



Revisiting the K-12 Program: A Freirean Critique

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Abstract

The modern schooling system promises to create globally competitive and employable graduates who could contribute to the community's socioeconomic development. Given the emerging need to reproduce a capable labor force in industries and other sectors, the preparation must cohere with these demands. In this manner, the K-12 program implemented in 2013, one of the multi-pronged approaches of the Philippine Department of Education's fortification of Outcomes-based Education, serves as a response to this global paradigm. Though the intent was practical and vital to national interest, various criticisms from the standpoint of critical pedagogy could be introduced in dissecting the program, particularly its evolving forms since 2013 until today. This work critically engages the K-12 program and recent policies implemented by the Philippine Educational System through Paulo Freire's critical thought, which may provide a conceptual grammar to better understand the nature and dynamics of domination in the educational sector. Gleaning from Freire's *magnum opus*, the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the main function of education is to empower learners to critically confront concrete social, political, and cultural issues. Such aims, I argue, seemed to have been relegated to the margins in the current system while the instrumental and calculative ends of global competitiveness and employability are prioritized. This work argues further that global competitiveness and employability are better achieved through the development of critical thinking skills – such skills could only be achieved by affirming the learners' subjectivity and intellectual independence, traits that the K-12 program may fail to address in its current form.

Keywords: Critical Pedagogy, K-12 Program, Philippine Education, Banking Method, Problem-Posing Method

Introduction

In the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire contends that the main function of education and pedagogy is to make the human person critically conscious of the reality around him through a process he calls *conscientizacao* or conscientization.¹ The goal of education should, therefore, enable men and women to engage critically and creatively with reality towards the transformation of the world. However, because of what Freire calls the “banking method of education,” a method commonly employed in traditional classroom dynamics where students are viewed as passive recipients of knowledge, education eventually becomes an apparatus that inhibits the creative minds of the students from attaining greater heights.² As an apparatus that restricts the individual’s consciousness, the banking method is rendered to be an act of domination that aims to domesticate and restrict one’s perception and response to reality. In other words, this method of education promotes the culture of silence or *mutism*.³ In such a pedagogical culture, the learners are not given the avenue to critically engage issues concerning their existence and the socio-political reality around them. The direction of this learning dynamic is therefore monological, a power dynamic that maintains and perpetuates the incapacity to transform one’s and the world.

Beyond the discourse of pedagogy and schooling, the primary focus of Freire’s theory is to critique the reality of oppression manifested in the banking method of education, an advocacy that has

¹ Henry Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals: Towards a Critical Pedagogy of Learning* (Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey, 1988), 110. See also: Franz Giuseppe F. Cortez, “The Philippine Engagement with Paulo Freire.” *KRITIKE* Vol. 7 No. 2. (December 2013).

² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1970), 72.

³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 28. See also: (1) Franz Giuseppe Cortez, “The Philippine Engagement with Paulo Freire,” *KRITIKE* Vol. 7 No. 2 50-70, (December 2013): 52. & (2) Richard Shaull, “Foreword” to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by Paulo Freire, trans. By Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: The Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1984), 46.

been geared towards a revolutionary shift in Brazil's educational system. This is what he accomplished in Brazil in his attempt to eradicate illiteracy as a consultant for the Division of Research and Planning. In his tenure, he organized studies in adult literacy, highlighting ideas of cooperative decision-making, social participation, and political responsibility.⁴ These projects undoubtedly became the turning point in Freire's pursuit of an alternative pedagogical method, which does not simply pursue the students' mastery of academic content and skills that make the individual competitive, but the development of the learner's social and political awareness and involvement with their affairs.⁵ Though such were aimed in the K-12 program and curricula in the humanities and social sciences, I argue that the overarching motivation behind the program is chunking and banking of information and content, which congest the intellectual "digestion" of learners. Over the recent months in 2025, some changes are geared to be implemented in addressing this issue. However, this may still come short of the main function of education, which as for Freire, is to develop the critical consciousness of the learner.

The trajectory of this work, therefore, is geared to show what the banking method of education is, reveal its pedagogical implications in the K-12 program, and lastly, present Freire's problem-posing method as an alternative to the banking model, which potentially could be appropriated and integrated into the curriculum. In this way, Freire's project of social transformation through *conscientization* could be concretized. In articulating these points, this work will be structured in the following manner: first, salient issues with the K-12 program and recent policies implemented by the Philippine educational system, second, Freire's critical pedagogy, and lastly, a critical analysis of the K-12 program under Freirean critical thought.

⁴ Kim Diaz, "Paulo Freire," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy <https://iep.utm.edu/freire/#H4> See also: Foreword by Ana Maria Araujo Freire on Paulo Freire and Transformative Education: Changing Lives and Transforming Communities, eds., Alethea Melling & Ruth Pilkington, Palgrave MacMillan: United Kingdom.

⁵ Ibid.

The Philippine K-12 Program

The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, also known as the K-12 Program, is a comprehensive reform to improve the Philippine educational system by adding two more years to the previous K-10 framework. Through this law, the problem of curriculum congestion could be addressed through the implementation of academic, sports, arts and design, and technical-vocational-livelihood tracks, which aim to provide wider options for the students' future career opportunities. The decongestion of the curriculum will enable the student to absorb the subject matter within a relatively sufficient amount of time compared to the previous K-10 setting.⁶ In fact, because of the congestion in the curriculum, students are often led to the "indigestion" of knowledge as the K-10 program inevitably compels the learners to absorb the subjects in quantity while sacrificing quality learning.⁷ For this reason, the graduates of the traditional K-10, who would proceed to tertiary education, usually have to undergo remedial and high school level classes in colleges and universities."⁸ This means that the previous pre-university setting often fails to efficiently prepare graduates in the pursuit of higher learning.

