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# A Marxist Approach to Education and Pedagogy

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Based on Paulo Freire's works

'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'

'Pedagogy of Freedom'

Paulo Freire (1921-1997) was a Brazilian educator who promotes radical democracy (down-up) and intellectual liberation via Marxist ideology in education, and who condemns an alienating, top-down, capitalist 'banking' system of education that maintains the status quo

According to Freire, students are 'objects' into which teachers pour prescribed knowledge, in the first place mathematics and science. Where once liberal educators insisted that education be at the core an activity of self-exploration..., now nearly all learning space is occupied by an elaborate testing apparatus that measures the student's 'progress' in ingesting externally imposed curriculae and... provides a sorting device to reproduce the inequalities inherent in the capitalist market system.... The student must be permitted no autonomy. *Stanley Aronowitz* (2, p4-5)

*A Mr Giddy, later President of the Royal Society, raised objections which could be matched in every country: "However specious in theory the project might be of giving education to the laboring classes of the poor, it would be prejudicial to their morals and happiness; it would teach them to despise their lot in life instead of making them good servants in agricultural and other laborious employments; instead of teaching them subordination it would render them fractious and refractory as was evident in the manufacturing counties; it would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books and publications against Christianity; it would render them insolent to their superiors and in a few years the legislature would find it necessary to direct the strong arm of power against them" (3, p117-118)*

What Mr Giddy really wanted (and what the elites of today want, although they do not denounce popular education so cynically and openly) was for people not to think. Since the Mr Giddys of all epochs, as an oppressor class, cannot think *with* people, neither can they let the people think for themselves.

(1, p105)

## *Group Exercise 1*

*Marx (and Paulo Freire) suggest that the world is divided into oppressors and the oppressed. As students at ESSCA, discuss in what ways you are oppressed by the educative system in terms of:*

- Relations with the administration
- Organisation (schedule, compulsory attendance, badging...)
- Relations with the teachers
- Evaluation procedures (continuous assessment, exams...)
- Content of the courses

*(note particular cases / events as well as the general system)*

## *Group Exercise 2*

*ESSCA is part of the private education system in France. Discuss your opinions about the following:*

