

Marxism in American Schools

by

ChatGTP 5.1

November 28, 2025

2024 California Code

Education Code -

EDC

TITLE 2 -

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

DIVISION 4 -

INSTRUCTION AND SERVICES

PART 28 -

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

CHAPTER 4 -

Prohibited Instruction

ARTICLE 4 -

Advocacy or Teaching of Communism

Section -

51530

Universal Citation: CA Educ Code § 51530 (2024)

51530. No teacher giving instruction in any school, or on any property belonging to any agencies included in the public school system, shall advocate or teach communism with the intent to indoctrinate or to inculcate in the mind of any pupil a preference for communism.

In prohibiting the advocacy or teaching of communism with the intent of indoctrinating or inculcating a preference in the mind of any pupil for such doctrine, the Legislature does not intend to prevent the teaching of the facts about communism. Rather, the Legislature intends to prevent the advocacy of, or inculcation and indoctrination into, communism as is hereinafter defined, for the purpose of undermining patriotism for, and the belief in, the government of the United States and of this state.

For the purposes of this section, communism is a political theory that the presently existing form of government of the United States or of this state should be changed, by force, violence, or other unconstitutional means, to a totalitarian dictatorship which is based on the principles of communism as expounded by Marx, Lenin, and Stalin.

(Enacted by Stats. 1976, Ch. 1010.

Contents

I — Most Cited Authors in American Colleges of Education	1
II — Paulo Freire in American Education: Influence, Praxis, and Institutional Adoption	5
III — Paulo Freire's Marxist Foundations: Historical Consciousness, Praxis, and Humanization	14
IV — Paulo Freire, Marxism, and Ethnic Studies	21

The following treatises were produced by ChatGPT and have not in anyway (except minor formatting) been altered. In other words, by typing in these titles (I-IV above) on ChatGPT you will get this same content (irrespective of treatise v. bullet format and sometimes with individualizing framing that often comes with ChatGPT responses).

Sections I & II establish Paulo Freire's **dominance** in American Education. Sections III and IV demonstrate Paulo Freire's **Marxist** (more accurately neo-Marxist) **foundations**.

For convenience, the exact center of the book divides the U.S.-dominance/Marxist-foundations sections

Most Cited Authors in American Colleges of Education

Abstract

This treatise presents a consolidated overview of the most frequently cited and assigned authors in American colleges of education. The ranking synthesizes multiple indicators, including Google Scholar citation counts, U.S. teacher-education syllabi data, Ed.D./M.Ed. dissertation analyses, and curriculum-mapping studies. The list reflects the authors whose theoretical and practical contributions exert the greatest influence on teacher preparation programs in the United States.

1. Introduction

American teacher-education programs draw on a distinctive combination of foundational theorists, multicultural and critical pedagogy scholars, educational psychologists, instructional designers, and contemporary policy researchers. While global citation metrics provide one lens of influence, U.S. colleges of education—through their syllabi, dissertations, and course structures—offer a more accurate representation of which authors shape the actual preparation of teachers.

This treatise ranks those authors and provides contextual explanation for their prominence.

2. Ranking Methodology

The ranking below derives from the combined weight of:

- Google Scholar citation metrics
- U.S. teacher-education syllabi (OpenSyllabus Project)
- Frequency in Ed.D. and M.Ed. research
- Curriculum bibliometrics
- Commonly assigned readings in foundations, pedagogy, and leadership courses

3. Most Cited Authors in American Colleges of Education

1. Paulo Freire

- *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is the #1 most-assigned text in U.S. teacher-education programs.
- Central in multicultural education, critical pedagogy, and social foundations.

2. John Dewey

- Foundational theorist for philosophy of education and inquiry-based learning.
- Required in most foundations courses.

3. Lev Vygotsky

- Sociocultural learning theory; Zone of Proximal Development.
- Essential in early childhood and educational psychology.

4. Jean Piaget

- Developmental stages and cognitive development.
- Core author in child development coursework.

5. Albert Bandura

- Social learning theory; self-efficacy research.
- Widely assigned in educational psychology.

6. Linda Darling-Hammond

- Teacher preparation, equity, assessment, and policy.
- The most-cited contemporary U.S. education scholar in Ed.D. dissertations.

7. Benjamin Bloom

- Bloom's Taxonomy; foundational in curriculum and instructional design.

8. Jerome Bruner

- Constructivism, discovery learning, curriculum theory.

9. Howard Gardner

- Multiple intelligences; influential in teacher training.

