

LIBERATING EDUCATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF GLOBALIZATION AND TECHNOLOGY

April A. Valdez ¹

Mejai B.M. Avoseh, Ph.D. ²

ABSTRACT: Globalization and technology have brought tremendous benefits to humanity and have enhanced the idea of life more abundant. Enjoying the good life is the ultimate goal of existence. However, the good life means different things to different people. While the advantages of globalization and technology are evident in enhancing the good life, their challenges are equally evident. Education – especially adult education – is a sure way of checkmating these challenges. The underlying goal of education, within the context of globalization and technology, should be along the lines that allow people the opportunity to become fully human and to enjoy the “common Good.” This paper theorizes from adult education literature and identifies liberating adult education as a process of empowerment that allows individuals to function as “being in and with the world” (Freire, 2000). It draws from Freire’s idea of liberating education and critical pedagogy to argue for liberating education that revisits the student-teacher relationships. It highlights challenges and opportunities for individual and social transformation, and social justice in spite of the challenges of globalization and of rapid technological innovations originating in the United States.

Keywords: adult education, Freire, globalization, liberating education, social justice

Sociology of adult education has been discussed in terms of social relations and actions concerning oppressive and dominant forces present in adult education and human development. Sociological theory identifies adult education as a social phenomenon, and sociological approaches can illuminate power relations and structures of inequality (Butterwick & Egan, 2010, p. 113). An argument can then be made that critical social theories of social justice should analyze the occurrences of oppression and domination. This analysis of oppression and domination is imperative in adult educator’s practices starting with educators themselves. The first step is to critically examine their own locations within systems of privilege and power while encouraging their students to do the same.

According to Young (1990), “social justice concerns the degree to which a society contains and supports the institutional conditions necessary for the realization of the good life” (p. 37) and defined a social group “as any collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or way of life” (p. 43). We know that social groups coexist in relation to one another. For Young (1990) this meant, “in the encounter and interaction between social collectives that experience some differences in their way of life and forms of association, even if they also regard themselves as belonging to the same society” (p. 43). However, it is important to understand that power operates in social groups and works to uphold inequality. Oppression can be generated through social systems similar to the despotism of individuals. Therefore, the social groups that people rely on for interaction, networking, and relationships can be infused with both injustice and social justice. Similarly, Young (1990) made powerful claims of

¹ Graduate Student, School of Education, The University of South Dakota, April.Valdez@coyotes.usd.edu.

² School of Education, The University of South Dakota, Mejai.Avoseh@usd.edu.

oppression happening by “unquestionable norms, habits and symbols and assumptions underlying institutional rules” (p. 41). The idea that oppression can be systematically reproduced in social interactions perpetuating oppression subconsciously is quite epiphanous. Oppression is embedded in schemes of socioeconomic injustice and found in the exploitation of masses.

Irena Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO (2015) aptly identified the role of adult education concerning social justice and human development in terms of:

Aspirations for human rights and dignity are rising. Societies are more connected than ever, but intolerance and conflict remain rife. New power hubs are emerging, but inequities are deepening and the planet is under pressure. Opportunities for sustainable and inclusive development are vast, but the challenges are steep and complex. Societies everywhere are undergoing deep transformation, and this calls for new forms of education to foster the competencies that societies and economies need, today and tomorrow. This means moving beyond literacy and numeracy, to focus on learning environments and new approaches to learning for greater justice, social equity, and global solidarity (p. 3).

Therefore Butterwick and Egan (2010) were correct in citing, “there is no single story to tell about these social relations” (p. 121). There is no single story for human rights aspirations; no single story concerning social injustices. The role of adult education concerning liberating education should be to support the realization of the good life because “there is no more powerful transformative force than education – to promote human rights and dignity, to eradicate poverty. . . to build a better future for all” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 4).

The intent of this writing is to illustrate that authentic human liberation into the good life can come from adult education through the process of empowering people to become the fullest humans they desire. This can happen in spite of the tremendous challenges seen from globalization and technology particularly concerning the United States’ influence.