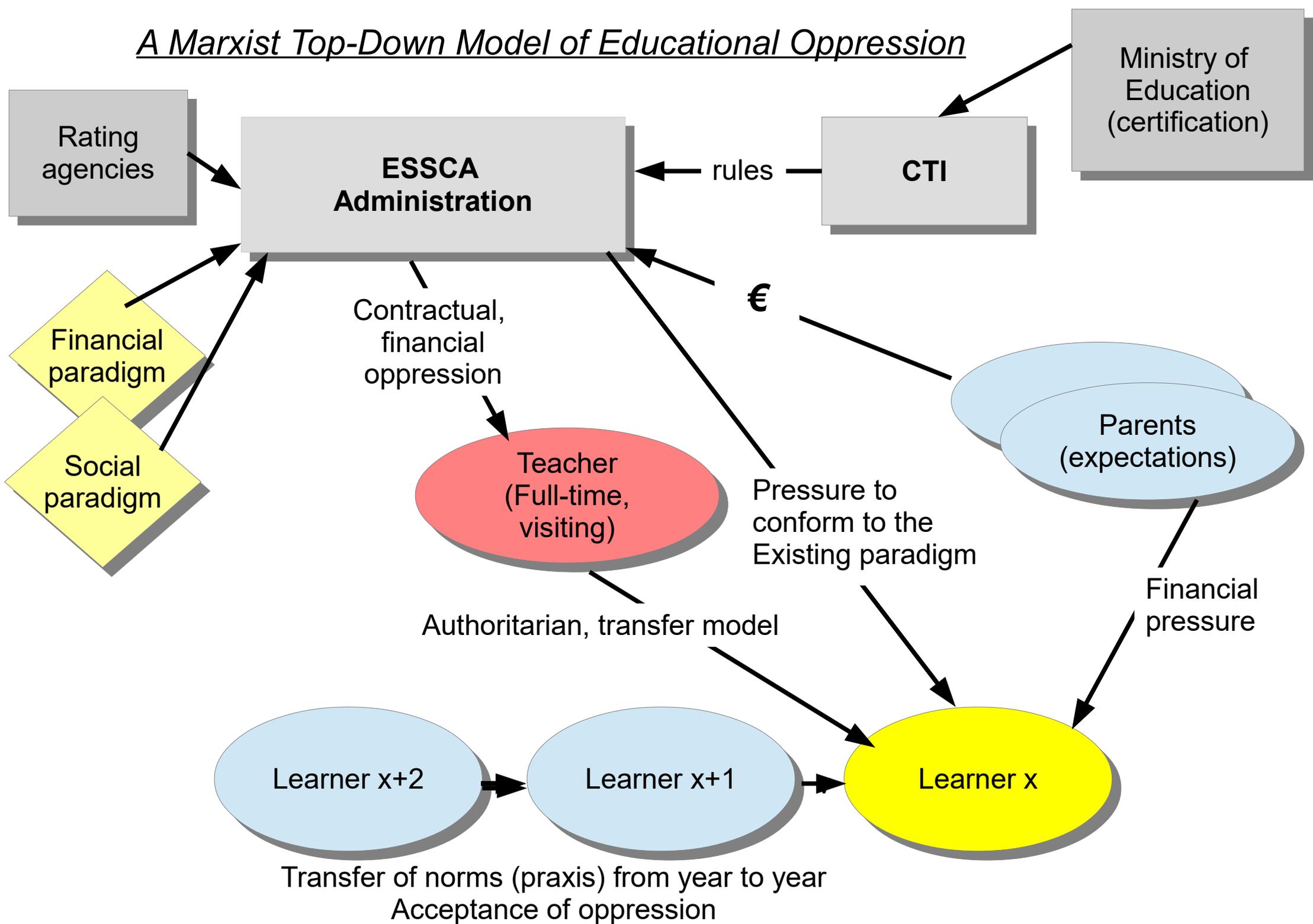
- Pressure on ESSCA to submit to the CTI and the Ministry of Education
- Pressure on ESSCA to provide a financially profitable model
- Pressure by ESSCA on teachers to conform to the status quo
- Pressure by ESSCA for students to conform to the status quo
- Pressure by students on students to conform to social and educational norms
- Pressure on students to submit to pressure from parents

*(note particular cases / events as well as the general system)*

## *Group Exercise 3*

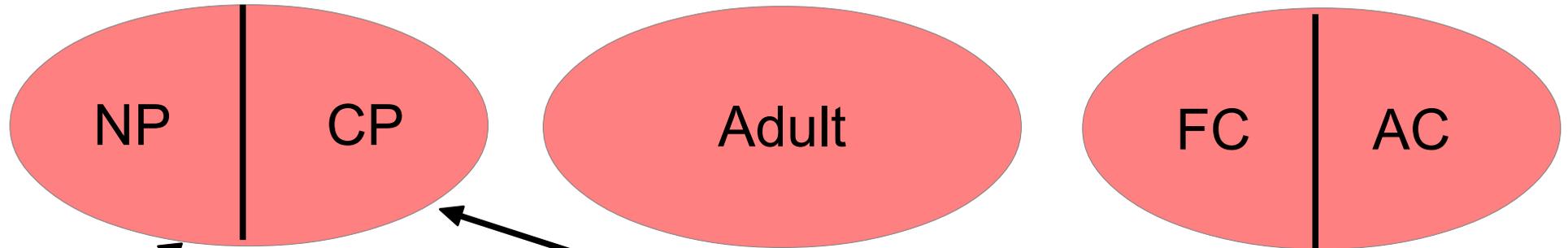
- *What alternative models can you suggest?*
- *How would you establish which models to aim for as a group of students?*
- *How would you achieve your aims?*
- *What likely barriers would you meet?*

