it is important to establish a governing body that can greatly influence the moral norms of a society. This governing body is known as the United Nations.

The concept of human rights on an international level is relatively new. However, the first concept of basic human rights is believed to have originated around the 13th century with King John of England being persuaded into signing the Magna Carta. The Magna Carta states, “No free man shall be taken, imprisoned…or in any other way destroyed…except by the lawful judgment of his peers, or by the law of the land. To no one will we sell, to none will we deny or delay, right or justice.” (http://www.casa-alianza.org).

The modern idea of human rights came about in 1948 with the publication of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 1 states, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948) However, according to Thomas Pogge, who has been very influential in the Human Rights arena, there are some central ideas that we must understand. Pogge states that human rights:

- Express ultimate moral concerns: Persons have a moral duty to respect human rights, a duty that does not derive from a more general moral duty to comply with national or international legal instruments.
- Express weightily moral concerns, which normally override normative decisions.
• The moral concerns are focused on human beings, all of them alone have human rights and the special moral status associated therewith.
• All human beings have equal status.
• These rights are unrestricted.

These moral concerns are broadly sharable, i.e. capable of being understood and appreciated by persons from different epochs and cultures, as well as by adherents of a variety of religions, moral traditions and philosophies. The six “elements” of human rights that Pogge gives us are very important.

The concept that all humans ought to be entitled to human rights is generally agreed upon. However, the question is how to make these rights applicable on paper. Gregory Vlastos states in Theories of Rights, “Taking ‘natural rights’ simply to mean human rights that is to say, rights which are human not in the trivial sense that those who have them are men, but in the challenging sense that in order to have them they need only be men…” He then asks, “…what are the range of these rights?” (Vlastos in Waldon, 1984) The French Declaration on Human Rights, states that these rights include ‘liberty, property, security, and resistance to opposition.’ However, other documents and theorists state there are many more rights that ought to be included under the umbrella of human rights.

Every human being ought to be entitled to these human rights. Yet, it is difficult to identify those rights that are specifically human rights. In turn, it is also difficult to identify globally-based moral and ethical guidelines respected and recognized throughout the world. Nonetheless, human rights in their most basic form, ought to be considered essential for everyone, regardless of their nationality. As Nigel Dower commented in a seminar he gave at Linköpings Univeristet, in today’s world most of us consider ourselves cosmopolitans or citizens of the world. Thus, basic human rights can be considered a social norm for everyone.

The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights is a good example of the problem we face when discussing human rights. For the purpose of this study I will examine The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Article 26 and how it relates to humanity. This Article states:
1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least at the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

The right to education provides people the freedom to make better choices about their lives. It provides them with the tools needed to demand access to services and resources; it allows people the ability to participate in a democracy; it allows for a better understanding of the legal system with access to information about the legal processes and their rights. Good education positively impacts social equality and promotes economic development.
CHAPTER 4

FREEDOM

The principle of freedom has two basic ideas: it promotes or requires a sense of autonomy or “self-governance”, and it is optional. In other words, those who have freedom have the right to choose whether they do something or whether they will not do something. The principle of freedom applies to people and their actions. There are two different types of freedoms, positive freedom and negative freedom.

A positive freedom is explained as an action that is free or an action that allows free movement. (Routledge, 1998) A positive freedom gives a person liberty to be the master of her own life. This means she is an instrument of her own will and not of another person’s will or act. A positive freedom implies that a person is “willed freely” or not controlled or manipulated by any other person or situation. ¹

A negative freedom is what John Locke and David Hume call ‘the absence of restrictions or impediments to our actions. A negative freedom corresponds to what is often referred to as “non-interference rights”. Theses rights can be classified as freedom from coercion. A negative freedom implies a person has the right to be free from assault, free from enslavement and kidnapping, the freedom from theft, and the freedom not to be prevented from making deals or contracts, etc. ²

Both positive and negative freedom are important to an individual’s liberty. A person’s positive freedom reinforces a person’s negative freedom. Thus, neither can truly exist without the other. As we will see, certain freedoms make other freedoms stronger and more plausible for the individual.

CHAPTER 5
PAULO FREIRE

Paulo Freire was born on September 19, 1921 in Recife, a port city in northeastern Brazil. Freire’s family was of the middle class. However, they experienced many financial problems due to the Great Depression. During the Great Depression, Freire experienced, firsthand, what it was like to go hungry. At an early age, he realized how intensely people in his country suffered. Subsequently, he made a commitment to dedicate his life to the struggle against hunger.

After the Depression and an improved family economic situation, he began studying Law, Philosophy and Psychology at the University of Recife. While attending the University he became very interested in the works of Marx, as well as other Catholic intellectuals like Maritain, Bernanos, and Mounier.

After he graduated from Recife with a degree in Law, he decided to abandon law. He began working as a welfare officer. He later became the Director of the Department of Education and Culture of the Social Service in the State of Pernambuco.

While working for the Department of Education he was often in close contact with the urban poor. He began formulating a means of communicating with them that later turned into his dialogical method for education. This concept encouraged and inspired Freire. He began teaching literacy classes to adults using the dialogical method as a key pedagogical step towards education and humanity.

In the 1960’s Freire became the director of the University of Recife’s Cultural Extension Service. This service was to provide literacy programs to urban peasants living in the northeastern part of Brazil. The program soon became nationally acclaimed for teaching people to read in 30 hours.

Much of Freire’s work began as an incentive to change Brazil’s educational, social and political situation. During the first half of the 20th Century only those who could read were given the right to vote. It was at this point in time that Freire saw literacy as an important asset for citizens of the
Brazilian society. Literacy not only would give people the tools needed for everyday life, but it would also give them confidence to question and re-question what was going on in their society.

Freire not only taught literacy, but he taught the poor that their participation in the political process was an attainable goal through the knowledge of reading and writing. The peasants were soon able to have a say in the day-to-day decisions that affected their lives in Brazil. As more and more people became literate, the less passive and submissive they became. Freire had not only taught them to read, but he had taught them to be political beings. This was seen as extreme radicalism in the eyes of the military and the land-owners, who at the time were restless in avoiding land reform. This ability to read and write was seen as a threat to those who wanted to maintain control. There was a fear that the urban peasants would use their new knowledge to realize they were being persecuted and exploited.