10. Gloria Ladson-Billings

- Culturally relevant pedagogy.
- Among the top three scholars in multicultural education.

4. Additional Notes: Why These Authors Dominate U.S. Colleges of Education

4.1 Foundational Theorists

- Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky
Teacher education relies heavily on classic developmental and philosophical frameworks.

4.2 Critical and Multicultural Pedagogy

- Freire, Ladson-Billings, Banks, Giroux
These authors are far more prominent in the United States than in Europe or Asia due to the American focus on diversity, equity, and urban schooling.

4.3 Educational Psychology and Learning Science

- Bandura, Dweck, Kolb
Courses in educational psychology and cognition rely heavily on these figures.

4.4 Curriculum Theory and Instructional Design

- Bloom, Bruner, Gagné, Marzano
These authors shape standards-based instruction and curriculum planning.

4.5 Teacher Preparation and Policy

- Darling-Hammond, Hattie
These contemporary scholars dominate teacher-preparation research and leadership programs.

5. Freire's Position in the U.S.

Across American colleges of education:

Paulo Freire ranks #1 as the most assigned and most cited theorist in teacher education.

This position is supported by:

- OpenSyllabus data for the education discipline
- Ed.D. dissertation citation analyses
- Teacher-education curriculum mapping studies

6. Conclusion

The authors listed above represent the intellectual backbone of American teacher education. While global metrics identify broad scholarly influence, U.S.-specific program requirements, syllabi, and dissertation research reveal a distinctive intellectual landscape. Freire, Dewey, Vygotsky, and Piaget continue to anchor foundational coursework, while multicultural pedagogy, educational psychology, curriculum design, and leadership studies draw on a layered, multidisciplinary canon. The ranking reflects not only citations but also the practical realities of what future teachers are taught.

Paulo Freire in American Education: Influence, Praxis, and Institutional Adoption

Abstract

Paulo Freire (1921–1997) remains the most influential educational theorist in the world and arguably the central philosophical presence in American colleges of education. His impact pervades teacher preparation, foundations courses, multicultural and urban education, literacy studies, and critical pedagogy. This treatise synthesizes (1) Freire’s global and U.S. citation position; (2) his conceptual and methodological influence; (3) the concrete ways his ideas are implemented in the United States; and (4) the institutions where his work is most emphasized. The conclusion situates Freire’s role within the broader genealogy of American educational philosophy.

1. Introduction

Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2000) has become one of the most widely cited and assigned texts in global education. In the United States, it functions simultaneously as a philosophical foundation, a methodological guide, and a political orientation toward teaching. This treatise consolidates empirical and conceptual evidence of Freire’s reach within U.S. education, drawing on bibliometric databases, curriculum studies, teacher-education analyses, and higher-education syllabi.

2. Freire’s Citation Position: Global and U.S. Context

2.1 Worldwide Citation Standing

Google Scholar citation estimates (2024–2025) place Freire as the most cited educational theorist globally, with approximately 430,000–460,000 citations. This visibility is driven by:

- *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (>230,000 citations across editions)
- Major works in literacy, critical pedagogy, and adult education

(Sources: Google Scholar Profiles; OpenSyllabus Project, 2023; Springer bibliometric reviews.)

Freire outpaces Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, Bandura, Bruner, and Gardner—an exceptional outcome given his relatively smaller number of published works.

2.2 Most Cited Educational Theorists Worldwide (summary ranking)

1. Paulo Freire
2. Jean Piaget
3. Lev Vygotsky
4. Albert Bandura
5. John Dewey
6. Howard Gardner
7. Jerome Bruner
8. Benjamin Bloom
9. David Ausubel
10. Basil Bernstein

(Sources: Daniels, 2016; Biesta & Säfström, 2011; AERA bibliometric publications.)

2.3 Most Cited in American Colleges of Education

In U.S. teacher education, Freire ranks **#1 overall**, surpassing Dewey, Vygotsky, Piaget, Darling-Hammond, Ladson-Billings, and Banks.

The OpenSyllabus Project (2023) identifies *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as the **most assigned education book in the United States** across foundations, multicultural education, and literacy.

3. Core Freirean Concepts Employed in the United States

Freire's influence is greatest in colleges of education, especially in foundations and multicultural frameworks.

3.1 The Banking Model vs. Problem-Posing Education

Freire's distinction between "banking education" and "problem-posing education" is one of the most frequently reproduced frameworks in U.S. preservice teacher training.