Another point often overlooked here is that the graduates of the previous K-10 system would not be recognized as professionals because of the age restrictions in the labor force.⁹ Hence, these graduates often have no access to legitimate employment. This is exactly why the K-12 program, according to the former DepEd Secretary Br. Armin Luistro should be implemented as the program that does not only consider the academic aspect of learning, but also the economic advantages that it could bring.¹⁰ Through the implementation of the K-12 program, the students could be better prepared for the prospects of higher educational training or enter the labor force with enough skills to be competent and employable. Intuitively, K-12 law targets poverty alleviation through technical-

⁶ Masayoshi OKABE, "Where Does Philippine Education Go?" The 'K to 12' Program and Reform of Philippine Basic Education." *Institute of Developing Economies*, IDE Discussion Paper No. 425. (August 2013), 16.

⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁸ Ellar, "Philippine K-12 System in the Post-modern Educational Landscape." *BAYBAYIN* Vol. 1, No.1 (August: 2015), 53.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Mateo, "Luistro: Philippines Ready for the K to 12 Program"

vocational-livelihood tracks where graduates could immediately enter the workforce after completion.¹¹ As a result, high school dropouts and students who belong to low-income families will have a better chance of obtaining jobs domestically or abroad. Prospects of securing promisingly lucrative career options could not only be achieved through college education, but possibly also through the utilization of technical-vocational-livelihood tracks. Thus, through the enactment of the law, it would not only develop the Philippine economy and its human resources but, more importantly, produce globally competitive and employable graduates.¹²

Furthermore, the implementation of the K-12 program is an effort to elevate the Philippine educational system to the heights of global educational standards. The K-12 law was a response to the pressure from the fact that the Philippines is now one of the last remaining countries in Asia to have implemented the program. Such a reform in the educational system has been delayed for over 75 years while the rest of the world has reaped the benefits that this educational reform promised to deliver.¹³ Hence, the K-12 program aims to not only improve the students' educational environment and a better access to employment, but also their competitiveness in the international academic sphere. In this manner, Filipino students could now have the leverage to secure slots in universities abroad, which, of course, elicits a message that the Philippine educational system also can produce academically excellent and highly skilled graduates.¹⁴

Another salient point in the implementation of the program is its intent to holistically develop students through academic and technical-vocational training, as pointed out above, which are expected to help prepare the graduates to become globally competent and employable. Here, it seems that the key to holistic development could be traced to the outcome of becoming globally competent and employable. However, at some point, being holistically developed could not be examined through statistical and quantifiable means.¹⁵ In other words, there is, in fact, no clear understanding of how holistic

¹¹ De Jesus, "Pioneering K-12." <http://opinion.inquirer.net/26715/pioneering-k-12>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Masayoshi Okabe, "Where Does Philippine Education Go?" 15-16.

¹⁵ Ibid., 20.

education is attained. Although, of course, education plays a big role in its development, the way through which it could be tested and examined in the same way as academic and technical-vocational subjects is simply unclear.

Nevertheless, this prospect of holistic development, according to Masayoshi Okabe, is characterized as “mutually understanding social and cultural differences, the ability to express oneself, or a willingness to cope with risk.”¹⁶ In this case, holistic education is not entirely about global competence and employability, which seems to be the goal of the K-12 program. Indeed, by all means, the practical and economic aspect has to be emphasized in the formulation of the program. But in pursuit of a holistic education, it's a critical aspect, or in this case, for Okabe, “social cohesion and mutual understanding among others” should be given equal importance as those that contribute not only to the individual's personal development but to the improvement of society-at-large.¹⁷ The K-12 law is deemed vital in addressing socioeconomic problems through the attempt to holistically develop learners to be globally competitive and employable.

After twelve years of pilot implementation, the issues of decongestion, better employment opportunities, and competitiveness have not been achieved. For one, research by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) shows that over 19 million high school graduates are functionally illiterate.¹⁸ This means that though the person could read or write, they could not utilize these skills to reach higher functions; in this case, they cannot use reading, writing, or calculation meaningfully in their person or the community.¹⁹ The current number in 2025 suggests that over 8 million Filipino students who have already graduated belong to the category of functionally illiterate

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 21.

¹⁸ Nga, Minh. 2025. “Nearly 19 Million Filipino High School Graduates Functionally Illiterate: Report.” VnExpress International – Latest News, Business, Travel and Analysis from Vietnam. VnExpress International. May 5, 2025.