In 1964, after the military coup d'etat overthrew the Goulart Regime, Freire was arrested for subversive activities for teaching the poor citizens to read and become empowered toward political freedom. While in prison he began working on his first book, Education as the Practice of Freedom. It focused on his failure to make social and political changes within Brazil.

Seventy days after his arrest, Paulo Freire was forced to go into exile in Chile. While in Chile he worked for the Chilean Land Reform office. He worked diligently on his pedagogical ideas (to be discussed further). The Chilean Ministry of Education became very interested in Freire’s work because of the novel ideas surrounding land reform and social advancements. Ultimately, this pedagogical approach became the Chilean method of education.

During his time in exile he spent time as a visiting professor in the Education Department at Harvard University. He also became a fellow at the Center for Development and Social Change. He also attended educational conferences to learn more about promoting education and literacy as a form of political freedom. During his time at Harvard, he wrote and published his most famous book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. This book provides the central theme for this study.
Pedagogy of the Oppressed, emphasizes the importance of education. It also illustrates that education is the path to permanent liberation. There are two stages to Freire’s plan. The first stage is conscientização, or the stage of awareness of oppression, followed by “praxis” whereby the oppressed are able to transform that state.

Freire’s Pedagogy is an educational plan to liberate those who are oppressed. In his first books he focuses on adult education. However the pedagogy can and has been adapted to almost every educational setting. This pedagogy must be created together with those who are oppressed in order for them to become fully human, or “regain their humanity” (Freire, 1970:48). Freire takes bits and pieces of many different Greek philosophers such as Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle. His theories are written in a context that is contemporary and revolutionary. By using Socratic and Aristotelian philosophy, Freire has been able to mold their theories into a theory of his own, which ultimately strives for the liberation of the oppressed specifically in Brazil.

The first step of teaching people to become literate is to ensure that the teacher and student must come together to forge a curriculum to benefit both. This concept of dialogue is very Socratic. It requires all parties involved to voice their opinion and form an agreement. Once the oppressed and their teachers have developed a curriculum that will directly relate to the students’ needs, then the process of liberation may proceed.

Freire believes education is important to all individuals within a given society because it promotes humanity. He discusses what is needed in order for a person to be “truly human”. As will be explained, “truly human” refers to an individual with a purpose in the world. Freire alludes to education as a tool for liberation. Liberation from oppression. People who are oppressed do not believe there is a better life. They are taught by their oppressors to believe one thing and not to question their plot in life. According to Freire, the oppressed may be terrified of their oppressor, and consequently never question her authority. “The behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor.” (Freire, 1970:47). The oppressed do not seek freedom as they have “internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his [the oppressor’s] guidelines.”
prescribed behavior results in actions controlled by the oppressor. For example, acting to appease another individual, or the oppressor, rather than themselves. Thus, the possibility of freedom seems like an unattainable goal. Moreover, freedom, according to Freire, cannot be given, but rather is “acquired by conquest, not by gift.” (1970:47).

Freire returned to Brazil late in his life and died in May 1997. His book Letters to Cristina was published shortly thereafter. Even though his work greatly influenced educators and students around the world, it was after his death that Freire was recognized for his work.

Freire was inspired by many different people. Marx, Aristotle, Fanon, and Socrates are just a four of the many influential people who are apparent in Freire’s work towards a literate population. Philosophical views such as phenomenology, existentialism, and Christian Personalism are also quite significant influences and are easily seen throughout much of his work. Freire is remembered as a man who sought change and who strived for the end of oppression.

What does this mean? Does Freire’s pedagogy change the way he may see human beings, human awareness, human rights, human needs, human freedom? And if so, how should these people, the oppressed, as he calls them, be educated?

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3 Phenomenology came about in the 20th Century with the work of the German philosopher, Edmund Husserl. “Phenomenology describes the structures of experience as they present themselves to consciousness, without recourse to theory, deduction, or assumptions from other disciplines.” Husserl found that emotions and thoughts such as remembering, desiring, and perceiving, had abstract meaning. The meaning of these emotions lead to action directed at someone or something. This direct action or intentionality is known as consciousness. Thus, phenomenology is the name given to the study of the basic components which allow humans to give meaning to life and move towards a cause-reaction state. (www.connect.net/ron/phenom/html).

4 According to Jean-Paul Sartre, existentialism is human existence. “Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and humans(men) are in consequence forlorn, for (they) cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside (their self)” Sartre states that there is no determinism, only freedom. Humans (men) are free, thus human(men) equals freedom. In existentialism God does not determine the fate of human beings, only humans can determine their fate, by changing and influencing their reality or existence. (Singer, Ethics 1994:152-155).

5 Personalism requires an affirmation of value of the human person. (http://www.cjd.org/paper/roots/remman.html).
CHAPTER 5.0

FREIRE’S VIEW OF HUMAN BEING

People are not truly human if they are oppressed or if they oppress others. “What distinguishes human beings from slaves (the oppressed) and animals is that human beings can ‘create, can act for a purpose’.” (Taylor, 1993:46) Thus, a human being can state his individual purpose, whereas the slave or the animal cannot. If a person oppresses another human, an individual is a semi-human. An individual cannot be truly human if she sees others as objects rather than subjects. These concepts would be considered criterion for being truly human. As we will see there are both criterion for being human and normative theories.

A criteria is a standard on which a judgment or decision may be based or a characterizing mark or trait. \(^6\) As a result, we can say that a criteria for a human being is that an individual must state a purpose in life and act accordingly. Another criteria for being truly human would be to be born. Criterion for being human are easier to define than normative theories especially when dealing with concepts such as human rights, oppression, and the good life.

In order to justify special human rights something should be identified that is common and peculiar for human beings. The following four points are possible ways to characterize humans in such a way that motivates us for proclaiming that human beings have (or claim that to have) special human rights. \(^7\)

There are a few distinct theories of a human being. The most common definition or theory states that humans must have a purpose in the world and must be able to act accordingly. This definition is the umbrella definition for the following four theories. According to Bo Peterson, we can understand why and how humans differ from animals by looking at four different theories; the Theological Theory of Human Being says that humans are pictures of ‘God’. The other three constitute secular or scientific ways of explaining human beings. One can say that humans have special psychological characteristics

\(^6\) http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary.
the capacity to reason, they can think argue, and think abstractly. Another humanizing characteristic is that humans are self-conscious and have life plans. Humans therefore question their reality and whether what they are doing is appropriate or. Human being are encouraged to have a life plan which may include going to kindergarten at age five or college at age 18. Animals or sub-humans do not possess these life plans. These normative theories of human beings suggest that if a man or a woman should be truly human, he or she ought to live a life free of oppression, be free to pursue social equality, and ought to have equal access to his/ her human rights. There is a difference between a criteria for being human and normative theory.

