

**Freire,
Teaching,
AND Learning**

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it is based on a set of patriarchal beliefs and was explained in terms of community morals; one participant said that "girls have to stay home and help their mothers." Through dialogue, participants in the culture circle I observed ultimately challenged this set of beliefs. They challenged gendered education as a predetermined fact and, seeing the issue as a barrier to the advancement of women, posed it as a problem, dialogued, and negotiated some possible solutions and responses to society at large. They plotted actions they could implement on a personal level to make sure their own daughters would not become victims of the structure in place. One of the solutions was to organize groups of girls who would walk together to the schools that were farther from where they lived so they would not become "badly spoken of" for walking alone, as one of them articulated. As seen in this example, knowledge is based on what individuals and/or groups believe and what has happened in the past, and it is co-constructed in conversations (Ochs & Capps, 2001), in dialogue (Freire, 1970), by challenging sociocultural assumptions.

The Freirean curriculum (Heaney, 1989) or method (Feitosa, 1999b) is based on the principle that experience and enacted elements inform curriculum design (Marsh & Willis, 1999). The curriculum of study comes directly from the learners who are participants in their own learning (Freire, 1997). There are no traditional textbooks adopted in these circles. The process of constructing and working with the curriculum in culture circles is complex because it is "literally hand-made from the social fabrics of the students' lives" (Salvio, 1998, p. 69). Such aspects of the curriculum in the culture circles and the seamless engagement of theory and practice, as proposed by Freire, serve to dispel the criticism that critical pedagogy theorists such as Freire could do more to recognize the realities of educational contexts, instead of remaining at the theoretical level (Gore, 1993).

Prior to implementing the culture circles, teachers and/or coordinators learn from the community in which the circle will be implemented. Engaging in what Freire referred to as field vocabulary research, they collect words and phrases and observe and record

An educator must dare to blur teacher and learner roles positioning himself/herself vulnerably yet responsibly.

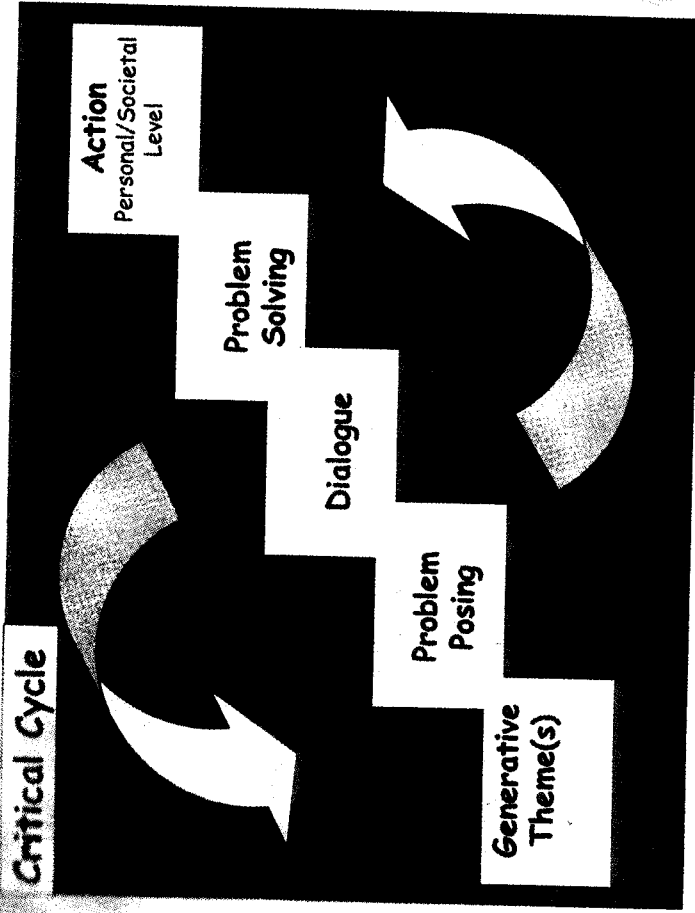


Figure 1.1. Critical cycle (Souto-Manning, 2007).

Culture circles are spaces to seize conflicts as opportunities for learning. Freire (1997) proposed the use of problematization or the technique of problem posing to initiate dialogue. According to Moacir Gadotti (Instituto Paulo Freire et al., n.d.), we only learn what is meaningful, otherwise we forget. Taking the students' experiences as central to the literacy process respects their discourses and cultures while making learning memorable and relevant. The student is therefore the protagonist in the culture circles, in the literacy process.

For example, participants of a culture circle I observed in Bezerros, Pernambuco, Brazil, were problematizing their own location in society in terms of gender (Souto-Manning, 2009b). The women were sharing their experiences of not being able to attend school beyond the elementary years. Although this is a historical reality in Bezerros,