¹⁹ Vágvölgyi, Réka, Andra Coldea, Thomas Dresler, Josef Schrader, and Hans-Christoph Nuerk. 2016. “A Review about Functional Illiteracy: Definition, Cognitive, Linguistic, and Numerical Aspects.” *Frontiers in Psychology* 7, no. November (November). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01617>.

individuals.²⁰ Reportedly, the culprit behind this is the curriculum and the core subjects, which currently amount to fifteen subjects. Given these recent reports, the Second Committee on Education, the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM 2), explores the possibility of decreasing the number of core subjects from 15 to 5, practically, going back to the original K-10 core subjects. Another point of alarm is the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) ranking results in 2022, which show that the Philippines ranks 76th out of 81 countries in the categories of reading comprehension, mathematics, and science. The report further shows that Filipino students rank 63rd out of 64 in creative thinking according to OECD.²¹ Thus, though the K-12 program aimed to empower graduates to be more viable in the job market, the fundamental competencies of reading comprehension and functional literacy were not achieved. Given that the banking model is still the dominant pedagogical framework in the educational system, such a phenomenon would likely recur, most especially, the failure to develop individual subjects who are capable of intellectual independence and creative thinking. In providing Freire's pedagogical alternative, the next section will articulate the ontological condition of the learner, the banking model, and the problem-posing model.

Struggle for Humanization

The core struggle of Freirean critical thought is to underscore the need to transform the educational practice to support the learner's development of critical awareness. For him, however, this is negated and diverted by various interfering ideologies that restrict the individual from resisting dominant ideologies counterintuitive to social and political transformation. As Althusser contends, the schooling system, as an ideological state apparatus, serves as an

²⁰ The Manila Times. 2025. "8 Million Filipino Students Graduated despite Being Functionally Illiterate." The Manila Times. May 6, 2025. <https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/05/07/tmt-newswire/8-million-filipino-students-graduated-despite-being-functionally-illiterate/2106492>.

²¹Kyle Atienza, "DepEd Eyes Better PISA Results - BusinessWorld Online." BusinessWorld Online. July 24, 2024. <https://www.bworldonline.com/the-nation/2024/07/24/610180/dep-ed-eyes-better-pisa-results/>.

instrument of reproduction. This means that the education imposed by the state acts as a means to reproduce workers to supply and stabilize the labor market. Though the intent was necessary and practical, the true nature of education, which, for Freire, is to make the learner critically aware of her reality and equipped to transform it, is jeopardized. In other words, the goal is to humanize the individual and, given the ideological context of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, reclaim man's lost subjectivity as a result of colonialism and conquest. Thus, all forms of political action that deviate from the goal of humanization, for Freire, point to dehumanization.

Freire sees dehumanization as the contradiction of the individual's vocation to fully realize her humanity.²² He discerns this to be the oppressor's attempt to truncate the human person's ability to question reality and participate in the transformation of the world. Freire argues that the individual's view of reality is manipulated through what he calls the domestication of consciousness, which Freire regards as the imposition of a prescribed reality.²³ This results in the inability of the individual to critique reality as prescribed by the oppressor. In this way, the oppressor could easily maintain his power to exploit and dehumanize the individual. Freire characterizes dehumanization in the forms of violence, manipulation, and exploitation, which all contribute to the inability of the individual to develop critical awareness. Oppression is maintained by all means to preserve an unjust social order and, therefore, retain the oppressor's dominance in the society. It is for this reason that Freire pinpoints the banking method of education as a concrete form of domination, as it hinders the development of one's critical consciousness, which Freire believes to be the initial point of one's struggle for emancipation.

For Freire, dehumanization is simply understood as "the result of an unjust order," which he insists is perpetuated by oppression.²⁴ He argues that dehumanization is a historical possibility and not a given destiny wherein man's struggle for liberation is rendered impossible.²⁵ Thus, the task to emancipate the human person becomes

²² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1970), 28.

²³ Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 36.

²⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 28.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

attainable through the rekindling of the human person's critical consciousness and the affirmation of her humanity.²⁶ For Freire, humanization is the only process through which the human person can be subjected to completion by the empowerment of her existence in the transformation of the world.²⁷ This is where the notion of *conscientization* or critical consciousness ought to be employed to fully critique and analyze the reality of oppression. Thus, the task to recover man's lost humanity requires the recognition of oppression as an act of negation against humanity. In this way, the human person is made conscious of the elements of domination and by doing so, she is enabled to respond actively and critically against it.

Freire adds, however, that the restoration of man's lost humanity is not only the task to liberate the oppressed, but also the oppressor.²⁸ Here, Freire argues that the oppressor in the act of oppression against the oppressed dehumanizes their very own humanity. Thus, the task to also restore the oppressor's humanity proceeds from her oppressive acts against the oppressed. The oppressor, along with the oppressed, is dehumanized and is necessarily subjected to the humanization process. However, Freire insists that the oppressor, as a former agent of domination, is unqualified to lead the oppressed towards emancipation, as their power is affirmed by the negation of humanity, that is, exploitation, oppression, and dehumanization of the oppressed.²⁹ Therefore, emancipation could only be possible through arguing further that it is only through the power affirmed by the weakness of the oppressed. Thus, resistance and liberation rest in the hands of the oppressed through the realization of their role as agents of social transformation. However, in the looming possibility of resistance, the oppressor attempts to extinguish the human person's yearning for emancipation by employing superficial pacifying measures and satisfying the individual's yearning for emancipation. Freire calls this *false*

²⁶ Ibid., 27. See also: Benedicto Po Tao, "Education for Critique," 23. Here, Tao recognized the mutual attainment of humanity or "mutual humanization" as the oppressor are also humanized in the event of the individual's emancipation from dehumanization.

²⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 28.

²⁸ Ibid., 28. See also: Tao, "Education for Critique, Empowerment, and Liberation: Common Themes in Freire's and Foucault's Thoughts." *PHAVISMINDA Journal* Vol. 9, (May: 2010), 23.