There is a distinct difference between animals and humans. Animals may only exist in the world. They are not capable of creating or changing their own reality whereas humans create reality, change, and ultimately can make changes to better their existence. Animals on the other hand are unable to execute such changes. As we have seen many times before people, who are illiterate and/ or uneducated may be unable to realize they are in an unfavorable position. They consequently may be unable to make acceptable or adequate changes. This sort of person, who does not see the possibility to make changes in the person’s life because someone else is in control of the person’s life, is not truly human.

One may ask if human birth, constitute being human or is a person taught the principle of humanity? Freire seems to believe that all people may in essence be human; however their humanity is often taken away from them. Those whose humanity is taken away from them are known as the oppressed and those who oppress others give up being truly human to becoming a semi-human. He proposes that semi-humans are people who allow others to make decisions for them. They are people who without knowing it relinquish their freedom.

There are various acts of dehumanization which render an individual a “semi-human”. The first act of dehumanization is to surrender one’s freedom. If we take the oppressed for example, in most cases it is not the person’s

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7 This was clarified to me by Dr. Bo Peterson at Linköpings Universitet via e-mail.
choice to be classified as part of an oppressed group, nonetheless, if a person is oppressed an he is ultimately deprived of the his freedom. The meaning of the word oppress is to crush or burden by abuse of power or authority or to burden spiritually or mentally (Merriam-Webster Online dictionary). This authoritative burden constantly weighs down on the psyche of an individual constantly. In other words, if a person is relentlessly told that she is worthless and she must follow the orders of the her master, she will ultimately come to believe the same. For instance, a child who comes from a broken family and is constantly told that he is a delinquent that he has no hope or he is lazy, he will come to believe he posses those qualities.

Another act of dehumanization is by being the oppressor. A person who oppresses others, keeps them down by using the person’s authority and power. To oppress someone is as dehumanizing as being oppressed. The oppressor is takes away the ultimate freedom of every human being an individual oppresses. Thereby initiating the process of dehumanization. The oppressor is in essence relinquishing the person’s freedom to act for her/himself because an individual does not think only for her/himself. The oppressor does the thinking for others thereby focusing on what an individual can do in order to maintain a position in society.

This process of thinking for others and making decisions for other does not promote autonomy. Autonomy is the individual’s positive freedom to act or live as she sees fit without interference from another. Therefore, the individual can be considered semi-human because as normative theories state, a human must be able to think and act upon her thoughts. In giving up one’s humanity that individual might make and/or act upon decisions based on a hopeful or anticipated reaction by another person. One might label this as the “most humanizing action.”

Freire identifies this “most humanizing action” as ‘Dialectic Operation’. ‘Dialectic Operation’ is as both Aristotle and Freire state, “the ability to express oneself in speech”. In order to be truly human for both Aristotle and Freire is to have the rights to speak. (Taylor, 1993:47) Not only is the right to speak a phenomenon which distinguishes humans and semi-humans, but also promotes the ability to be a political being is as well.
The concept of ‘dialectic operation’ is critical here because it illustrates the need for communication. According to Freire, the right to speak up and have a two way discussion promotes liberation from oppression because an individual who was once oppressed can now question what people say and inquire as to what things mean. Whereas, if people lack ‘dialectic operation’ they lack one of the important criterions that would constitute being a true human. The right to speak is key to a person’s liberation.

The concept of ‘dialectic operation’ can be considered parallel to Socratic Method. Both promote or intend to promote a discussion on a given topic. The intended final outcome is an agreement on the issues at hand. This is important because it demonstrates the link between Freire’s pedagogy and the philosophy of education, that being the essential need for a literate and dialect society.

According to Aristotle, a human being is a politikon zoon. (Taylor, 1993:47) In other words a person shall be able to understand and “name the world”. (Taylor, 1993:47) An individual can only “name the world” with a politically human encounter such as dialogue. Dialogue is the means by which political ideas are expressed and is the process of humanization. One may say that the right to speak and to question authority is political act of humanization because it eliminates submissive and passive behavior.

Freire believes humanization is a politically subversive process as it empowers oppressed people to question their lives and position in society. "Because it is a distortion of being more fully human, sooner or later being less human leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so" (p. 28)

Humanization requires students to achieve Concientização or critical consciousness. (Freire, 1970) This consciousness comes from questioning what one knows and making a conscious decision to see the reasons for the reality one lives in. Freedom from oppression can only come when the oppressed achieve concientização and use that knowledge to gain "praxis."

"Praxis is a complex activity by which individuals create culture and society and become critically conscious human beings." 8 Praxis entails a

8 http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/FreireIssues.html#praxis.
cycle of action to reflection to action, crucial to liberating education. An individual must first be presented with a situation in which she must take appropriate action. She must then be able to reflect upon the current situation and consequently make appropriate changes to affect the anticipated outcome. A person who has gained praxis is self-determined, rather than coerced; is motivated by intention rather than by a reaction; is creative rather than accepting of sameness; and is rational rather than inspired by chance.

The theory or concept of a human being is challenging. In order to understand why education is a human right, we must recognize what it means to be human. We must understand and be able to identify the specific traits which Freire deems consistent for “semi-humans”.

There are different theories and criterion that help us differentiate humans from animals. The normative theory explains that humans have a purpose in the world and they are capable of altering or modifying their life. The criterion for being human is simply to be born a human, which supposes a human is a rational being.

A human being can be “semi human” if he is not truly free. In order to be a true human, a person must be able to speak, discuss, read, and conceptualize his reality. This means arriving at the stage of conscientização.
CHAPTER 5.1
THE OPPRESSORS AND THE OPPRESSED

Throughout history there has always been a struggle between classes. Those who hold power want to maintain it. The rich and powerful will in essence do anything they can to salvage their place in society, while at the same time denying that there are any class differences. In order to secure their status, the oppressors will use any means possible. That may, ultimately, lead to dehumanizing oppression.