*A Marxist Top-Down Model of Educational Oppression*

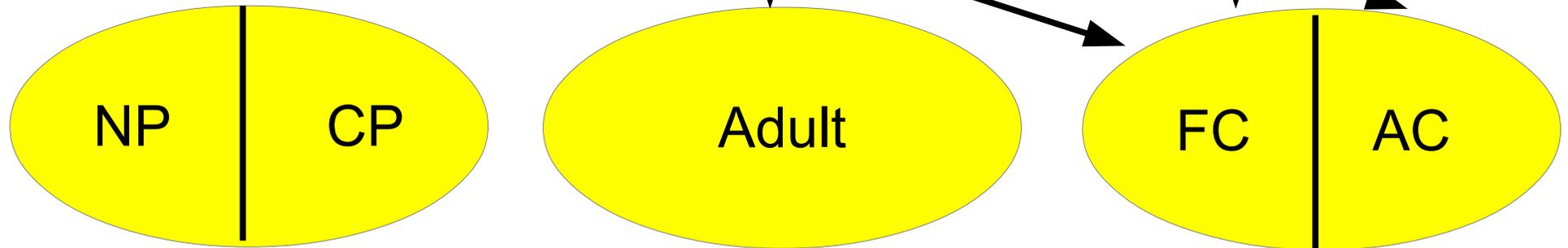


**Transactional Analysis of Learning Possibilities**  
**Linked and Crossed Communication**

*Teacher*



*Student*



*NP: Nurturing Parent, CP: Critical Parent, FC: Free Child, AC: Adapted Child*

“The education of all children, from the moment that they can get along without a mother's care, shall be in state institutions at state expense.”

– KARL MARX,  
*THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO*



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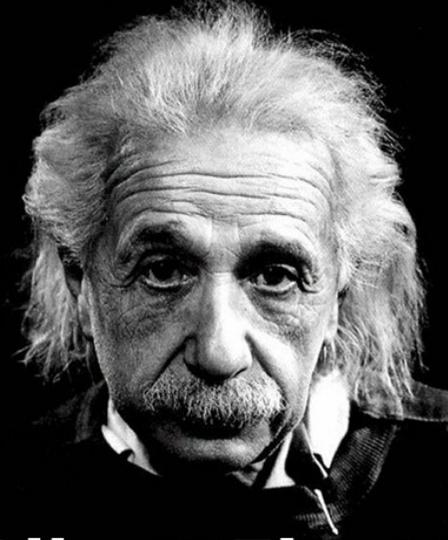


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*It is a miracle that **curiosity** survives **formal education***

