1. Introduction

In 1968, Paulo Freire (1921–1997), a well-known and recognized philosopher and pedagogue, completed the writing of the book ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’ [1]. The exile to which he was subjected by the Military Dictatorship in Brazil (1964–1985) lasted for 16 years (1964–1980) and can only be seen as a determining context for the evolution of his thought.

Since Paulo Freire wrote the book ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’ [2] the world has changed a lot. Human population more than double, energy consumption tripled, motor vehicles are now seven times bigger, carbon dioxide emissions quadrupled, and ecological footprint rose to be 75% bigger than the Planet itself [3–6]. As a corollary, climate change arose confronting humanity with a serious and global ecological crisis.

2. Environmental oppression in the light of Paulo Freire

Since the 1970s, a whole new pedagogical approach was erected around environmental education, focusing in building a more sustainable society to face the increase of environmental imbalances. However, 5 decades later, society didn’t transform for the better and neither is more sustainable. Thus, it is important to insist on the search for new frameworks and pedagogical practices and, despite wrote in a very different context, Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed could be an opportunity to unravel the plot in which environmental education is entangled.

To overcome the ecological crisis, we need to consider Paulo Freire’s vision and understand that humans are uncompleted beings, aware of their incompletion, and constantly challenged by the crossroads that separates humanization from dehumanization [7, p.43]. It implies realize that, despite these two possibilities, the vocation of humans is its own humanization, which is contrary to the maintenance of the present ecological crisis. This humanization requires fulfilling its “historical vocation”, the vocation of “being more” [7, p.44], denying any form of oppression and, naturally, also environmental oppression.

When Freire presented the duality between oppressors and oppressed [7, p.44], he begun by exposing a reality in which each one embodies different physical persons, denying the former the role of liberation, neither their own nor even of their victims. It is up to the oppressed, the only one who truly feels the need for freedom, the challenge to humanize themselves and others, including the oppressors. In the context of environmental oppression this physical separation between oppressed and oppressor may not always exist. For those who lives under a consumer culture, anthropocentric and dominator of Nature, we should assume that in each one lies, simultaneously, an oppressor and an oppressed. As so, one may also question whether the oppressor that exists in us is just hosted or is there genuinely. In fact, Paulo Freire revealed...
how the oppressor himself can be hosted in the oppressed, not only physically, but in the structure of his thinking and in his ideal of being a human [7, p.48]. When it comes to environmental oppression, this hosting is strongly physical, with the same person living in a struggle of contradictions in their thinking, in their ideal of being a human, and in their action. Thus, in this condition of inconclusive and contradictory beings, the one that could seek to free himself from the ecological crisis is the same who feeds it every day, oppressing himself and, as such, constituting, simultaneously, in oppressor and oppressed.

However, the origin of environmental oppression does not reside physically in the individual, even if the individual is the perpetrator of that oppression, as is its victim. The origin of environmental oppression is housed in the complex system of codes and standards shared in society and translated into the norms, beliefs, values, creations, and institutions that are part of human lives. The real residence of environmental oppression is in human culture, a consumer culture, anthropocentric, opposed to nature. As so, the struggle of liberation from this oppression requires cultural transformation, a "cultural action for liberation" [8, p.35], and the development of an environmental culture [9]. This is the challenge of environmental education, more than sensitize the individual to action, sensitize an entire society/community and transform the culture itself, even because, in the words of Paulo Freire, “no one liberates himself by his own efforts alone” [7, p.66].

3. The pedagogy for liberation from environmental oppression

In the light of Paulo Freire’s thoughts, any pedagogy for liberation (from the environmental oppression) requires a dialogical action, problematizing and critical. This revolutionary action (through environmental education) cannot be done without “communion with the people” [7, p.171], with the common citizen. This communion will lead to collaboration, and collaboration to union for liberation. If humans live immersed in an invasive culture; if everyone are environmental oppressed and environmental oppressors, even if in different degrees; then this communion/collaboration/union should ideally be done with everyone. The liberation of the oppressed cannot be achieved without the liberation of the oppressor. For an oppressed to exist an oppressor must also be present, and vice versa, even if both are the same person, the same community, the same specie (humans). Thus, environmental education must involve everyone, neither excluding nor being exclusive, and, as such, it is not acceptable for it to continue infantilized and imprisoned by school. Environmental education must go out to the street. It must walk and work alongside each one. It must enter homes, sit at dinner table, play with children, and listen to grandparents’ stories. Environmental education must live with people in their daily life. It will be naive to pretend that an environmental education guided by a prescriptive and banking educational system will be able to build an environmental culture that allows to reconcile humans with the Planet.

As Paulo Freire presented in the pedagogy of the oppressed and for liberation, environmental education, which seeks to culturally transform humanity, can only be understood as a revolutionary act. As so, the environmental education which truly seeks cultural transformation tends to be relegated to the underground. In fact, the environmental education that allows a transformation is necessarily a threat to the invasive culture, anthropocentric, consumerist and dominator of nature. For social, political and economic forces that do not want a change, an effective environmental education is seen with fear. Environmental education, illuminated by Paulo Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed, must free itself from the oppression to which it is also subjected. Only after successfully completing this task, the environmental education could be, itself, a cultural action at the service of the liberation from this environmental oppression that crushes humanity and the Planet itself.
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References


