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# HUMANIZATION OF SCHOOL ACCORDING TO THE IDEA OF PAULO FREIRE\*

# UDC 37.014 Freire P.

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**Abstract**. *This paper presents, gives an interpretation and a critical review of the theory* of school described in the works of the Brazilian pedagogue and philosopher Paulo Freire and offers a critical approach to the theory. The modernist roots of Freire's ontology, epistemology and ethics provide a basis for a critical approach to the pedagogical theory and practice of the school as a social educational institution. Despite the fact that he is one of the most famous representatives of the radical criticism of the school, Paulo Freire is not studied extensively in this geographical area, which is one of the reasons for a thorough analysis of his work. In times of changes and attempts at reforms of the school and the school system, the pedagogical ideas of Paulo Freire, especially those related to the democratization of school, the equality and humanization of school relations, are again attracting attention. In his theory, Freire advocates for the transformation of the school and the introduction of changes that will result in the humanization of the school environment. In his theory, Freire critically examines the value of school, its pedagogic and educative function, the principles on which it is based as well as school relations. Paulo Freire's theory of school, and, above all, his critical opinions about the organization and the functioning of school represent a fertile source of ideas about the changes that the school practice is still undergoing. A diversity of ideas and an impressively wide range of issues in the works of Freire offer opportunities for changes of the school and the school system with the aim of creating a more efficient and superior system of education.

Key words: school, changes, humanization of school, Paulo Freire

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### INTRODUCTION

The eminent Brazilian pedagogue and critic Paulo Freire (1921-1997) is one of the leading representatives of the radical-critical theory of school. In his prolific professional career he wrote a considerable number of works which include a wide range of topics: national education, improvement of the literacy of the poor, cohesion in diversity, availability of education, formal, nonformal and informal education, a change in the relationship between the teacher and the student, adult education. His practical pedagogical work was a significant contribution to the educational reforms in African colonies in which Freire himself participated, along with his work as a secretary of education in Sao Paulo. The works of Paulo Freire have been translated into many languages, and his most significant and acknowledged works in academic circles are the following: Education as the Practice of Freedom (1967), Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970), The Politics of Education – Culture, Power and Liberation (1985), Literacy – Reading the Word and the World (1987), Pedagogy of Hope – Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1994), Pedagogy of Freedom – Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage (1998). A significant milestone in education came in the form of the book Pedagogy of the Oppressed written at the time of Freire's exile which he spent in Chile and Bolivia. This work is believed to have provided the groundwork for all subsequent critics of school and the school system who advocate equality, availability and humanization of the school as an open social institution. Freire's ideas and his practical work in the field of adult education, achievement of equality in the process of education and the availability of education to all categories of children and adults is what makes him one of the creators of the humanistic pedagogy, free from the dominance of political elites.

At the time when they originated, Freire's pedagogical ideas were revolutionary, but yet necessary in the society in which he lived, worked and spread his pedagogy. The evidence of the great popularity and applicability of his ideas are his many followers who have further developed Freire's humanistic vision of education. In his works, Freire emphasizes the importance of education, a process which includes the development of personality, the mind, the creation of works and changing the world for the better, all of which imply education based on humanistic principles.

Taking into consideration a broad set of Freire's pedagogical works as well as the diversity of his ideas, giving a summary and interpretations of his most important ideas in a single place is not an easy task, so this paper will deal only with the ideas relating to school and its organization. Thus the paper will discuss the ideas of the criticism of school as an institution for formal education and the needs for its change, the organization of school, the dialogue and the problem-based methods as the methods which should replace the frontal method of learning in schools, and the topicality of Freire's ideas.