Oppressor and Oppressed

The ontological vocation of all is to be fully human, said Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. According to Shaull (2000), Freire “operates on one basic assumption: that man’s ontological vocation is to be a Subject who acts upon and transforms his world, and in doing so moves toward ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively” (p. 32). Using an example of illiterate students learning how to read and write, transforming their reality happens as they “come to a new awareness of selfhood and begin to look critically at the social situation in which they find themselves, often take the initiative in acting to transform the society that has denied them this opportunity of participation” (Shaull, 2000, p. 29). One’s world is not a reality without choices. Freire’s world is “a problem to be worked on and solved. It is the material used by man to create history, a task which he performs as he overcomes that which is

dehumanizing at any particular time and place and dares to create the qualitatively new” (Freire, 2000, p. 32). The main problem of becoming fully human is the new-found ability to see dehumanization that occurs; “we were blind, now our eyes have been opened” (Freire, 2000, p. 33).

The process of humanization is what Freire (2000) called “authentic liberation” (p. 79). Reflecting on one’s reality and taking action to transform that reality is praxis. Freire said the only way to achieve authentic praxis is not only through action, but also with true reflection. *Conscientização*, a Portuguese reflective term Freire (2000) used to illustrate “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against oppressive elements of reality” (p. 35). Some of Freire’s oppressive elements of reality include concepts concerning a fear of freedom whereby subjects actually confuse freedom with maintaining the status quo and a culture of silence in which societal domination suppresses one’s capability for critical awareness. Dehumanization was described by Freire (2000) that “which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human” (p. 44). Dehumanization is not a destiny for any human, but “the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed” (Freire, 2000, p. 44). Therefore, according to Freire’s beliefs, any instance of exploitation hinders pursuit of self-affirmation and constitutes oppression and violence. Oppressors commit violence against the oppressed through “exploit[ation] and rape by virtue of their power” (Freire, 2000, p. 44). Most think of violence as physical acts of harm brought on by another and rarely does one think of it as Freire (2000) did; “violence establishes subjugation. Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons” (p. 55).

I agree with Shaull (2000) when he wrote “I find a dialogue with the thought of Paulo Freire an exciting adventure” (p. 31) because, happily Freire (2000) believed “the greatest humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well” (p. 44). How ironic is it that the same forces that exercise their power by committing oppressive violence against humanity do not have the strength to stop oppressing? Freire (2000) said that they “cannot find in their power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both” (p. 44). What a wonderful paradox! I imagine the difficulty the oppressed find in comprehending the actual power they carry because after all, Freire (2000) reminded us that to oppressors, the oppressed do not have what they need “because they are incompetent and lazy, and worst of all is their unjustifiable ingratitude toward the ‘generous gestures’” (p. 59) of the oppressors. Generosity is a twisted notion for oppressors because regardless of its sweetness, oppression remains a violent act against humanity. It is couched in inequity and lives to deprive and destroy. True generosity ultimately gives the oppressed opportunities for humanization and to become authentically liberated from the grip of oppression by their own hands, their own actions, fighting the depravity of oppressor’s false charity. Freire (2000) said the oppressed must use their powerful strength to restore true generosity because:

Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation? They will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it. And this fight, because of the purpose given it by the oppressed, will actually constitute an act of love opposing the lovelessness which lies at the heart of the oppressors' violence, lovelessness even when clothed in false generosity (p. 45).

Therefore, the humanistic endeavor for transformational opportunities into the good life can be situated in Freire's stages of pedagogy of the oppressed. Equitable social actions by individuals can be achieved through Freire's (2000) initial stage of, "the oppressed unveil[ing] the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation" (p. 54). By demanding involvement in one's own reality, and taking action, transformation to authentic liberation begins. Equitable social actions by communities can then take place through Freire's (2000) second stage of this pedagogy when "the reality of oppression has already been transformed" (p. 54). Oppressors realize the injury they've caused and are forced into redemption through the liberation of the oppressed. However, authentic liberation is not possible in any capacity without Freire's authentic praxis and conscientização. While one might restrict their ideas of who and what is considered an oppressor, you are implored to "transform [your] lived experiences into knowledge and to use the already acquired knowledge as a process to unveil new knowledge" (Macedo, 2000, p. 19). Through transformational learning, new knowledge can unveil forces you'd never imagine as oppressors regardless of their individuality or communal structure.

