

A Teaching and Stage Artist's Perspective of Paulo Freire's Dialogical Method

Theatre, like academia, often operates within an elitist institutional model focused on the capitalistic foundation of product over process. Theories and practices have evolved within these systems to further support and enable hierarchy, bureaucracy, and white supremacy. In an environment where art and artistry is at the soul of collaborative relationships and authentic communication, this type of model is unsustainable, limiting, and toxic to creativity. My research, which centers the belief that teachers, like Stage Managers, are artists, examines the connection between those in positions of leadership and the institutions in which they operate, and how holding space for critical, individual thought, advocating for equity of the oppressed, and re-designing the container (the classroom and the rehearsal room) further challenge established norms and breaks down these systems from within.

Freire's critique of the banking model in his book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (Freire, 1970), decries how a teacher (or mentor, or leader) is meant to impart knowledge on the empty vessel mentee, maintaining their status as "master" throughout the inevitably oppressive dynamic. This model denies creativity by implying that there is one singular answer, that conversation is a technique, and that the answer is the end point. Freire instead argues that conversation is part of the process towards creativity and enlightenment. His dialogical method of teaching upholds that everyone carries experience, that conversation encourages an equitable exchange of ideas, and that empowering non-oppressive relationships (whether with others or the self) are at the core of pedagogy.

As an artist who is process focused, my most fulfilling and successful relationships have closely followed this model, and in my time researching and practicing the art of teaching, I have found that this model serves the artistry of different interdisciplinary practices. As a teacher of undergraduate students, I have actively practiced Freire's dialogical method in my classroom, to which the students have responded positively to the effect of free-flowing, authentic, critical conversation, consistently high class attendance, and positive verbal and written feedback. I plan on incorporating Freire's methods in my future classroom and stage management work, further exploring how I, as an artist, can continue to center process over product.