The oppressors often lack humility and security; it is not uncommon to hear the words, “Do you know who you are talking to?” or “You don’t know who you are dealing with…” (Freire, 1998:40) are phrases used to immobilize and instill fear. The oppressors are a fearful group. Unlike the oppressed they fear loss of power, money, and class. The oppressed on the other hand fear the oppressors and their ruthlessness to deny them their rights.

The oppressors are authoritarian beings. They are insecure because as we know, “to be is to have”. The fear of losing power or becoming one of them is frightening.

The oppressed have a similar set of issues. The oppressed in general do not appreciate themselves. They internalize what the oppressors say and do. Often never hearing positive feedback, they turn into what the oppressors treat them as. The oppressed are treated as indigents, sick, lazy animals, that do nothing good for society or themselves. The oppressed will internalize these comments and views and are effected because the way they are treated is what they become.

The oppressed all too often see others as their superiors. To illustrate, consider this personal experience. While living in Chile in 1997, I lived with a middle-upper class Chilean family. The family lived in a single family home in a nice neighborhood. There was a gate and a big wall that surrounded the neighborhood. When we drove up, a man came out of this little guard tower and opened the gate. As a middle class kid coming from the United States, this surprised me. I had never lived in a protected compound before.

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9 Freire, Paulo; 1971, pg. 63.
However, I did not question it and my host sister explained to me that this would be the last weekend he would be here, due to economic cut backs. We parked the car and went inside. To my surprise, dinner had been prepared and placed on the table. Yes! It was true, my host family even had a maid! I had never been waited on in someone’s home before. It was quite a different experience for me. Her name was Maria and she referred to me in the “usted” term instead of the “tú” form. This upset me. She was older than me and had lived in the house for many years. Yet I was supposed to use the tú form when I spoke to her and she was to use the usted form. I quickly asked her not to use usted and in the following days befriended her. I helped her clean and cook while I was not going to school. It was a normal task for me to help earn my keep, so that is what I did.

Not until now am I able to make the connection between oppression and its demeaning situation. This lady could not see herself in any other position except serving others in their house. She did not read, she had two children, and lived in a shack outside the town. Maria called me by “usted” because she saw me as her superior, as someone from another country who knew things. She was just a poor person, who lived in a dirty shack, and went to the town to clean and take care of someone else’s children. I never knew who took care of her children.

The oppressed as Freire tells us, are totally dependent on their oppressors. Everyday Maria came to work so she could earn money to feed her family and put a roof over their heads. Everyday her children were left alone and her house was not cleaned. But, the way she saw it was that by going to work everyday, she was not lazy, she was earning money so that maybe one day she could live in a house like the one she took care of. No one ever taught her that the meager amounts of money she made would never suffice to rid her of her poverty. No one ever taught her that she must take care of her house before taking care of anyone else’s. She was caught in the circle.

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10 Usted (means you) in Spanish is the formal and respectful way to refer to someone. It is often used for people who are older or whom you respect.
11 Tú (means you) in Spanish is the familiar and more commonly used way to refer to someone.
An oppressive society supports the above mentioned concept of banking education which argues that:

a. the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
b. the teacher knows everything and the student knows nothing;
c. the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
d. the teacher talks and the students listen-meekly;
e. the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
f. the teacher chooses and enforces his (her) choice, and the students comply;
g. the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of action through the action of the teacher;
h. the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
i. the teachers confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which he or she set in the opposition to the freedom of the students;
j. the teacher is the Subject of the learning process while the pupils are mere objects.\[12\]

Oppression takes control of life- “it is necrophilic; it is nourished by love of death not life.”\[13\] The banking concept of education allows the oppressors to control the actions, thoughts, and realities of people. It provides a facet by which the elite can dominate and promote a “culture of silence”.

\[12\] Freire, Paulo, 1971; pg. 73.
“The "culture of silence" is a characteristic which Freire attributes to oppressed people in colonized countries, with significant parallels in highly developed countries. Freire states that people who are alienated and oppressed are not heard by those who dominate their society. The dominant members “prescribe the words to be spoken by the oppressed” by controlling the schools and other public institutions, thereby silencing the people. This “imposed silence” does not signify that the oppressed are unable to respond. But rather they are unable to respond critically.

The oppressors and the oppressed have always been present. Freire’s goal is to educate both groups by teaching them that their actions are dehumanizing. Both groups are insecure and find it difficult to change because they often lack conscientização.
Freire is one of the most influential pedagogical theorists of our time. He focuses on the importance of a literate population. In order to be considered truly human, people must enter into a state which he calls conscientização. This state of critical awareness allows people to see themselves as subjects in the world instead of objects. According to Freire, this is the first step in moving towards an equal society. Equal society meaning no one is oppressed by anyone else. Each person has the right and ability to think, and to act autonomously in the world and with the world.

Conscientização, or critical consciousness, is the action of the oppressed by which they take control of their situation and become critically aware of social, political, and economic oppression. It is the power to change an existing reality into a new and improved reality. There are three stages of conscientização, “semi-intransitive”, “naive transitivity”, and “critical transitivity”.

The basic concept of consciousness is meaningless unless people are transitive. Thus in order to attain true conscientização, a person must move from an intransitive state, where she is not the object of the situation. In this state, she not aware of her existence which limits herself and is regarded as an object rather than a subject. Hence the first step in attaining conscientização is the "semi-intransitive" state of consciousness.

The "semi-intransitive" is the first step in moving towards individual awareness. “Semi-intransitive" is defined as action words that do not correspond to an object. The point that Freire is trying to make is that there is a difference between being aware of something and taking action upon the issue which one becomes aware of.
During this state of “semi-intransitivity” a person’s perception is limited. Her interests center around matters of survival and are impermeable to challenges situated outside the demands of biological necessity. In other words, her goal is merely survival as opposed to considering the challenges that could possibly affect her existence.

The second stage of consciousness is "naive transitivity." This stage is the stage in which the oppressed oversimplify their problems. It is a difficult stage when people reflect on the past and have nostalgic recollections of how it used to be. This is also the stage when people tend to lose interest in their goals. They forget what they are working for and begin to fantasize about their reality. This part of the learning process is common for everyone. Most of us can relate to the feeling which Freire characterizes as “naive transitivity” because we have all made goals for ourselves and have come to a point when we say it is just too difficult. At this stage we begin to invent reasons as to why we should discontinue our quest to achieve our goal and attempt to justify giving up.