Student-Teacher Dynamic

You enter school not knowing what is about to be taught to you. You are an empty repository teachers are making deposits into, expected to receive information, remember it, be tested on it, and reveal to the world the capabilities of your teachers and schools by the scores you produce. After all, how students perform directly correlates to the capabilities of the teacher as state legislation across the country now issues school grades based on students standardized test scores. While this may seem like the harmless reality of our current educational system, according to Freire (2000) this is known as the banking concept of education (p. 72). The problem with banking education is the mere notion that students know nothing and teachers are filling ignorant shells with gifts of knowledge. Banking education negates our ontological vocation to be free, full humans living the good life and encourages oppression upon of a student's reality. According to Freire (2000):

the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher, the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his/her own professional authority, which he/she sets in opposition to the freedom of the students, and the teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects" (p. 73).

Banking education discounts any creativity on the student's part and creates the teacher-student contradiction because it treats students as empty objects receiving the gift of knowledge never discovering the power they have to educate teachers and the world around them. Freire (2000) concurs with this idea:

Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence. The students, alienated like the slave . . . accept their ignorance as justifying the teacher's existence – but unlike the slave, they never discover that they educate the teacher (p. 72).

The learning environment is an appropriate backdrop for illustrating the teacher-student contradiction and the oppressive elements of banking education. This environment is suitable for such because educators can behave in ways that silence their students and prevent creative thought through dialogue by their students. However, by teachers welcoming the opportunity to learn aside their student, they relegate their power of the all-knowing educator, turning to students as equal co-investigators of knowledge. Additionally, students become richer and fuller individuals, evolving at deeper levels because they authentically feel confident about displaying their reality of the world around them as having value to others. Each escapes the exploitation of themselves and others, and allows opportunities for dialogue and problem-posing education. All, ultimately become more fully human.

Freire also uses the teacher-student contradiction to demonstrate opportunities in problem-posing education. Freire saw the world as problem to be worked on and solved by using the material of life to overcome that which is dehumanizing. This corresponds with Freire's (2000) notion of "problem-posing education" whereby teachers can "abandon the educational goals of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of problems of human beings in their relations with the world" (Freire, 2000, p. 79). This allows people to critically inquire of the world around them and see their power to transform their reality. Rather than an educator issuing communiqués, problem-posing education allows comprehension of the world as a problem needing solved and using dialogue as a means to solve those problems. This provides teachers with the opportunity to join in dialogue, solve the teacher-student contradiction, practice conscientização and dismiss the culture of silence.

Therefore, banking education and problem-posing education are in conflict with one another concerning people as incomplete beings seeking to be more fully human but struggling with oppressive elements in the learning environment. Freire (2000) contrasted banking education as mythicizing reality whereas problem-posing education demythologizes reality. Banking education prevents dialogue by students whereas problem-posing education considers dialogue an indispensable act of cognition in revealing reality. Respectively, one treats learners as objects, inhibiting creativity and intentional consciousness by isolating from the world and denying the ontological

vocation to be fully human while the other bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality fostering critical thinkers. In the context of the learning environment, Freire (2000) connected the teacher-student contradiction with violence to help us understand just how important inquiry is to becoming authentically liberated. Educators subscribing to problem-posing education provide the possibility of heightened consciousness to their students. Heightened consciousness of one's reality ushers the opportunity for transformation, which is done through inquiry. But, any educator who suppresses the process of inquiry is committing violence! Freire (2000) believed "the greatest humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: [is] to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well [because oppressors] cannot find in their power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both" (p. 44). What a wonderful paradox! Here is an opportunity for people to come together for the greater good of humanity, and work together because:

The pursuit of full humanity cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity; therefore it cannot unfold in the antagonistic relations between oppressors and oppressed. No one can be authentically human while he prevents others from being so (Freire, 2000, p. 85).