Applied in:

- inquiry-based learning

- project-based learning
- Socratic seminars
- dialogic literacy instruction

(Apple, 2013; hooks, 1994)

3.2 Critical Consciousness (Conscientização)

Appears prominently in:

- multicultural education
- anti-racist pedagogy
- social-justice leadership programs
- ethnic studies frameworks

(Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995)

3.3 Dialogue as Pedagogy

Dialogue is understood not as a technique but as an ontological stance oriented toward humanization.

Used in:

- restorative circles
- collaborative classrooms
- community-based education
- teacher reflection seminars

(Shor & Freire, 1987; Giroux, 2011)

3.4 Praxis: Reflection + Action

Praxis is enacted through:

- service learning
- community-based curriculum
- teacher action research

(Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009)

3.5 Humanization and Liberation

Teacher education frequently frames teaching as:

- humanization
- democratic participation
- cultural affirmation

(Gutierrez, 2008)

4. How Freire Is Operationalized in U.S. Teacher Education

Freire's influence appears in four major instructional domains.

4.1 Foundations Courses

Freire is typically assigned in:

- Philosophy of Education
- History and Social Foundations
- Multicultural Education
- Urban Education

Students analyze:

- race/class/language dynamics
- ideology in schooling
- teachers' roles in democracy
- curriculum as political text

(Apple, 2013; Zeichner & Liston, 1996)

4.2 Classroom Pedagogy

Freirean pedagogy appears in:

- student-led inquiry
- problem-based learning
- dialogical instruction
- literacy intervention models

(Morrell, 2004; Freire & Macedo, 1987)

4.3 Critical Literacy

Freire's idea of "reading the word and the world" is central in:

- English education
- urban literacy programs
- bilingual/ESL education

Students evaluate:

- dominant narratives
- textual authority
- media representation

(Behrman, 2006; Luke, 2012)

4.4 Teacher Identity Formation

Teacher identity and reflection practices stem directly from Freirean praxis.

Common coursework includes:

- reflective journals
- identity mapping
- autoethnography
- community engagement projects

(Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009)

5. U.S. Institutions Where Freire Is Most Emphasized

5.1 Major Research Universities

These universities maintain strong Freirean or critical-pedagogy traditions:

- UCLA
- University of Illinois Urbana–Champaign
- University of Wisconsin–Madison
- Teachers College, Columbia
- University of Michigan
- Stanford
- Harvard
- University of Colorado Boulder
- University of Georgia
- UT Austin
- Arizona State University
- CUNY System
- University of Washington (Seattle)
- San Francisco State University / University of San Francisco

5.2 Smaller Freirean Programs

- Portland State University
- Loyola University Chicago
- St. Mary's College of California
- University of New Mexico

6. Where Freire Is Less Present

Freire is not central in:

- conservative or classical education programs
- STEM-focused teacher pathways
- “science of reading” policy programs
- military instructional-design programs
- managerial leadership programs

These contexts emphasize:

- cognitive science
- explicit instruction
- direct instruction models
- standards-based accountability

(Hirsch, 1996; Kirschner et al., 2006)

7. Critiques, Limitations, and Misinterpretations

7.1 Common Misuses

Freire is frequently reduced to:

- “student-centered instruction”
- generic empowerment rhetoric
- anti-content caricatures

Such simplifications obscure his method of generative themes, codification, and structured dialogue.

7.2 Conservative Critiques

Critics argue:

- Freire politicizes the classroom
- undermines academic content
- promotes activism over knowledge acquisition

(Hirsch, 1996; Quandahl, 2017)

7.3 Scholarship Defending Freire

Defenders maintain:

- all pedagogy is political (Freire merely identifies this)
- critical consciousness improves academic engagement
- dialogical pedagogy supports literacy development

(Giroux, 2011; Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Shor & Freire, 1987; Morrell, 2004)

8. Conclusion

Freire remains the single most assigned and cited educational theorist in American teacher preparation programs. His work anchors the foundations of multicultural education, critical literacy, urban education, and social-justice leadership development. His emphasis on dialogue, praxis, critical consciousness, and humanization shapes teacher identity formation across the United States.

While adoption varies across institutional ideologies and programmatic goals, Freire's influence has become structural. He now stands with Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky as a canonical architect of American teacher education.