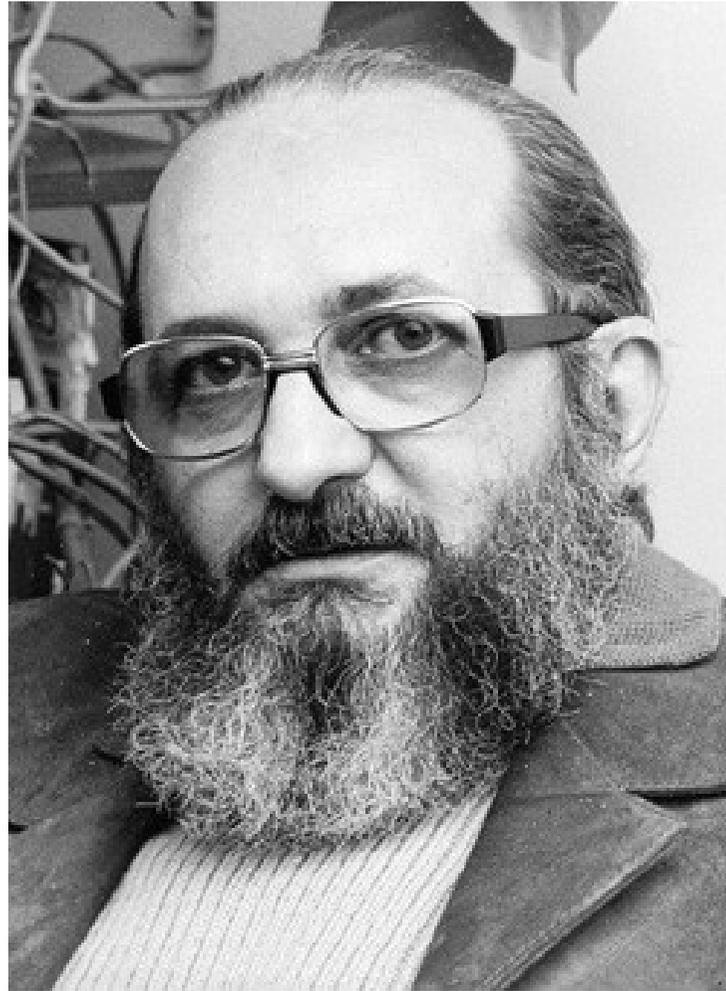


– **Albert Einstein**

GeniusQuotes.net

For a full list of Marxism and Education, see the reference library at [Marxists.org](http://Marxists.org)

It is not surprising that the banking concept of education regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. (Freire, 1, p46)



"Each, however, as he revolves about 'his' truth, feels threatened if that truth is questioned. Thus, each considers anything that is not 'his' truth a lie. They both suffer from an absence of doubt. (Freire, 1, p13)

## ***Basic Concepts***

- Teachers think they can transfer knowledge to fill up 'empty' students
- The transfer model of education cannot and does not work (river exercise)
- Education is designed by the minority class in power to maintain the status quo
- The oppressed (learners) need to liberate themselves from oppression
- They need to know that they are oppressed and part of an oppressive system
- Liberation comes from dialogic education not a transfer of inexistant 'truth'
- The oppressors will defend their system at all costs and avoid dialogue
- Dialogic education is based on love (in the sense of revolutionary love to liberate an oppressed people at all costs
- *"The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by revolutionary leadership, but the result of their 'conscientização'"*

## *The Banking (transfer) model*

*" Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into 'containers', into 'receptacles', to be 'filled' by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are." (1, p45)*

*"In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of enquiry". (1, p45)*

## *The Banking (transfer) model*

- 1. The teacher teaches and the students are taught*
- 2. The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing*
- 3. The teacher thinks and the students are thought about*
- 4. The teacher talks and the students listen – meekly*
- 5. The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined*
- 6. The teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply*
- 7. The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher*
- 8. The teacher chooses the programme content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it*
- 9. The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her professional authority, which she sets in opposition to the freedom of the students*
- 10. The teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the students are mere objects (Freire, 1, p46)*

*"Oppression – overwhelming control – is necrophilic; it is nourished by the love of death, not life. The banking concept of education, which serves the interests of oppression, is also necrophilic. Based on a mechanistic static, naturalistic, spatialised view of consciousness, it transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power." (1, p50)*

What is the natural state of learning – dialogue – with the world or with other persons (Léonie, age 1)

Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information. (Freire, 1, p52)

Teaching Fiscal Policy at ESSCA – examples of transfer and dialogic / negotiated learning.

## *Transformative evaluation*

Despite, as teacher, being oppressed (by the administrative power system) and sometimes oppressor (as your teacher), at the end of this module, I shall send all students of this course a questionnaire allowing you to make transformative proposals for teaching and learning. This will also help with my personal research into pedagogy and institutional educative 'norms'. I can guarantee nothing since I am working within an unliberated educative system, but your feedback is genuinely useful and will hopefully (slowly) feed back into the system (depending upon my room for manouvre).

Thank you for you help – hoping that this discussion helps you become consciously aware of the Marxist / Freire critique of education and helps you on your path to your personal liberation!

# References

1. Paulo Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed
2. Paulo Freire. Pedagogy of Freedom
3. Niebuhr, op. cit