Challenges and Opportunities

The most fundamental challenges to educators and adult learners alike equate to issues within the social context of adult education. Socio-economic factors are motivating forces behind varying foci and shifts in educational progression. History reveals adult education as a major platform for social justice movements surrounding inequity and inopportunity. The idea is to create a more independent society through educating the adult workforce and freeing them from social injustice and excluded participation. Knowledge is now used a major driving force in the global economy. In fact, "economic globalization dictates and directs profitable areas of participation [which] implies that it constructs barriers in the way of those who may wish to do otherwise" (Avoseh, 2009, p. 126). Barriers equate to oppression, which prevents authentic liberation of individuals. Thus the concept of educational participation seems to be a fundamental challenge for 21st century education. Avoseh (2008) further recounted the fundamental challenges of 21st century adult education to concern empowering adult learners through vocational education. Over time scholars have contributed to the discussion of liberating education by calling for transformation of people and their communities through improvement of economic conditions of the poor, general human development, and those oppressed by challenges of access. One of the greatest challenges of adult education in the 21st century is individuals freeing themselves from the socio-economic/political barriers that are present in today's globalized world. Avoseh (2008) said, "the direction that participation and learning in adult education is heading within the context of globalization is compassed by economic logic and individual survival" (p. 56).

As the world's only superpower, the United States' influence on globalization and technology is tremendous, and therefore, their globalized activity must be at the heart

of academic discourse. Schied (2006) pointed to the inescapable fact that “the United States, the world’s leading economic and military power, is central to globalization” (p. 53). It is appropriate to focus on topics of globalization and technology nationally rather than transnationally because products of United States economic activity become global phenomena. Economic challenges from globalization and technology within the United States are a focus of Schied’s (2006) writings as he described the negative influence of neoliberal policies on workers in the United States; including rising unemployment rates, wage growth rates falling below the rate of inflation, the American economy losing millions of jobs, and the unprecedented decline in average yearly income while corporate profits hit an all-time high (p. 55).

Wal-Mart is an exceptional example of a national globalized phenomenon reaching global markets. Their business practices maintain impoverished economic conditions for their workforce of 1.4 million and counting, who earn as much as \$14,000 per year while their business model is envied globally. They have been recognized by *Fortune* magazine as the nation’s most admired corporation for what Schied (2006) attributed to “increased productivity, defined as output per worker, at such a rapid rate that it now leads competitors in productivity by 40 percent” (p. 56). They do this by using technology to analyze data trends and drive prices as low as possible by using overseas suppliers. Therefore, technology is an interconnected force of globalization. In Wal-Mart’s case, technology is used according to Schied (2006) to “identify and adjust customers’ needs quicker than any other corporation in history” (p. 57). Ironically, as a self-professed knowledge corporation, Wal-Mart’s cutting-edge ability to use state of the art technology to drive down the costs of interpreting large quantities of data, faster than any other competitor makes them a global phenomenon. Their use of technology is so customer focused that they give consumers the products they want at prices they cannot find anywhere else. Wal-Mart’s rate of production over their competitors speaks to their brilliance in visualizing how best to use technology to their advantage. Wal-Mart’s applicability to globalization and technology is recounted by Schied (2006):

[It] combines its information-rich, high-tech communication system with a customer-centered focus that is responsive to customers’ wants in ways previously unheard of. Its managers are highly trained, efficient, and given enough power to make local decisions. The result is a level of productivity that is the envy of the business world. Yet, Wal-Mart is also an employer not far removed from third-world sweatshops . . . Wal-Mart may very well be the paradigmatic American version of the globalized corporation (p. 57).

The challenges of globalization and technology do not stop there. Mass media has also become brilliant innovators of how best to use technology to their advantage. Mass media has turned into a vehicle used to privilege few and disable many through United States Federal communication policies allowing monopolies of media ownership which has resulted in the “Big Five” major communication corporations dominating the media industry. Through monopolies, media giants have mastered how to control the messages people receive and advertisers have learned how to influence consumer behavior. Guy (2006) argued

The power of the media to influence the thought and actions of people is at a level unprecedented in human history [and] the concentrated power of the media has the consequence of steering consumers (learners) away from critical, socially conscious forms of learning and social action (p. 64).

This means that media has figured out how to manipulate the messages they want to advance in such ways that literally shape how consumers see the world and behave in it.