## THE PEDAGOGY OF PAULO FREIRE

In the forthcoming era of neoliberalization and globalism, the reality of modern, contemporary education is characterized by many contradictions and controversies. Many critics indicate that the dominant philosophy of education, which separates school from its essence, is quite contradictory to the definition of school as a human social community. Freire, a radical democratic humanist, believed that the system of education ought to be in accordance with human rights and dignity. His pedagogy is a pedagogy of peace, hope, love and freedom. Although some authors consider his ideas utopian, leading to "blurry, unreal optimism in a world which is fatal, cynical and entirely repressive", Freire's ethical code, and especially his anthropocentrism, will remain in the original humanistic positions (Roberts, 2007:532).

In accordance with the humanistic definition of education and school as the formal institution in which the process of education is carried out, Freire emphasized the importance and the shortcomings of the current educational policy. He had an entirely different understanding of educational policy and he assessed its value through the process of critical revision of the relations between the participants in school processes. When defining an educational policy, the starting point, according to this author, should be the child itself and not state policy. The state should work towards the development of the creative personalities of people who will contribute to the development of its community, instead of creating passive people who are unable to adapt to life circumstances when they finish school. This is why it is very important to show people that they can, may and are able to fight for what they want, and to inform them that every human being has rights that should be respected. This is what makes his ideas about the struggle against discrimination and respect for everyone's rights and differences significant. Freire advocated education for children and adults from underprivileged and marginalized groups, especially for those deprived of education because of the fact that they are poor. He was a fierce opponent of the class-based education, believing that there should not be privileged individuals in the process of education and that education should be equally available to everyone. That is why he pointed out the existence of citizens deprived of their rights and encouraged people to become aware of their own selves through the process of education as well as to defend their own rights. The social context is reflected in the school context, which is the reason why social problems are connected with school problems. School is the basic institution whose aim it is to educate children; however, if there is any dissatisfaction, it means that the school has not fulfilled its function and has failed to create people who will be able to develop not only their own personality but also the ability to live with other people different from themselves.

Similarly, in terms of education, Freire believed that there is no ready-made recipe for the education of children but that different ways of education ought to be discussed and implemented. It is necessary to regularly revise the processes of upbringing and education, the work of school staff and the needs and achievements of children as well as the satisfaction and motivation of parents to participate in the processes of upbringing and education and the cooperation of a school with other institutions for nonformal education. A school is, according to this author, the institution in which the process of education takes place, but this process continues after finishing school. That is the reason why school education should aim at the emancipation and self-actualization of every person, and offer support for the achievement of goals and ideals of every person, which will result in a fulfilling life of that person. In order for such worthy aims to be achieved, it is necessary to work on the development of students' consciousness and to help them recognize their potentials and to find ways for their fulfillment. In accordance with his strong humanistic preference, Freire believed that every human being has potentials for development and that those potentials may differ, which is why every person has different abilities, interests and aspirations. However, since we are all humans, no matter what our

abilities are and how high they are, it is essential to respect differences in the process of education and to enable every individual to fully develop their potentials.

Although Freire's theory of school was quite ahead of his time, his pedagogical ideas had many supporters and followers. There are also critics who say that Freire's theory is based on ideas but that it lacks fully-developed practical solutions. Roberts suggests that Freire is a profound thinker who advocates democracy, progressive teaching and learning, the importance of language, respect for difference, the importance of culture, liberation, literacy and freedom. It is true that his ideas are utopian, but these utopian ideas have emphasized the importance of changes and have found their place in practice (Roberts, 2007). Nevertheless, current critical ideas certainly do not deny the pedagogical work and deeds of Paulo Freire, who is considered to be one of the founders of a new wave of ideas in education – critical pedagogy.

The evidence of the popularity and influence of his ideas is the fact that many institutions today follow his basic ideas. The pedagogical works of Paulo Freire have left their mark in the field of nonformal and informal education. For example, Freire's ideas from his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* inspired the creation of the so-called 'Theatre of the Oppressed', whose founding father was Augusto Boal. This kind of interactive theatre invites the audience to participate in the performance so that they can become aware of their deprivation and express their own opinions through the process of playing different roles (Boal, 2000).