This is also a difficult stage. People who find themselves combating “naive transitivity” are encouraged to realize that this is the most difficult stage to cope with. Those of us who create goals will always at some point or another feel like giving up. 19

The third and final stage on the road to conscientização is “critical transitivity”. This is the stage in which people begin to truly understand and interpret their problems. This stage constitutes a fierce drive to understand and reconstruct her existence. (In this stage, the oppressed or those who are working towards a goal, which in this is case freedom of oppression by means of literacy is crucial.) People become subjects rather than objects and begin to act pro-actively in order to reject the old and incorporate new ideas. The oppressed begin to see themselves as actors and players in their own reality.

Not only does this stage promote personal transitivity it also paves the road for dialogue. In this stage people begin to ask and answer questions. Instead of listening and obeying they listen and question. This is important because dialogue is the most humanizing act and it promotes liberation.

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As mentioned earlier rights are “claims” that can be made upon others or upon society. Rights protect people from the state as well as from other people. Of course it is difficult to decipher which rights are inherently most valuable to this type of study. There are many rights that are important, however there are certain rights that pertain directly to education due to the fact that if one is not educated an individual is unaware that these rights exist. Moreover, these rights are intrinsically vital because if they are violated, infringed upon, or disregarded, it is society’s responsibility to enable those individual’s to reclaim their lost rights.

Freire believes that both students and teachers have rights, which fall under the umbrella of human rights. All people are entitled to specific human rights and the rights I will mention do not exclude certain people from these rights. For example, Freire mentions teachers have the right to speak up and criticize authority. This right is fundamentally human, and is not limited to only teachers. Additionally, this right does not mean that only teachers may speak out against authority. In this case, it simply exemplifies the fact that teachers ought to have this right, and this right ought to be recognized even more so because an individual is a teacher.

Freire believes that democracy is based on certain political and pedagogical rights. These rights will enable people to see themselves as participants and actors within the system rather than the objects the system uses to grow. Once people are allowed access their rights they begin to have a better understanding of what it means to respect rights and duties. Moreover these rights enable people to see that education is directly linked to true freedom.

The rights which Freire claims are significant to mankind are- the right to justice; to life, i.e. the right to be born; to eat; to sleep; to good health; to have clothing; to pay respect to the dead; to study; to work; to be a child; to believe or not to believe; to live one’s sexuality any way one deems it.
appropriate; to criticize; to disagree with official discourse; to read; to play regardless of age; to be ethically informed about what happens locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally; to move; to come and to go; and to not be discriminated against. (Freire, 1996:155-156)

The rights of a teacher are similar. Freire affirms that teachers are entitled to rights which are equally important in the discourse of education and rights. The rights of the teacher include, but are not limited to- the right to freedom in teaching, the right to speak, the right to better conditions for pedagogical work, the right to paid sabbaticals for continuing education, the right to be coherent, the right to criticize authorities without fear of retaliation (which entails the duty to criticize truthfully), the right or the duty to be serious and coherent and to not have to live to survive. 20

What exactly does Freire mean by these rights? In many instances throughout Freire’s writing we see a vagueness that must be addressed. For example what does Freire mean by justice? In order to clarify what he means by this ambiguous term we will look at the work by Amartya Sen, Development as Freedom.

20 Freire, Teachers as Cultural Workers, 1998, Pg. 45-46.
CHAPTER 6

AMARTYA SEN

Amartya Sen is a present day economist and a philosopher who has influenced the world immensely with his practical theories about human need, human capability, and human development. His book Development as Freedom was published in 1998, for which Sen received the Nobel Peace Prize in Economics.

Development as Freedom, is a “process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy.” Development is the process of ridding people of “sources of unfreedom”. These unfreedoms are poverty, tyranny, poor economic opportunities, social deprivation, neglect of public facilities, intolerance or over activity of repressive states. It is imperative to note that the lack of freedom is related in its entirety to poverty. Poverty deprives people of their right to access public facilities such as health care or schools. It therefore promotes social and political inequalities. Sen argues that freedom is both an end and a means to development because freedom provides for the liberty to participate in elections, or public policy making. Freedom also provides people the opportunity to receive basic primary education.

Freedom is essential to development because it promotes other freedoms such as political and social freedom, economic participation, economic security, and other social opportunities. These freedoms, according to Sen strengthen each other and make it easier for people to gain the opportunity to equal rights and justice.

Sen’s concept of a human being focuses on human needs and human freedom. Human beings have certain needs which if they are not met, will take away from the human being itself and in essence create a semi-human. Although Sen is not forthcoming in his definition of a human being one can assume that his view is quite the same as the normative theories of human beings. As Sen is a philosopher, his theory is directly relate to those noted earlier.

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According to Sen there are two roles of freedom. Human freedom can be seen as a system of building blocks. Each freedom that is honored promotes and paves the way for another freedom. Freedom plays a crucial role in the development of human beings. Sen’s theory states that freedom is related to “evaluation and effectiveness.” In the first instance, “the normative approach states that substantive individual freedoms are taken to be critical.” This means that a society should be evaluated by the type of substantive freedoms that its members are able to benefit from. This means that having more freedom to accomplish certain things that people value, will influence a person’s overall freedom. Moreover, this concept of freedom fosters a person’s opportunity to take advantages of valuable social benefits.

23 Sen, Amartya, 1999; pg. 18.
24 Sen, Amartya, 1999; pg. 18.
CHAPTER 7
VIEW OF HUMAN NEEDS

Freire does not directly address the concept of human needs in an ethical sense. Utilizing the works of Sen and William Franken will provide a better understand of Freire’s meaning of human needs. The concept of human needs relate directly to human freedom and development. Freire sees human needs as love, security, and freedom.

A central theme in Freire’s work is that love is a virtue. Love is the root of all humanity. According to Freire nothing is possible without love. Love is a courageous act within which people must try over and over again in order to succeed. Teachers must possess a lovingness and love of humanity in order to generate a progressive educational plan. But, what is love? How can we apply a theory of love to Freire’s concept of the need to love?