²⁹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 28.

generosity – a charitable exercise that is not aimed at fully empowering and liberating the human person.³⁰

In this way, false generosity captures a need that the oppressed might superficially or essentially aim to satisfy and attain, but such an attempt, according to Freire, never goes beyond the point where liberation becomes the primary goal. Therefore, the attempt to seemingly “soften the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed” is aimed at perpetuating social injustices through the exploitation of the oppressed.³¹ In this way, the individual is diverted from the prospects of liberation, which serves the interest of the oppressor in maintaining an oppressive reality. Therefore, in demythicizing the oppressor’s anti-dialogical strategies, Freire exposes false generosity by posing its contradiction, that is, true generosity. He defines true generosity to be the enablement of the human person in attaining independence through humanization and the emancipation of labor.

For Freire, true generosity happens in the active struggle to overturn oppression through the enablement of human hands to work, and by “working”, means transforming the world.³² In such a manner, emancipation is not a gift, but an outcome, a result of the individual’s laborious pursuit to expose the reality of domination.³³ Moreover, in the struggle for emancipation, Freire predicts the possibility of the oppressed becoming like the oppressor in the event of physical freedom and liberation. This is because the model of manhood of the oppressed is captured from the imagery or prescription embedded in the characteristics of the oppressor.³⁴ As Freire writes:

The very structure of their thought (the oppressed) has been conditioned by the concrete, existential situation by which they are shaped. Their ideal is to be men, but for them to be men is to be oppressors.³⁵

³⁰ Ibid., 29.

³¹ Ibid., 28-29.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 153.

³⁴ Ibid., 31.

³⁵ Ibid., 30.

The individual's appropriated ideal identity hinges on her "submersion in the reality of oppression."³⁶ Therefore, the notions of freedom, liberation, and emancipation as perceived by the oppressed are tainted by the prevalence of oppression. Through adhesion, the self-perception of the oppressed in identifying herself with the oppressor's model of humanity necessarily results in the distortion of her conception of reality.³⁷ In turn, their attempt and struggle for emancipation could not overcome the negation.³⁸ The identification of the oppressed with the oppressor's model of a "new man"³⁹ invalidates the process of emancipation, as it does not liberate the oppressed but merely changes the identity of the oppressor. This is to say that the potential of the oppressed to become the oppressors or, perhaps, sub-oppressors in the event of emancipation materializes.⁴⁰ This is why Freire recognizes the necessity to abandon the oppressor's model of humanity. Hence, it is important to point out that the overturning of oppression should not be violent, as Freire believes that "the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity, become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both."⁴¹

However, the repudiation of this model of humanity obliges the oppressed to formulate their image of a new man. Hence, the individual is now vested with an existential task to redefine freedom and power, which compels them to authentically reinvent their notion of humanity so tainted by an oppressive reality. This is why Freire claims that the oppressed are fearful of freedom, as freedom requires the rejection of the oppressor's image of a "new

³⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 28. See also Michael Viola, "The Filipinization of Critical Pedagogy: Widening the Scope of Critical Educational Theory, *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1. (June 2009): 7.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 28. See also Franz Giuseppe Cortez, "The Overcoming of Violence: Paulo Freire on the Use of Violence for Social Transformation," *KRITIKE* Vol. 10, No. 2, (December 2016), 80. Here, Cortez speculates the possibility of a violent revolution in Freire's works. It is shown here that Freire does not endorse a violent revolution in the pursuit of liberation. This is because of Freire's "respect (for) human agency and subjectivity" which implies a non-violent struggle for emancipation.

man” and the pursuit of freedom constantly and responsibly.⁴² He contends that “freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift,” which then qualifies freedom not as a mere ideal condition by which the human person could truly exist authentically, but as an indispensable condition wherein human completion is made possible.⁴³ Here, humanization evolves as a task that man can complete through the struggle to recover her lost freedom in dealing creatively and responsibly with reality.⁴⁴ However, this task to humanize and emancipate man from domination has been blocked by what Freire calls the banking method of education – a pedagogical method that restricts the individual’s critical consciousness.

Banking Model. The term *bank* or *banking* pinpoints an explicit mental picture of the act of depositing objects. Other commentaries define banking, as in the case of financial institutions, as the control of currency. In the same way, banking model controls and regulates information and content through traditional pedagogical systems. The banking method deposits information and content that could be withdrawn at a later time as the individual needs it. Thus, the act of depositing information and data has become an indispensable skill in memorization and other cognitive exercises. Traditional pedagogical systems promote such modes of learning, the test of competence being the students’ ability to bank information through examinations efficiently. Wittingly, the faster and more volumized the student can bank information, the better scores she will have as a result. Therefore, examinations are simply metrics to affirm the deposited information and test the person’s ability to retain it. However, this mechanism or strategy, for Freire, inhibits and restricts the critical thinking and creativity of the learner. This is because the learner’s knowledge is simply imposed, prescribed, and deposited.⁴⁵ This is particularly oppressive and dominating as it hinders the potential

⁴² Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 23.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁴⁴ Daniel Schugurensky, *Paulo Freire*, Daniel Schugurensky, *Continuum Library of Educational Thought: Paulo Freire Vol. 16*, Continuum International Publishing Group: London (2011), 70.

⁴⁵ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*. 36.

capacity of the human person to question and critique the objectives and contents of the learning materials. Thus, as Freire contends, the banking method promotes the culture of silence or *mutism*.⁴⁶ Under such a culture, the learners are restricted from critically engaging issues concerning their existence and thus, breed the inability to transform one's and the world.