#### CRITICISM OF THE MODERN SCHOOL AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A HUMANISTIC SCHOOL

In accordance with the humanistic orientation, the central ideas of Freire's theory are directed towards the examination of the kinds of relations that exist between discrimination, liberation and education. In his theory of school, Freire pays serious attention to discussions of discrimination as a universal phenomenon which exists in the school environment as well. The starting point for his discussion of discrimination in the school is his work A Pedagogy for Liberation (1987), a work, in addition to Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1972), in which Freire expressed his ideas about the need for changes. School is essentially a human community which develops people's awareness, liberates them from oppression and restores them to human society. Nevertheless, there are some indicators which show that school does not adequately fulfill this function. In order to change this situation, it is necessary to redefine the aims of education and to revise the starting ideals. The aims of education should not be based on the principle of authority, which is still the dominant concept in school despite the fact that the educational policy officially claims to be based on equality and democracy. Authority is still present at school and education is still controlled by the elite, which results in the creation of marginalized persons (Milutinović, 2008). In that sense, Freire and some other critics demand the revision of everything: the subjects that are discussed, the aims of education, its objectives, the relationship between the teacher and the student as well as between the students themselves. In the revision of the functioning of the school, it is necessary to take into consideration influences of elitist circles, who at present, just like in the past, create a situation in which many ideas about education form a 'vicious circle', disregarding the fact that "the death of the traditional school means the birth of new forms of institutional education... It is necessary

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to eliminate habits and prejudices, the elitism of those in power and the intellectualism of those in high positions" (Trnavac, 2005:238-239).

According to Freire, the aim of the pedagogy of the oppressed is not only to free all the oppressed from tyranny but also to free their oppressors (Freire, 1972). If education can form our minds, then it is important that the models we follow should not be the ones that coerce us into conformism but ones that will help us develop into people who are free to express their needs which will be acknowledged. In that sense, the pedagogy of the oppressed has two stages: "In the first stage this confrontation occurs through the change in the way the oppressed perceive the world of oppression; in the second stage, trough the expulsion of the myths created and developed in the old order, which like specters haunt the new structure emerging from the revolutionary transformation" (ibidem, 31).

Freire advocates the freedom of education, the breaking down of all prejudices and the undermining of the authority of the 'prestigious' ones. In his opinion, education is the cultural action for freedom. In order to achieve educational freedom, it is necessary to introduce changes into the school. Changes in school are directed towards the creation of a favorable human environment and are connected to the application of *the principle of democracy, i.e. the availability of education, changes of some aspects of school organization and learning, and changes of the positions of students and teachers.* 

In his works, Freire starts from the idea that in the world there is humanization as well as dehumanization. In accordance with the educational policy, schools assert that they embrace the principle of education available to all; however, this principle is not consistently applied in practice. Although schools claim to be human, they cannot be human if they do not apply the principle of availability and equal rights to education. By advocating a peaceful policy of seeking solutions to these problems, Freire suggests that individuals should not grow to resent those who hinder them and thus adopt their own methods, but they have to retain their humanity and fight for their rights. That is why it is necessary that every individual should work towards their own liberation and thus show others that they are wrong and that this exactly is the reason why what is humane is disappearing from this world (Ibidem, 1972).

School and education play a significant role in the process of humanization of a society. However, education is always subjected to the needs of a society, and many authors who agree on this also suggest that for many past years education "took into consideration almost exclusively the needs of certain social classes – the ruling elites, while individual needs of children, as well as their aspirations and interests, were pushed into the background. Children were presented with ready-made forms and shapes of life and thought to which they had to adapt; otherwise, they would have to encounter obstacles and failure in their school and life career" (Đơrđević, B. & Đơrđević, J., 2008:586).