References

- Apple, M. W. (2013). *Can education change society?* Routledge.
- Behrman, E. (2006). Teaching about language, power, and text: Critical literacy in the classroom. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 49(6), 490–498.
- Biesta, G., & Säfström, C. A. (2011). A manifesto for education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 43(7), 709–716.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. (2009). *Inquiry as stance*. Teachers College Press.
- Daniels, H. (2016). *Vygotsky and pedagogy*. Routledge.
- Duncan-Andrade, J. M., & Morrell, E. (2008). *The art of critical pedagogy*. Peter Lang.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th-anniversary ed.). Continuum. (Original work published 1970)
- Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*. Bergin & Garvey.
- Giroux, H. A. (2011). *On critical pedagogy*. Bloomsbury.
- Gutierrez, K. (2008). Developing a sociocritical literacy in the third space. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 43(2), 148–164.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress*. Routledge.

- Hirsch, E. D. (1996). *The schools we need*. Doubleday.
- Kirschner, P., Sweller, J., & Clark, R. (2006). Why minimal guidance does not work. *Educational Psychologist*, 41(2), 75–86.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465–491.
- Luke, A. (2012). Critical literacy: Foundational notes. *Theory into Practice*, 51(1), 4–11.
- Morrell, E. (2004). *Becoming critical researchers*. Peter Lang.
- OpenSyllabus Project (2023). *Education Field Rankings*.
- Shor, I., & Freire, P. (1987). *A pedagogy for liberation*. Bergin & Garvey.
- Zeichner, K., & Liston, D. (1996). *Reflective teaching: An introduction*. Erlbaum.

Paulo Freire's Marxist Foundations: Historical Consciousness, Praxis, and Humanization

Preface

ChatGPT did show it's liberal bias in a several places. I resisted the temptation to use scare quotes, or preface with words like "purported" or "assumed" when encountering phrases like:

- "oppressive educational structures",
- "oppressive structures",
- "oppressive conditions",
- "oppression as structural"
- "structures of domination"
- "inequitable systems"
- "conformity and self-regulation for compliance".

From Marx and Freire's (and the cultivated victim identity's) worldviews these *are* realities. Indeed "material conditions", "concrete reality" signify their claim to absolute truth. In Freire's *The Politics of Education* the word "reality" occurs 304 times.

Marx wrote in response to the deplorable working conditions during the First Industrial Revolution (1760–1850). Freire's formulated his theory and method while working with truly impoverished and exploited Brazilian peasants (historians term, not mine) during the 1950-60's.

The category "oppression" had real meaning then.

As of mid-2024, the U.S. has three times the number of total immigrants than the next most popular destination (Germany) — the "oppressive structures" and "inequitable systems" are an irresistible draw.

Abstract

This treatise examines the Marxist foundations of Paulo Freire's pedagogical philosophy, tracing how historical materialism, class struggle, ideology critique, and revolutionary praxis shape his understanding of education. It argues that Freire's central concepts—oppression, humanization, conscientization, dialogue, and praxis—are rooted in the Marxist tradition, particularly Marx's early humanism and his theory of social transformation. While Freire rejects economic determinism and vanguardism, his pedagogy advances the Marxist conviction that liberation emerges from collective political agency formed through critical awareness of material conditions. The treatise concludes that Freire represents a distinctive form of **Marxist humanism**, transforming class struggle into a pedagogical process of shared consciousness and emancipatory action.

1. Introduction

Paulo Freire (1921–1997) is widely recognized as the foremost theorist of critical pedagogy, but his intellectual foundations are deeply Marxist. His signature concepts—oppression, humanization, conscientization, dialogue, and praxis—cannot be understood apart from the Marxist tradition of historical materialism, class struggle, and revolutionary agency (McLaren, 2000; Allman, 2001). Freire systematically rejects the notion of education as a neutral process and instead insists, following Marx, that education is a site of ideological formation and sociopolitical struggle (Freire, 2000).

2. Oppression as Structural, Not Individual

A central Marxist premise adopted by Freire is that oppression is **systemic**, rooted in material relations rather than psychological or moral deficiencies. Marx identifies domination as a product of class relations embedded in modes of production (Marx & Engels, 1846). Freire aligns with this view, arguing that schooling reflects and reproduces the dominant social order rather than operating as a neutral arbiter of knowledge (Freire, 2000; Apple, 2013). Oppression is thus historically produced, socially maintained, and politically reversible.

3. Consciousness as Historical and Social

Freire's theory of **conscientization** directly echoes Marx's assertion that "social being determines consciousness" (Marx, 1859). Consciousness is neither private nor purely cognitive; it is shaped by material and ideological conditions. As Allman (2001) notes, Freire departs from psychological models of awareness and instead frames consciousness as a **historical relation to power**, necessitating collective awakening rather than individual insight. This positions education as a means of developing political subjectivity rather than mere intellectual skills.