By using culture perspectives with political economic theoretical models, mass media can then control the thoughts, behaviors, and even manipulate the desires of consumers as a way to exercise their power which Guy (2006) said is “difficult to resist because the locus of power appears diffused” (p. 66). The consequences of such concentrated power moves people from critical thought and conscious social action to what has been dubbed cultural homogeneity and predictability in cultural taste. Guy (2006) saw cultural homogeneity as an outcome of “mass produced consumer products, where the public was increasingly restricted to a set number of choices of any product” and predictability in cultural taste as “essential for producers to ensure that products would turn a profit” (p. 67). The lack of competition among monopolized media markets leads to greater floods of strategic homogenized mass media messages that lack choices for consumers to make meaning of; essentially controlling their preferences while “celebrat[ing] capitalist cultural values (consumerism, materialism, instant gratification, sexuality, and money)” (Guy, 2006, p. 71). The result is the construction of a domesticated and colonized mass culture that spans the globe.

Mass media moves people away from critical thought and conscious social action through the standardization of mass culture, also known as pop culture. According to Guy (2006) Pop Culture “loses its critical function by not taking any explicit political position” (p. 71) by operating through standardization, passive listening, and psychological adjustment to the status quo (p. 71). Mass media standardizes their messages by exploiting them to literal exhaustion, then trying to make them appear different using what Adorno and Horkheimer (1991) called “pseudo individualization” (p. 63) giving each message its own distinction. Passive listening is the result of the standardization process where the message has become so repetitive that you can understand the message, even if receive in an incomplete fashion, because you’ve heard it so many times before. Guy (2006) pointed to passive listening as “operating on a kind of confused dialectic: to consume it demands inattention and distraction, while its consumption produces in the consumer inattention and distraction” (p. 71). Finally, psychological adjustment to the status quo acts as a sort of social integration where the standardized messages are meant to foster feelings of togetherness and people then tend to become “rhythmically obedient, dancing to the distraction of the rhythm, to his or her own exploitation” (Guy, 2006, p. 72).

The challenge of mass media’s technology is their assembly-line efforts to mass produce products, including knowledge and information that garners high annual revenue and retains power systems without threatening them through thoughtful critique. Mass media and the mass culture it produces are inescapably connected to the technological innovations that drive media platforms into creating global communication networks

which ultimately shape the world around us and our reality of that world. However, Guy (2006) believed that “in the search for cultural homogeneity and predictability . . . mass production entails colonization of independent thought and critical consciousness, . . . however critical function of mass media rests largely on the control of the market response” (p. 69). Alas, the function of technology use rests on market response!

Certainly the ability to dehumanize is present, but the ability to humanize is of greater educational value. Technology provides various means of learning that operates in forms that escape the challenges caused by location and reaches all corners of the globe. Guy (2006) addressed four conceptual and policy areas what should be of concern in adult educators including technology as informal education, as a pedagogical tool, as a threat to diversity, and as a threat to democracy (p. 73). Major innovative developments have made technology an important source for information and data where learning is concerned. While technology does serves as a tool to oppress while maintaining power structures, it can also provide educational opportunities so that power systems can be critiqued and knowledge gained concerning their operations. Additionally, mass media can be a valuable source for information if used in the right context. Recent paradigm shifts call for blended modes of teaching and learning, including active learning experiences aimed at creatively gathering information and ideas. Criticality of atheoretical stances that mass media technologies are unbiased portrayers of accurate information which take no part in controlling media messages is cause for attention. Media technologies, furthermore, have the ability to promote diversity of populations and tear down sociopolitical marginalization that oppressed population’s experience, through liberating educational practices.

Conclusion

A great opportunity in adult education is for a “dialogic and democratic process of creating knowledge” (Avoseh, 2009, p. 128). Liberating education has the ability to solve many of the challenges caused by globalization and technology. By teachers fostering a dialogic and democratic learning environment, learners are able to discover the true meaning of Freire’s conscientização and tear down education’s culture of silence. Freire and Macedo (1995) might agree as they wrote that dialogue as a process of dismantling the ‘culture of silence’ must have “an epistemological curiosity...the readiness and eagerness of a conscious body that is open to the task of engaging an object of knowledge” (p. 381). Dialogue can be used as a way of knowing which makes education, according to Freire and Macedo (1995) “a globalizing practice . . . that does not only involve technical knowledge, but also world knowledge” (p. 386). We can see globalization as a means of allowing the great opportunity of Freire’s conscientização to occur within learners. Learners use world knowledge as a process of revealing new knowledge, and can then participate rigorously in dialogue as a process of learning and knowing while dismantling the culture of silence adult education has been known for and individually achieving liberation in spite of the challenges of globalization and technology.

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