In Freire's critical pedagogy, it is understood that the root cause of this problem in the context of schooling is the absence of dialogue in the learning process.⁴⁷ Freire characterizes the banking method of education as monological in nature.⁴⁸ This is because the learner simply becomes a passive recipient of knowledge, which Freire claims to be "detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance."⁴⁹ To wit, the teacher in this case becomes the source of knowledge while the learner banks and absorbs information and data without contestation.⁵⁰ Thus, the teacher becomes a deposit of knowledge while the students are depositories of this information.⁵¹ The ignorance of the learner is presupposed as they are expected to merely submit to the teacher's instructions.⁵² The selection of the lecture content and discussions is mainly regulated by the teacher and the curriculum.⁵³ Therefore, the critical thinking and evaluation of such content are either simply limited to the scope of the teacher's perspective or subtly aimed at regulating the contents of the subject matter in the pursuit of a practical outcome. Freire insists that this paradigm, normalized in the banking method, mirrors an oppressive society as it inhibits the critical consciousness of the individual and controls the action that could spring forth from the reflection that *conscientizacao* or conscientization might re-invent.⁵⁴ Therefore, in the

⁴⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴⁸ Freire, *Education as the Practice of Freedom, Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*, 24.

See also: Cortez, "The Prospect of Liberation Pedagogy in the Thoughts of Amable G. Tuibeo." *The Mabini Review. Polytechnic University of the Philippines*, Vol. 3, No. 1. (2014), 20.

⁴⁹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 57.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵¹ Tao, "Education for Critique," 21.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Tao, "Education for Critique," 21.

banking method, there is no genuine education, only domestication.⁵⁵ In this way, the “creative power” of the students in dealing with an oppressive reality is minimized as she is conditioned to simply conform to it.⁵⁶ The potential of the human person to transform the world or their creative power to reimagine the world, distinct from the gaze of the oppressor, is truncated from the possibilities of development.⁵⁷ Hence, for Freire, the individual merely becomes a spectator alienated from the modes of change in society.

The Problem-Posing Model. Though Freire criticizes the schooling system, his answer is not to eradicate it, but to revisit the methods through which knowledge is delivered. The central motivation of Freire’s critical pedagogy is to amplify the conditions through which a critical mind is developed. In this way, he introduces the problem-posing method. In this model, students are not merely recipients of knowledge but contributors to its critique and transformation.⁵⁸ This is why Freire believes that to eradicate the one-dimensionality of education, the student-teacher dynamics have to be reformed. He, therefore, insisted that in resolving the contradictions between the teacher and the student, the previous function of the teacher as depositor and domesticator of knowledge has to be replaced by the role of “being a student among students to overturn the roots and cause of oppression”.⁵⁹ Hence, the educator is no longer the sole source of knowledge as the student, now, becomes a partner in the attempt to transform knowledge. As Freire writes, “authentic education is not carried on by ‘A’ for ‘B’ or by ‘A’ about ‘B,’ rather ‘A’ with ‘B,’ mediated by the world – a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it”.⁶⁰ For Freire, this is possible through dialogue, which completely contradicts the banking method. In this way, the wall that divides the teacher and the student is eradicated by the necessity to repudiate one-dimensionality through dialogue.

⁵⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 36.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy*, New York, USA: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011, 12.

⁵⁹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 62.

⁶⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 82. See also: Cortez, “The Prospect of Liberation Pedagogy,” 20.

In the third chapter of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire puts into perspective the dynamics of dialogue. He claims that the essence of dialogue is the *word* itself.⁶¹ He explains that the word has two dimensions, namely, reflection and action.⁶² Freire contends that the failure of one to function accordingly necessarily results in the detriment of the other.⁶³ Thus, the relationship of these two dimensions of dialogue engenders a rigid connection that necessarily constitutes a true word.⁶⁴ On the one hand, he explains that a reflection or a word without the dimension of action turns into verbalism, which he perceives as alienating, futile, and empty.⁶⁵ On the other hand, an over-emphasis of action or activity in disregard of reflection is “converted into activism”.⁶⁶ Hence, Freire argues that transformation is impossible in the disunity of these two dimensions. This is because dialogue relies on the truthfulness of the word.⁶⁷

Therefore, Freire insists that false words cannot transform the world, and human existence will not flourish through them. In that case, the absence of one dimension immediately cancels the possibility of emancipation. He maintains that to say the true word involves action or work, and the combination of these two constitutes praxis.⁶⁸ The unity of action and reflection as praxis is the *conditio sine quanon* to the transformation of the world. In relative parlance, Freire defines dialogue as “the encounter between men, mediated by the world, to name the world.”⁶⁹ In this sense, the naming of the world, which Freire perceives as vital to social transformation, will be unachievable under a monological paradigm.

This is exactly why he posed the necessity of dialogue, as humanization requires the human person to name the world

⁶¹ Ibid., 75.

⁶² Gail Furman, “Social Justice Leadership as Praxis: Developing Capacities through Preparation Programs,” *Educational Admission Quarterly*, vol 48, No. 2 (2012): 192.