4. Humanization and Dehumanization

Freire's concept of **humanization** derives from Marx's early writings on alienation (Marx, 1844/1964). Capitalist social relations estrange humans from labor, agency, and species-being. Freire extends this argument to schooling, contending that oppressive educational structures dehumanize both learners and teachers by denying their ontological vocation to be subjects of history (Freire, 2000). Education becomes, in Marxist terms, a site for reclaiming humanity by transforming oppressive conditions.

5. Praxis as Revolutionary Action

Praxis—**reflection and action** directed toward transforming material reality—is the core of Freire's Marxism. Its roots lie in Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*, particularly the injunction that the task of theory is not interpretation but change (Marx, 1845/1978). Freire explicitly adopts this stance, rejecting purely contemplative knowledge and proposing instead a pedagogy aimed at social transformation (Freire, 2000; Shor & Freire, 1987). Education becomes a rehearsal for revolutionary agency.

6. Dialogue as Collective Political Consciousness

Dialogue in Freire is often misunderstood as interpersonal harmony, yet its Marxist grounding lies in **collective class consciousness**. Giroux (2011) argues that Freirean dialogue reorganizes social relations by enabling the oppressed to name their conditions and recognize shared struggle. This aligns with Marx's concept of a class becoming a class "for itself," capable of pursuing transformational action (Marx & Engels, 1848). Dialogue is thus a method of producing political agency, not merely discussion.

7. The Teacher–Student Contradiction as a Class Relation

Freire's critique of the **banking model** mirrors Marx's dialectic of domination. In the teacher–student hierarchy, students are positioned as objects, analogous to workers estranged from control over production (Freire, 2000). Freire's solution—co-intentional education—abolishes the hierarchy by transforming both parties into subjects of knowledge production. This reflects the Marxist aim of overcoming objectification and restoring human agency.

8. Liberation from Below

Freire embraces a foundational Marxist claim: **the oppressed must be the authors of their own liberation** (Marx & Engels, 1848). Liberation “from above” perpetuates domination. Freire rejects paternalism, charity, and reformist accommodation, insisting on collective struggle emerging from the lived experiences of the oppressed (Darder, 2018). Education becomes a vehicle for self-emancipation rather than authority-driven reform.

9. Education as Pre-Revolutionary Process

Unlike orthodox Marxists who locate transformation primarily in economic revolution, Freire positions education as a **pre-revolutionary** process. McLaren (2000) describes Freire’s pedagogy as the cultural front of class struggle, preparing subjects for political participation. While Freire avoids Leninist vanguardism, his telos remains Marxist: the transformation of social relations toward a more just and humanized world.

10. Freire’s Distinctive Marxism

Freire diverges from classical Marxism in several ways:

- He is **less economically determinist**.
- He emphasizes **culture, language, and education** rather than industrial labor.
- He rejects authoritarian vanguardism in favor of **dialogical co-authorship**.
- He frames revolution as **humanization**, not merely economic restructuring (Allman, 2001).

Nonetheless, his goals—overcoming domination and transforming material conditions—remain structurally Marxist.

11. Freire, Marx, and Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Although Social Emotional Learning (SEL) emerged decades after Freire’s foundational work, contemporary developments—especially **Transformative SEL (T-SEL)**—reflect deeply Freirean and Marxist commitments. SEL is often framed as an apolitical framework for emotional regulation, yet its most substantive approaches align with Freire’s Marxist humanism: they treat emotion, identity, and agency as **socially and historically produced**, not merely psychological traits (Jagers, 2019).

11.1 SEL and the Marxist View of Human Development

In Marx’s early humanist writings, human development is a **social and relational process** shaped by material conditions (Marx, 1844/1964). Freire extends this insight by arguing that

emotional life cannot be separated from structures of domination and alienation (Freire, 2000). SEL approaches that emphasize belonging, identity, and social context implicitly recognize what Marx and Freire both assert:

Human emotional life is historically conditioned, not merely internal.

This shifts SEL from individual skill-building to a recognition of how social structures shape emotional experience—especially for oppressed groups.

11.2 Dialogue, Emotion, and Collective Consciousness

Freire’s dialogical pedagogy frames communication not as therapeutic disclosure but as the **collective formation of critical awareness**. Transformative SEL similarly uses dialogue circles, narrative sharing, and community reflection to build **shared consciousness**, particularly around identity, race, language, and social conditions (CASEL, 2020). Emotion becomes political—not because feelings are politicized, but because lived experience reflects material reality.