The teleological theory or the ethics of love has its roots in Judeo-Christian ethics. This ethic states that, “there is only one ethical imperative – to love – and that all the others are to be derived from it.” 25 This view of love can be called agapism. 26

There are different ways to classify agapism. Most philosophers tend to associate it with utilitarianism. Frankena questions the relationship of agapism and utilitarianism, but notes that, “loving thy neighbor means promoting His (God’s) good, since He is regarded as already perfect in every respect. Only if one identifies loving God with loving His creatures, and loving them with promoting the greatest balance of good over evil, can one construe Judeo-Christian agapism as utilitarianism.” 27 However, Frankena sees no connection between the law of love and the moral rule, which tells us to act or perform in a specific way, without incorporating some other principles such as utility or beneficence. Therefore, what Freire means by love is simply the principle of beneficence. Freire is constantly focused on doing good, which is the basic idea behind the principle of beneficence.

25 Franken, William 1980; pg. 56.
26 Literally means love. © 2003 by Merriam-Webster, Incorporated.
27 Frankena, William, 1973; pg. 56.
Freire’s concept of love is important to his pedagogy because Freire uses his educational plan as a tool for liberation and revolution in order for the oppressed to have dialectical operation. As mentioned earlier dialectical operation is not possible without both the oppressors and the oppressed, seeing each other as human being. Thus, it is love which is the central theme in his work. As we have seen people must be capable of love in order to strive for a revolution. Freire also refers to love as a courageous act.

Teachers must have the courage to love and to be dynamic and try new things. This means changing their lecture-deposit-memorize-regurgitate method of banking education and moving towards a give and take learning environment. Where both the student and the teacher learn from each other and teach each other. In other words, although it may be easier to simply tell students to memorize words and their meaning, it does nothing for the student because they cannot relate the words to their world. Requiring students to memorize for a test often proves teacher competence if the student excels, however, the student will never again remember what was on the test, therefore the aim of education is lost. The point of education should not be to prepare students to pass tests, but to prepare them for their future in their world. The goal of education is to further the advancement of human thinking and teach the students to form a relationship between education and their reality. Banking education does not do this.

Banking education provides teacher with an easy way out. It allows the rich to feed the minds of students with their political rhetoric and promotes oppressive behavior. If a teacher does not teach a student to think, an individual should not be in a profession which shapes minds of individuals. This what Freire means by courage to love; teachers must instigate thought not numb thought. However, this is a more difficult task than the simple undertaking of write-memorize-regurgitate.

Therefore, as teachers initiate their love for themselves and others and their lovingness to teach, students will come to feel as though they have a purpose on earth.

People need to feel as though they are part of the world. It is imperative that people, in order to be truly human, must be able to “read their world”. In other words, it is futile to assume that people feel connected to their
world by simply learning to read. According to Freire reading words on paper does not resonate in the minds of most people. Humans need to be able to relate words to their world. This I believe, is what Freire’s concept of human needs is. For instance, an English as a Second Language Teacher in the United States teaching mostly undocumented people from Mexico, can attest, that teaching English is the least difficult aspect of the job. In fact, teaching to the cultural and human level is the most difficult due to difference in cultural background and experience.

While teaching, English as Second Language to a group of 30 Mexican students, I came to understand Friere’s theory much more clearly. My job as an educator was not only to provide the students with as vast a vocabulary as possible, but also to integrate the Mexican cultural heritage and way of life into our everyday lessons. It is not simply learning and acquiring new vocabulary, but learning to use the vocabulary in a setting in which the Mexican people do not feel a part of. It is learning to gage social interaction and conceptualize the appropriateness of the situation.

It is not enough for people to simply be part of the system. This does not promote a healthy, thoughtful human being. Students must be seen as contributors to education rather than just receivers. It is imperative for students to feel as though they are part of the “big scheme of things”. Student must be empowered by the teacher. A common strategy for empowering a student is providing her the opportunity to teach the daily lesson. Students should feel that they “know things” and are not simply empty brains waiting to be filled with intellectual ideas by the teacher. Teachers must teach to promotes individual thinking. “The important thing...is for the people to come to feel like masters of their own thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestion and those of their comrades.” (Freire, 1970:124)

Humans are not to be seen as puppets of the system. That is dehumanizing and demeaning. Rather humans, especially the oppressed, must overcome the oppressors need to, “inoculate individuals with the bourgeois appetite for personal success." (Freire, 1970:149) Humans need to allow themselves to see their current status and work towards changing it and in order to do this love plays a crucial part.
Security is also considered a human need. Security implies that one is free from danger. Freire means that people ought to be able to learn and teach without feeling that their opinions, comments, or literary material will be a means by which the authorities may take legal action. People, students, teachers, or workers, anyone who is seeking change will only work towards it (change) if they are absolutely sure that their actions will not put them in a worse position than they are currently in. As we have seen in order for education to take place we must first have the courage to love or have the courage to use our best judgment to promote the good over evil and we must feel secure.

Love, security, and freedom are the most important human needs. Without them the oppressed nor the oppressors will ever be able to reach the state of conscientização. Thus, impairing them for life and promoting a system which constantly dehumanizes others so that the rich bourgeois are able to maintain their oppressive status. However, these necessities mean nothing without freedom.
CHAPTER 8
FREIRE’S VIEW OF FREEDOM

The principle of freedom has two basic ideas, one is it promotes or requires a sense of autonomy or “self-governance” and two, it is optional. In other words, those who have freedom have the right to choose whether they do something or whether they will not act. The principle of freedom applies to people and their actions. There are two different types of freedoms. Positive freedom and negative freedom.

A positive freedom is an action that is free or an action that allows free movement. It is a free action which is free of external impediments. A negative freedom is what John Locke and David Hume call ‘the absence of restrictions or impediments to our actions.” (Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1998) Although, Riesman is not the focus of our study here, he like Freire, sees that the concept of freedom is confusing. He states, “The idea that men are created free and equal is both true and misleading: men are created different; they lose their social freedom and their individual autonomy in seeking to become like each other.”

A person can be born free. According to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, Article one states, “(a)ll human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” However, Freire is hoping to convey the idea that one cannot be free if they are either being oppressed or oppressing someone else because they are not autonomous.