School has the task of making education available to everyone since all people without exception deserve to have access to the process of education. In that sense, Freire believes that education should be democratized and made available and open to the public and all those who are either directly or indirectly interested in the process and effects of education. With the aim of democratization, Freire proposes the establishment of school councils by means of which cooperation with parents, ministries and other educational institution will be secured. School councils will enable parents to get a glimpse into schools and observe the development of their children. In order to make this possible, school has to be a democratic institution which is flexible and open to necessary changes. Schools have to

struggle for autonomy from the government which they will use for further development (Freire, 1999).

In the field of *school organization*, according to Freire, some necessary changes have to be introduced in order to overcome the existing 'banking concept'. Namely, Freire compares the organization of education with the so-called 'banking concept', which is characterized by the following elements: the teacher gives a lecture, the students listen to the teacher; the teacher knows everything, the students know nothing; the teacher thinks and the students think about what the teacher thinks; the teacher disciplines, and the students are disciplined; the teacher chooses and imposes the choice on the students, and the students comply; the teacher acts, and the students act through the action of the teacher; the teacher chooses the teaching content, and the students unquestioningly accept it; the teacher exercises authority; the teacher is the subject and the students the object in the process of learning. The 'banking concept' involves the process of transmission, where teachers transfer the knowledge they possess to students in any way they want. Freire believes that, in some aspects of school organization and teaching, this way of learning should be surpassed and changed (Freire, 1972). The teacher ought to encourage students to be inquisitive and to ask questions. Inquisitiveness also means that students should look at an object of knowledge from all possible angles and then at a distance from the object and think about it, compare it and detect how it is associated with other objects. Freire also points out that the teacher should make decisions and provide assistance, consciously and conscientiously (Freire, 1998).

In its essence, the humanization of the school context implies significant changes in the field of learning and the acquisition of knowledge. Education, taken as a process, is an act of active learning instead of passive memorizing of data, information and facts. According to Freire, "one of the radical differences between education as a dominating and dehumanizing task and education as a humanistic and liberating task is that the former is a pure act of knowledge" (Freire, 1985:114). The transfer of knowledge does not provide freedom and does not enable people to think critically, while humanistic education makes people explorers who always seek new kinds of knowledge.

In accordance with that, the process of acquisition of knowledge is the process of development of consciousness and raising the awareness of a person, which stands in contrast to the mechanical learning and learning solely for the sake of learning. The definition of education as a process during which the consciousness of students is raised and their critical thinking developed implies the use of different learning methods. Namely, in the case of frontal learning, which is dominant in the conception of the classical school, learning contents include narration (which very often does not reflect reality) and knowledge which is ready-made and which usually hinders the development of thinking. Narration leads to nothing but the memorization of data, which is what makes the minds of students mere 'containers to be filled'. That is the reason why changes in the process of learning are so necessary, and they primarily involve the introduction of new learning methods. In that sense, Freire suggests the use of the method of dialogue as well as the problem-based learning, claiming that these methods have many advantages, some of them being the development of critical thinking of students, the ability of reflection, problem analysis and different approaches to problem solving, all of which are part of the process of "raising the awareness of a person" (Freire, 1972).

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In Paulo Freire's humanistic school, *roles and positions of teachers and students* are considerably altered. In accordance with that, free education leads to the situation in which teachers and students switch their positions – teachers become students, whereas students become teachers (Ibidem, 1972). He emphasizes the importance of the knowledge and experience children acquire before they start school, because a child is a being in the process of development that comes to school with some previously acquired knowledge, and yet has to acquire a lot of knowledge. That is why it is necessary to appreciate the knowledge and demonstrate their abilities. The teacher now has a different role in this process. The teacher is no longer an authority figure superior to students, but their associate and partner in the process of learning. Freire criticizes the school based on authorities, in which children's needs and interests are not taken into consideration and where there is no chance for development. That kind of school is not suited to children, who do not accept authority, so it hampers them and restricts their development.