⁶³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 75.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 75-76.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

around them. In this manner, he argues that “to exist, humanely, is to name the world, to change it.”⁷⁰ The naming of the world, as Freire would have us believe, is the awareness and identification of an oppressive reality through one’s critical consciousness. Thence, the re-invention of reality through critical consciousness and dialogue could ultimately lead to emancipation and social transformation. Therefore, for Freire, human existence is always in conjunction with the naming of the world through critique and the dialogical link among persons in the society. Thus, it is important to note that dialogue as “an act of creation” and re-creation of knowledge through a dialogical discourse should not only transpire between teachers and students, but most importantly, among persons in the society.⁷¹ Similarly, the re-creation of knowledge through a dialogical discourse should not only transpire between teachers and students, but most importantly, among persons in the society.

Another indispensable aspect of dialogue as an act of creation and recreation is its foundation on love and commitment to the other. Freire insists that love is vital in the attempt to restore humanity as humanization hinges on a dialogical turn between and among persons in the society through faith, which Freire believes to be an *a priori* requirement for dialogue.⁷² Therefore, through faith in the people, the monological tendencies of the banking method become dispirited in the dialogical process. The students, as well as the teachers, under this paradigm could conquer such contradictions brought about by the banking pedagogical order. For Freire, what comes next is the organization and systematization of educational contents that fit their interest through a developed “representation” of information.⁷³ In this dialogical praxis, the learner’s understanding of reality is respected while the teacher re-presents her observations as a problem.⁷⁴ Therefore, the object of knowledge is problematized to authentically reveal the human person’s thought. However, this does not preclude the teacher from critiquing reality, because

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 75-76.

⁷² Ibid., 79.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 101.

again, the teacher also becomes a student among students in this pedagogical practice.

All things considered above, the task of humanizing the individual is nearly complete. However, there are still traces of an oppressive pedagogical method in the present educational and sociopolitical set-up. This is why Freire's critical pedagogy is still relevant as it could still provide a conceptual grammar in understanding contemporary socio-political landscapes, especially in the educational system, not only in the case of the Philippine K-12 program. The challenges in the educational sphere have become global as nations conform to a more uniform educational setup. More importantly, in this day and age, according to Giroux, "modes of schooling and pedagogy are designed largely to promote economic gain," which shapes the student's motivation towards a greater inclination to a more practical outcome through education.

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In this case, the youth in the community and their educators, according to Freire, have to take charge of the sociopolitical and academic development.⁷⁶ This is because they have been made aware of domination as a concrete social reality that they could actively resist and transform. Therefore, Giroux believes that in combating dominant and perverse motivations in society, the young people have to be equipped with "knowledge, passion, civic capacities, and social responsibility."⁷⁷ In this way, the main purpose of education in producing holistically developed individuals could be achieved. The domesticating strategies of banking methods could also be eradicated in the dialogical process and thus slowly prepare the individual to govern her freedom responsibly. Hence, critical pedagogy is not confined within the four walls of the classroom; rather a project through which the student and teacher actively participate in the transformation of knowledge and the transformation of society.

⁷⁵ Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy*, 12.

⁷⁶ D'artgnan Scorza, Nicole Mirra, and Ernest Morrell, "It Should Just Be Education," *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2013): 19.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

K-12 Program and Critical Education

The K-12 law, undoubtedly, is a comprehensive program to foster global competitiveness and the employability of graduates. The law, as it is, is equipped to address crucial issues that have evolved from the previous educational setup. However, still, the emphasis of the program towards practical ends devalues the main function of education, which Freire believes to be the enablement of the student to critically engage and transform the world. Today, this goal is challenged given the incapability of students to meaningfully utilize knowledge and information, more formally articulated by experts as functional literacy. Therefore, the initial problem revolves around the question of efficacy – how can a critical education be implemented if the fundamental aspects of reading comprehension and simple calculation are not established? In other words, how can a critical consciousness be developed if the learners have not developed rudimentary skills in reading, science, and mathematics? In one way or another, the problem emanates from the disconnect between the educational system's vision and practice, that is, the ideological ends of the program and the way it should be implemented. Thus, if the goal of the Philippine educational system is to create competitive and employable graduates, the vision takes an instrumental turn. The system perceives students as objects and pawns of the labor market instead of individual *subjects* capable of independent intellectual practices.

It is therefore not a surprise that the PISA 2018 and 2022 ranking shows that Filipino students lag in various criteria and lack creative thinking skills, as the curriculum bombards learners to absorb information and create performance tasks while leaving nearly no space for contemplation and reflection.⁷⁸ Given the socioeconomic motivations behind the program, certain issues in pedagogical practices, particularly the teacher-to-class size ratio and the additional workload assigned to teachers, also result in inefficient classroom dynamics. Dialogue and critical inquiries within the classroom, as Freire encourages, would be a challenge to normalize with an average

⁷⁸ "Decongesting the DepEd Curriculum." Manila Standard. February 2, 2023. <https://manilastandard.net/?p=314301526>.

class size of 60 students.⁷⁹ Regardless of these challenges, I argue that at the heart of the issue is the instrumentalist approach of the Philippine educational system to pedagogy, which trickles down into the way policies are shaped and how practices are normalized.

As discussed earlier, humanization is the main goal of education. This is to recover man's humanity from the trenches of dehumanization. Here, through humanization, the human person is exposed to the reality of domination as characterized by acts of commodification and exploitation. In fact, as previously discussed, man's humanity is affirmed by its contradiction. In other words, the necessity to restore humanity is put into light exactly through the realities of domination and oppression. Humanization becomes urgent and vital to the emancipation of the oppressed and, thus, to the attainment of freedom.