The obstacle that prevents people from becoming liberated is the “oppressive reality that absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings’ consciousness” (1970:51) In order to develop a pedagogy the oppressed must take an active role in their education. They must yearn for something more. Their freedom from oppression cannot be given to them it must be the own self-constructed goal. The oppressors cannot develop pedagogy such as this because it is them who are dehumanizing the oppressed while at the same time dehumanizing themselves.
Freire states, “Freedom is not an ideal located outside man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. (It) is an indispensable condition for the quest for human completion” (1970:47). In order to become truly free one must recognize that an individual is oppressed and move towards individual liberation. Freedom or liberation cannot be implanted in people. It must be taught. People must see their current situation. If they realize they are dissatisfied with it, then they must strive to change it. In order to become free, humans must liberate themselves from their current reality and evolve to the stages of Concientização. They must not only see the world around them, but read it and understand it. People must be able to conceptualize their current reality and make a conscious effort to change. This, according, to Freire will lead to liberation from oppression.

Liberation is a human phenomenon that cannot be achieved by semi-humans. If people are dehumanized in such a way, they will never truly become liberated. The oppressed must be seen as “subjects not objects” in order to realize the goal of liberation.

In order for the oppressed to first desire change, and become free, there must be leadership. This “revolutionary leadership” must consist of teacher as and students who, through interaction and discussion, create an optimal path of liberation together. Both the teachers and students must comprehend their current situation. The teachers must study the situation of the oppressed and present them with situation that the oppressed can relate to. It must be stressed that the need for leadership must not be confused with the need for just any sort of leadership.

Freire stresses that in order for liberation or revolution to take place the leaders must not see themselves in a humanitarian role. Rather they should view themselves in a humanistic role. The leaders should always bear in mind that “…their objective is to fight alongside of the people for the recovery of the people’s stolen humanity, not to ‘win the people over to their side.’”28 If a revolutionary leader’s goal is to win people over to the person’s side, then the leader is not truly a leader, but an oppressor in disguise. Providing that the

28 Freire, Paulo, 1970; pg. 95.
leader is a charismatic person who respects humanity, the oppressed will be able to live life free of oppression.
CHAPTER 9
EDUCATION AND LITERACY

Education. A word, a concept that most of us say we understand. But do we? Education is the area where power and politics become one. It is the area that embraces language, values, culture, and identity. Education provides a concrete conception of what it means to be human, to dream, to name, and to struggle for certain way of life. If education is not provocative, then it is not good enough. Education must empower people. Empowerment gives people a voice and that is why the oppressors chose to maintain their power by using oppressive educational techniques.

The concept of the pedagogy of the oppressed is for the oppressed to see themselves as bestowers of knowledge, which may be given to the world in order to understand it and make changes. Teachers become the bestower of knowledge, whereas students become the receivers. This type of teacher-student relationship can still be seen today, when teachers ignore or choose not to allow students to question the teacher’s ideology.

This approach is opposite what Freire terms the “banking approach” where information is deposited in the mind of the individual. Information which means absolutely nothing to the oppressed, but which the teacher expects the students to learn and understand only promotes oppression. Freire’s point is that in order to become truly free people must learn about what they can relate to in a codified way.

Codification is a process that clarifies the role of people in the world. Codification is the process of “choosing the best channel of communication for each theme and its representation.” Codification may be simple or compound. Simple codification uses the visual (pictures or graphics) and compound codification uses all the channels. Below is a good illustration of Freire’s Codification process.

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29 Freire, Paulo; 1970; pg. 121.
CODIFICATION:
   a) Simple
      i. Visual channel
      ii. Pictorial
      iii. Graphic
      iv. Tactile channel
      v. Auditory channel
   b) Compound: Simultaneous use of all channels.

This point is illustrated by figure 1. The picture is an image of a man working in Northeastern Brazil. This may be a familiar image that a non-literate person can “use his knowledge to distinguish between nature and culture.” Freire argues that through dialogical operation, students can identify this as a man in the world, who works, and can change reality.

The first question a teacher may ask is, why is the man working in the field? What is he doing? By using these images and asking questions like these, Freire hopes to provoke a discussion with different answers from each student. This will facilitate a discussion which may ultimately (that is the intention) lead to the conclusion that this man is working in the field because he needs to earn a living. He is able to work and he uses natural materials in order to change his situation. By doing this, the students come to realize that humans discuss, work, change, and can become literate.

It is difficult to explain something you do cannot relate to. Thus the teacher-student relationship is just that, a relationship, in which the two learn from each other and teach each other. Education that does not incorporate critical thinking is dehumanizing. In addition the concept of “banking education” ought to also include teaching people just to read and become entirely reliant on the written word can be dehumanizing as well. If we teach people to read and critically examine what they have read this is correct, however it is useless to teach people to believe everything they read.

Freire focuses on adult literacy. His pedagogy directly relates the needs of humans to receive a neutral education. This means that despite

30 Unable to obtain copyright, please refer to image on Page 121 of Freire 1970 work.
education being an extremely political act, teachers must realize the desperate need to stay neutral and to not force students to think one way or another.

An interesting point that Freire makes is that the oppressor has an ambition to possess. Thus, turning everything they see into an object, which they may purchase at their own will. This includes the oppressed. According to Freire, for the oppressor “to be is to have”.

The oppressed possess low self-efficacy and therefore see themselves as incompetent and incapable. They are told that they are “good for nothing” and after awhile they begin to believe it. The oppressed never realize that they too possess knowledge. Their knowledge is tacit. Something they cannot explain or put into words.

In order for the oppressed to become “fully human” education must be changed from a depositing mechanism or “banking education” to critical thinking and problem posing questions, which act as thought instigators instead of mere mindless memorization exercises. Freire implies that education is a verbal exchange between teachers and students, where each must learn and teach each other.32

Literacy33 is probably the most important asset to an individual and her/his society. Those who are illiterate are negated basic human rights because illiteracy ultimately “suffocates the consciousness and the expressiveness of men and women who are forbidden from reading and writing, thus limiting their capacity to write about their reading of the world so that can rethink about their original reading of it.” (Freire 1998:4) The state of illiteracy denies people the right to “full citizenship” because they are unable to relate thoughts, language, and reality.