Freire believes that school should revise the influence it has on students and the starting position of this process should be the idea of what kind of students it wants to have. According to Freire, the aim of school is the education of good students instead of obedient subjects. Good students are the ones who question and want to know the reasons behind facts, those who want to explore things and find answers by themselves. The problem of school today is the fact that such students are actually not considered good students. However, Freire thinks that these students are in fact what good students should be (Freire, 1985). In that sense, he draws attention to the necessity for children to awaken and become active participants in the process of education. In order for students to assume these new roles and take new positions, it is essential that they have the support of their teachers. However, teachers mostly rely solely on the school curriculum which is designed in such a way so as to be ineffectual, in terms of the aims and objectives and the commands given by their superiors, and they rely less on the children themselves. Teachers carry out the state policy of education in their teaching; therefore, the policy of education in a particular state shapes the process of education in that state. The solution to this problem would be for teachers to work on conveying a certain amount of knowledge to the students, but also on leaving some space for students to critically think and question (Ibidem, 1985).

The pedagogical optimism of Paulo Freire is particularly evident in his work *Pedagogy of Hope* (1994), in which he emphasizes the need for hope and faith in a better future. This book was written as an act of "revolt and love, since without these two there can be no hope whatsoever. The aim of the book is to defend the idea of tolerance which should not be confused with silence and dodging, and the defense of rights to social radicalism. It tries to explain and defend progressive postmodernism that is rejected by conservative and neoliberal postmodernism" (Roberts, 2007:536). Starting from the idea that hope is an ontological necessity, he believes in the possibility of change of school, as well as in the establishment of democratic relations in the school context, in a different organization of the school, and in the implementation of such methods that will result in students' freedom and make them active participants in the process of learning and cognition. The establishment of a humanistic school is based on changes of the teachers, who are expected to be more tolerant, open and direct, more critical, inquisitive and modest, which is what he considers to be the characteristics that are undoubtedly progressive and

much more postmodern than modern. Teachers have the task of instilling into their students virtues which, in Freire's opinion, are necessary for the liberation of education, and these virtues are the following: humanity, respect, openness, inquisitiveness, devotedness, persistence, a willingness to listen to others and hear a different opinion (Ibidem, 2007). This way students become more tolerant, better prepared for dialogue and respect for difference and for observing a problem from many perspectives, which results in more effective work in the school environment and life in modern society (Stanisavljević-Petrović, 2010).

Freire's ideas about the reorganization of school and school work are considered to be referential for pedagogical critics. Many of them have based their theory of school, school organization and school work on Freire's ideas. It is widely known that in his theory Tillmann (Tillmann, 1994) mentions practical support for the reform of school learning on the basis of Freire's criticism. Just like Freire, Tillmann also emphasizes the need for changes in school and believes that the school curriculum has to be enriched and new ways for its implementation have to be found. In accordance with that, he believes that schools should organize classes outdoors, in nature and other environments, which is a way to fight against sterile working conditions of classrooms and other school buildings. The organization of work in non-school environments requires a higher degree of creativity and the additional training of teachers. Besides Freire, Tillmann also advocates the establishment of democratic school relations which should not be based on superiority and inferiority. Just like Freire and other humanistic authors, Tillmann believes that knowledge should be available to everyone, that changes should be introduced into the school curriculum and that adults should also be included into the process of education (Tillmann, 1994:131-132).