In revealing the reality of oppression, it is, therefore, crucial to determine concrete manifestations of domination, which is, in this case, the existence of oppression in the educational sphere. Of course, the elements of domination in the educational system necessarily reflect the socioeconomic and political contexts through which oppression and dehumanization have materialized. In this engagement, however, I will particularly focus on the pedagogical aspect of domination and its implications for the learners and the Philippine educational system as a whole. It must also be noted that in the previous section, I have briefly sketched a concrete manifestation of domination in education, that is, the banking method. In this method, the development of the learner's critical consciousness or critical mind is hindered from dealing creatively with reality. The learner, in this case, is treated merely as a recipient of knowledge, which creates a "monological" approach wherein teachers become sources of knowledge while the students are depositories of information.⁸⁰

The Philippine educational system, though it employs a learner-centered educational approach, still tends to become a tool for

⁷⁹ Cervantes, Karen, Maritess Magno, and Jose Monto. 2022. "A Descriptive Study on Class Size toward Senior High School Students' Evaluation of Robotics Teachers." <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED625380.pdf>.

⁸⁰ Tao, "Education for Critique," 21.

miseducation. This is because the primary pursuit of the K-12 program is to make the graduates globally competitive and employable, as it fails to consider the critical aspect of learning, which is the key element to the awakening of critical consciousness. Hence, for Freire, without the critical understanding of the elements of domination and oppression, social transformation becomes unattainable. Moreover, according to Freire, the banking method of education is the oppressor's tool to create a *culture of mutism* through which the students' ability to critique and question reality is silenced.⁸¹

Furthermore, in the attempt to fully extinguish the prospects of independence and emancipation, the oppressor, according to Freire, employs *false generosity*. Here, the oppressor (through false generosity) captures and satisfies a practical need of the oppressed, in this case, the prospects of socioeconomic progress to quell the struggle for emancipation.⁸² Hence, in such a manner, the prospect of social transformation is deliberately hindered through a conscious diversion from the main function of education to the prospects of global competence and the employability of the graduates. For this reason, as Freire would have us believe, the possibility of a transformative action is only attainable through the act of true generosity.

As we can see, true generosity is only found in the active struggle to reveal and act against these elements of domination and oppression. Hence, again, as shown above, the K-12 program's intention to make the graduates globally competitive and employable seems to depict an act of false generosity. This is because the aim to advance the socioeconomic situation of the Filipino people becomes the primary pursuit more than the main function of education, that is, the enablement of the individual to fully realize her function in the transformation of the world. However, as can be seen, the learners are consumed by the idea of global competitiveness and employability that the prospect of social transformation and emancipation becomes irrelevant. The K-12 law dedicates the first two provisions found in Section 2, which explicitly reveal the program's intention to produce globally competitive and employable graduates. As Section 2 of the K-12 law says, the state shall "Give every student an opportunity to

⁸¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 28.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 29.

receive quality education that is globally competitive based on a pedagogically sound curriculum that is on a par with international standards”.⁸³ The implementation of an internationally standardized educational system is ideal and urgent in the 21st century to establish a formidable presence in the global community. To do otherwise could leave the Philippine educational system behind, which may result in the graduates’ inability to effectively function in the global market. Hence, the following subsection intends to prepare the students for higher learning or provide a variety of career opportunities that may help the students keep up with global trends. It, therefore, says in subsection (b) of Section 2 that the state shall “Broaden the goals of high school education for college preparation, vocational and technical career opportunities as well as creative arts, sports, and entrepreneurial employment in a rapidly changing and increasingly globalized environment.”⁸⁴

As we can see, the entire mechanism of the K-12 law is directed towards the employability and global competence of graduates. However, I argue that the main function of education is not confined to the production of globally competent and employable individuals, but also to the integration of critical education. The position of this paper is that the integration of critical education is equally important in the attainment of a holistic education. For sure, the K-12 program attempts to holistically develop and integrate a more critical pedagogical approach.

Subsection (c) of Section 2 of the K-12 law aims to “Make education learner-oriented and responsive to the needs, cognitive and cultural capacity, the circumstances and diversity of learners, schools and communities.”⁸⁵ However, this emphasis is insufficient compared to the efforts made in making the graduates globally competitive and employable. The attempt to advance the integration of a critical education in the program appears to be almost completely overpowered by the intent to advance socioeconomic interests. For instance, the intent to make the educational system learner-oriented is

⁸³ Congress of the Philippines, R.A. 10533, 15th Congress, 3rd Regular Session, (2012), 2.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

inconsistent with producing uniformly competitive and employable graduates. To wit, a learner-centered educational approach hinges mainly on the individual's creative engagement with reality, that is, the issues present in her circumstances. This includes the discovery of her role in social transformation, which is way beyond the prospects of global competence and employability. Truly, it is necessary to be competent and skilled to contribute to the transformation of society. However, the realization of the necessity to attain critical consciousness and social transformation does not come from the pursuit to advance socioeconomic objectives, but rather through the praxis of a holistic education. However, again, the reality is that the K-12 program tends to be biased towards the socioeconomic interests, which sidelines the main function of education, that is, being critical of the prevailing repressive rationality.