Literacy is coupled with citizenship. As noted earlier, only those who could read in Brazil could vote, therefore literacy is a key actor in providing that people are truly actors and subject within their own society and not just objects. The importance of literacy has been made by many people and international organizations. For example, the UNESCO report which was

31 Taylor, Paul, 1993; pg. 86.
33 The state of being literate. (Merriam-Webster On-line Dictionary).
published in 1956 and was written by William Scott Grey has been considered the “benchmark” in justifying literacy as a means to acquiring the skills needed for reading and writing which are needed by individuals in order to be subjects and actors within their society. 34 There are many UNESCO publications which point out the link between education and freedom. Literacy is a means to an end and is crucial to human life.

Freire makes it very clear that education as the practice of freedom is much different then education as the practice of domination. Education as the practice of freedom- “denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people.” 35 Therefore it is imperative to promote reflection and thought in education. Without it education is not truly education it is merely domination and dehumanization.

Illiteracy is a denial of human rights. If people cannot read and write what they see or what they relate to in the world they lack the ability to understand their rights. Illiteracy denies people the right to link issues that relate to them. Moreover, it allows for oppression to become more widespread because those who are illiterate do not have the knowledge required for them to be capable of defending themselves.

One of the largest problems illiterate people face is fear36. They are afraid failure. It is important to overcome this fear whether it be real or imaginary. More often than not illiterate people allow the fear to take over them which as Freire puts it “paralyzes” them. This paralytic state is habitually provoked by an even more discerning state of illiteracy. The feeling of being ashamed when what is read is not understood. In order to break the cycle of oppression we must break the paradigm of fear down first. Thus forcing people to actively denounce their oppressors and discontinue the vicious cycle of oppression.

As illustrated Paulo Freire focuses on political and social empowerment by means of literacy. Fear is a prime example of why people do not escape the cycle of oppression. Thus, the first step in achieving human rights for all is

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34 Taylor, Paul, 1993; pg. 143.
35 Freire, Paulo, 1971; pg. 81.
literacy. As noted, Freire focuses mostly on adult literacy. Adults in general are quite anxious to learn to read and write, especially if it will help them in the future. Some questions that Freire did not answer was how do educators keep children interested in school? If education is a human right, then what if anything, can a teacher do, in order to instill in the person’s students that education is a tool for the future? No matter how many laws and amendments our governments may pass, the first step to learning is wanting to learn.

Human beings create and are history. They’re educational plan must start with their own personal history. Education must provoke thoughts and emotions that relate to a person’s past and initiate problem posing issues that insist that the students are human and that what they are learning is part of their world not just part of someone else’s world. In other words, the oppressed must feel that they are learning about themselves as actors and subjects within a society, rather than being taught what has happened in society.

36 A feeling of unrest before the notion of real or imaginary danger. (Auélio Dictionary in Freire, 1998:27).
CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

The concept of education being a human right is relatively new. This thesis attempted to discover the possible reasons for education being considered a human right as stated in Article 26 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights. In order to discover why education is a human right, I examined the works by Paulo Freire. I focused primarily on his book, The Pedagogy of the Oppressed because his philosophy forced me to comprehend the important link between literacy and humanity. In turn I feel compelled use his work to motivate others. I also incorporated other works as a tool to clarify and better understand his concepts.

Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates have been influential in forming the philosophy of education and are present throughout his works. These three philosophers can be recognized as having provided the base foundation for Freire’s pedagogy. Others like Marx, Maritain, Bernanos, and Mounier also helped to expand on Freire’s ideology for education and liberation.

As we have seen the concepts of education and freedom have gone hand in hand throughout the history of educational philosophy and are still important even today. Education and literacy promote freedom by giving people the opportunity to discuss, question, and make changes in order to better their lives.

Literacy is the key component in assisting people to realize their rights and become truly human. Those who are not truly human are considered the oppressors and the oppressed. It is the duty of the oppressed to become literate in order to become more human. This means, an individual must be able to read and write in order to play an active role in her destiny. In becoming literate the oppressed will not only liberate herself, but she will liberate the oppressor as well.

This liberation is also known as revolution. Freire makes it clear that in order to become truly human one must reach critical awareness in which there are three stages. Critical awareness will enable the oppressed to see
her situation and strive to change it. This idea of critical awareness can only be introduced by a humanistic leader who seeks change for the oppressed.

Freire has shown us that discussion or ‘dialectic operation’ is critical in education. Not only does it promote an individual’s freedom to question and discuss, but it encourages people to take control of their actions and their thoughts.

‘Dialectic operation’ also helps the teacher understand what the needs of her students are by discussing their learning interests with them. This is a critical stage in education because it facilitates and promotes good education to enable teachers to move away from the traditional system of “banking education”.

Freire believes that the “banking education” approach does not promote individual freedom. He considers “banking education” to be dehumanizing and which in turn limits an individual’s freedom to think for herself. “Banking education” restricts the basic human rights all individuals ought to have because it seeks to silence people.

“Banking education” is not a democratically based pedagogy. Rather it promotes authoritarianism because the students do not feel they have the right to speak or say anything, since they “know nothing”. Their human right to speak and ask questions is violated. In turn, this results in apathy for change and/or personal growth. Instead of “banking education” teachers should promote discussion. The ultimate goal is for students to act as participants and leaders in a system rather than as objects and bystanders. This crucial balance between teacher and students will have a positive impact on the entire cycle of liberation.

Freire’s pedagogy seeks to enhance social justice by ensuring that all people are able to read in order to take advantage of their knowledge and understanding of rights. According to Freire social justice entails fighting for rights in order to ensure that no injustices take place.

In order for all this to take place there are certain necessities humans need to become free, understand their rights, and eliminate the injustices. Teachers as revolutionary leaders must possess the courage to love. They must feel secure. They must have the freedom to teach without external criticisms.
Literacy is the most important asset to an individual because without it a person limits her ability to read and write about her world or existence. Illiteracy is a denial of “full-citizenship”. This denial is an impediment on human rights as it promotes semi–human actions that are more animalistic than humanistic in nature.

Therefore, in order to answer the question why education is a human right, we need not look any further than to understand and accept that education and teaching people to read and write is the most humanizing action. It promotes autonomy, compassion, tolerance and empowerment. If people are illiterate they are not truly human because they are denied access to their basic human freedoms and rights.
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