## CONCLUSION

The ideas of progressive postmodernism reflected in the works of Paulo Freire are a strong reaction to conservative and neoliberal postmodernism, which is especially evident in his work *Pedagogy of Hope* in which radical and utopian ideas are dominant; however, it is still considered that in many aspects Freire remains a modern thinker (Roberts, 2007). Freire was an eminent critic of the times in which he lived and wrote. Although he challenged the romantic idea about education as a means for achieving social balance, he still put great emphasis on the importance of the institution of school, the organization of its processes of teaching and learning and its progressive role in the process of social change. His ideas about the pedagogy of liberation, love, hope, peace, respect for difference and democracy instead of authority greatly contributed to the humanistic conception of education. Freire critically examined education in practice, perceived both its good and its bad aspects and aspired towards changes that would result in making the school a human social institution. His ideas about school available to everyone clearly exemplify a humanistic view of education where there is no discrimination -a form of education that is equal for everyone, especially for children and adults who belong to marginalized and unprivileged social groups. In Freire's opinion, changes ought to be introduced into school work which will help overcome the existing 'banking concept' and which will lead to the organization of school work that is adapted to the needs of students, teachers and all other participants in the process of education. In that sense, it is necessary to change the school climate and create a democratic climate instead of the existing hierarchical relations of superiority and inferiority. In that respect, schools and teachers have the tasks of developing students' self-reliance, critical thinking and motivation for active participation in school work. The accomplishment of these tasks is possible only if school education is transformed, and here Freire emphasizes the difference that exists between education by means of transmission and education defined as a process of the transformation of knowledge. The transformation of knowledge requires a change in the teaching methods and the use of active methods, above all others, which are based on dialogue, problem-solving, students' independent exploration along with a constant questioning and analysis of acquired knowledge. That kind of approach, which has a lot in common with contemporary constructivist theories, requires the change of roles and positions of teachers and students.

Paulo Freire's ideas about school and its organization, although they originated at the end of the XX century, are still topical in many of its aspects, and they are the starting point for the reform of school systems. The actualization of Freire's ideas about school as a humanistic institution is fully evident in the latest reform of the school and the school system in our country, which started after the year 2000. The main goals of the reform – decentralization, democratization and a more effective process of education are also present in Freire's works. Great similarity is found especially in the ideas regarding the availability of education, the definition of education as a process of transformation, democratization of new methods and forms of school work. On the basis of this, it can be concluded that Freire, in his criticism of school and its organization, draws attention to the key aspects that should be changed for school to become a more humane institution. Taking into consideration the progressive role that the school plays in the process of social change, Freire's critical observations of school and its organization could be used as the starting point for future reforms based on humanistic conceptions of education.

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# HUMANIZACIJA ŠKOLE PREMA IDEJI PAULA FREIREA Zorica Stanisavljević Petrović, Marija Cvetković, Aleksandra Jovanović

U radu je dat prikaz, interpretacija i kritički osvrt na teoriju škole u delima brazilskog pedagoga i filozofa Paula Freirea. Modernistički koreni Freireove ontologije, epistemologije i etike čine osnovu za kritički pristup pedagoškoj teoriji i praksi škole, kao društvene institucije za vaspitanje i obrazovanje. Mada je jedan od najpoznatijih predstavnika radikalne kritike škole Paulo Freire je na našim prostorima nedovoljno pručavan, što je još jedan od razloga za studioznijim istraživanjem njegovog rada. U vremenu promena i reformskih zahvata u školskom sistemu i školi, pedagoške ideje Freirea postaju ponovo aktuelne, posebno one koje se odnose na demokratizaciju škole, jednakost i humanizaciju odnosa u školskom kontekstu. Freire se u svojoj teoriji zalaže za preobražaj škole i uvođenje promena u pravcu humanizacije školskog okruženja. U svojoj teoriji kritički preispituje vrednost škole, njenu vaspitnu i obrazovnu funkciju, principe na kojima počtva, odnose u školi. Teorija o školi Paula Freirea, pre svega kritički stavovi o organizaciji i funkcionisanju škole, čini neiscrpan izvor ideja o promenama koje su i danas aktuelne u školskoj praksi. Raznovrsnost ideja i spektar tema koji ima impresivnu širinu u delima Freirea otvara mogućnosti za promene u školi i školskom sistemu u cilju stvaranja efikasnijeg i kvalitetnijeg sistema vaspitanja i obrazovanja.

Ključne reči: škola, promene, humanizacija školskog rada, Paulo Freire.