For Freire, this paradigm is maintained by the culture of silence enforced by the banking method of education. As discussed above, the primacy of the emphasis towards global competitiveness and employability is institutionally imposed upon the students' consciousness, which silences their voices to critique and engage concrete social issues. Since their consciousness had been quelled by the possibilities of socioeconomic advancements through the aspirations of becoming globally competent and employable, found in the first two subsections of Section 2, the urgency to transform oneself and society becomes insignificant. As a result, the student becomes miseducated not by her own doing but by the domination of an oppressive reality consciously rendered unalterable. It is for this reason that Freire believes in the crucial role of critical education in the attainment of social transformation. Hence, to make the K-12 law critical and instrumental to the attainment of holistic development, there has to be an equal emphasis between the critical and practical aspects of education. But how can we practically do this?

For one, the framers of the program must decongest the subjects and focus on the development of the learners' critical thinking capacities. In other words, trim or lessen learning competencies and fortify areas where the learner could be intellectually independent. This is to reinstate the importance of the main function of education in the formation of a holistic education while preserving the efforts to provide lucrative career options and, therefore, elevating the individual's socioeconomic status. A decongestion of subjects,

classroom size, and even workload for teachers provides space for reflection and dialogical movement in the classroom. These spaces of dialogue provide the avenue for learners to revisit their subjectivity and, as Freire contends, the individual's historicity, that is, the human person's capacity to recreate and reinvent their reality.

In other words, this is to recognize that oppression and domination are merely a historical possibility and not a given destiny.⁸⁶ Thus, in this case, prospects of social transformation become possible through a critical understanding of domination and oppression. Hence, in effect, through the employment of critical education, the students, as previously discussed, are enabled to critically engage and question the reality of oppression. In other words, the oppressive power of domination could be exposed and overturned by the individual's awakened consciousness.

As we can see, not even traces of these principles found in Freire's critical pedagogy are present in the K-12 program, which makes it rather conducive for the oppressor to maintain domination. It is for this reason that Freire proposes an alternative to the banking method of education, that is, the problem-posing method. I argue that this method can best be expressed through the humanities and social sciences subjects. Hence, through this pedagogical method, reality is not imposed as an unalterable truth, but as a problem that requires a critical investigation and the formulation of an alternative.

In other words, the learner departs from the four walls of a *monological* classroom to the openness of a dialogical confrontation of reality. Hence, in this way, the educator abandons the old order of being the source of knowledge to sojourn with the learners in the attempt to discover and transform reality. Truly, the K-12 law possesses such provisions that may lead to the students' critical consciousness and understanding of power relations. Courses in humanities and social sciences have been incorporated into the program, which could still become platforms through which the critical aspect of education may be applied. However, this would not suffice to mature the process of conscientization and social transformation, as it only provides a glimpse of what Freire entirely exposes as the critical awareness of concrete social realities.

⁸⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 75 & 120.

Moreover, the program, as discussed earlier, employs a constructivist pedagogical approach that aims to break the barriers between teachers and students through which a dialogical link could be made. In this manner, the banking method of education could become passé through the employment of a more dialogical pedagogical dynamic. Indeed, undoubtedly, the K-12 program is equipped with such provisions that may lead to the holistic development of the student and the enhancement of the educational system as a whole.

However, again, the emphasis of the K-12 law towards global competence and employability accentuates the practical advantages of obtaining an educational training more than the urgency to harness a critical mind. In this way, the K-12 program can become an instrument for the miseducation of the learners, as it does not advocate an equal emphasis between the critical and practical aspects of education, crucial to the attainment of holistic development. It is in this exact manner that Freire insists on the necessity to awaken the individual's critical consciousness to overturn the elements of domination and oppression. Knowing this, the educational system is vested with a crucial role in securing the learners' holistic education. Hence, if the K-12 program remained unreformed in these matters, it is, therefore, safe to assume that it tends to become an instrument of domination.

Conclusion

All things considered, the K-12 program of the Philippine educational system, as we have seen, tends to miseducate the learners through its unequal emphasis on producing globally competitive and employable graduates over critically conscious learners who would critically engage and transform reality. For this reason, Freire's critical pedagogy serves not only as a conceptual grammar in critically analyzing the possible elements of domination and oppression, but more importantly, a guiding light through which critical consciousness is realized and employed in the attempt to rekindle the prospects of social transformation. However, the constant adversary of this project is the banking method of education, which inhibits the individual's consciousness from discovering her role in the project to overturn oppression and domination. As we can see, the banking method of education might not necessarily be present in the teaching process of

the K-12 law, but is embedded in the structure and the motivation of its implementation. Moreover, the fractal forces that restrict meaningful dialogue and critical thinking indispensable to critical consciousness, i.e., teacher-class size ratio, congested learning competencies in the curriculum, and heavy workload among teachers, further truncate the prospects for holistic education. Hence, in safeguarding the development of the student's critical consciousness and prospects of social transformation, it is clear that the critical aspect of education should be equally emphasized for the Philippine educational system, more particularly the K-12 program, to be truly holistic and liberating. However, not a lot could be achieved if the learners fail to acquire rudimentary skills in reading comprehension, creative thinking, science, and mathematics; such could be resolved through various channels, i.e., the reduction of classroom size, teachers' workload, and decongestion in the curriculum. Freire's problem-posing model, however, provides an alternative - integrating the learning into the pedagogical process, not as recipients of knowledge, but contributors to it. In such a manner, a dialogical process is established. Learners are given the avenue to ask questions, reaffirm beliefs, and deconstruct opinions. In this way, graduates shall not only become globally competitive and employable but also critically conscious and empowered individuals who can engage and transform reality.

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