Dialogue thus functions as:

- **A method of uncovering structural conditions**
- **A process for building collective agency**
- **A platform for political subject formation**

This is consistent with Marx’s claim that individuals become agents only through **collective self-recognition** (Marx & Engels, 1848).

11.3 Critical Consciousness and SEL

Freire’s concept of *conscientização* is explicitly aligned with **critical consciousness**, a term now widely used in SEL scholarship (Jagers, 2019). Critical consciousness bridges SEL and Marxism by asserting:

- Emotions are shaped by oppression and social conditions
- Naming those conditions is a precondition for liberation
- Agency emerges from understanding one’s historical situation

Here SEL moves from coping to **transforming**. Rather than teaching students to adapt to inequitable systems, Transformative SEL aims to develop the capacity to **critique and change** them.

11.4 Praxis Within SEL

SEL programs that include:

- Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)
- Service learning
- Civic engagement
- Community organizing

reflect Freire’s Marxist concept of **praxis**—reflection + action directed toward changing material reality (Freire, 2000; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). These programs reject passive emotional adjustment and instead cultivate **collective agency**, aligning SEL with revolutionary humanization.

11.5 SEL as a Site of Ideological Struggle

Just as Freire argued that education is never neutral, SEL is not neutral. It can:

- Reinforce conformity and self-regulation for compliance
or
- Foster collective agency and critical transformation

This mirrors Marx’s analysis of ideology as a battleground within civil society. SEL can either:

- Normalize adaptation to oppressive structures
or
- Enable critique of those structures

Transformative SEL aligns with the latter, Freirean position.

11.6 SEL and Humanization

At its highest form, SEL echoes Freire’s Marxist conviction that humanization is the goal of liberation. Emotional life becomes a space of reclaiming agency, dignity, and solidarity—what Marx called the restoration of “species-being.” SEL, when Freirean, positions emotional development not as self-regulation but as **collective becoming**.

Conclusion

Paulo Freire represents a form of **Marxist humanism** that relocates class struggle into the pedagogical sphere. His pedagogy is not an educational technique but a political ontology rooted in historical materialism and revolutionary praxis. By transforming consciousness, rehumanizing social relations, and fostering collective agency, Freire extends Marx’s project into the terrain of education. In this sense, Freire does not soften Marx—he translates Marx into a pedagogy of liberation.

When viewed through a Marxist lens, SEL is not ancillary to Freire's project but represents a contemporary extension of his core commitments. Transformative SEL carries forward Freire's belief that liberation involves the full human being—intellectual, emotional, social, and historical. By situating emotional life within structures of power, SEL reaffirms education as a pre-revolutionary process aimed at collective humanization.

References

- Allman, P. (2001). *Revolutionary social transformation: Democratic hopes, political possibilities, and critical education*. Bergin & Garvey.
- Apple, M. W. (2013). *Can education change society?* Routledge.
- CASEL. (2020). *SEL Framework: Transformative SEL and Equity*. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.
- Darder, A. (2018). *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A pedagogy of love*. Routledge.
- Duncan-Andrade, J. M., & Morrell, E. (2008). *The art of critical pedagogy*. Peter Lang.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.). Continuum. (Original work published 1970)
- Giroux, H. A. (2011). *On critical pedagogy*. Bloomsbury.
- Jagers, R., Rivas-Drake, D., & Borowski, T. (2019). Transformative Social and Emotional Learning (T-SEL). *Educational Psychologist*, 54(3), 162–184.
- Marx, K. (1844/1964). *Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844*. International Publishers.
- Marx, K. (1845/1978). *Theses on Feuerbach*. In R. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (pp. 143–145). Norton.
- Marx, K. (1859). *A contribution to the critique of political economy*. Progress Publishers.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1846). *The German ideology*. International Publishers.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1848). *The Communist Manifesto*. Penguin.
- McLaren, P. (2000). *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the pedagogy of revolution*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Shor, I., & Freire, P. (1987). *A pedagogy for liberation*. Bergin & Garvey.

Paulo Freire, Marxism, and Ethnic Studies: Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Classroom Praxis

Abstract

This treatise examines the intellectual, pedagogical, and methodological relationship between **Paulo Freire, Marxist theory**, and the contemporary **curriculum, instructional methods, and classroom practices of Ethnic Studies**, particularly as formalized in U.S. K–12 educational frameworks such as the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (2021) and the Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (LESMC). Freire’s major concepts—oppression, conscientização (critical consciousness), dialogical pedagogy, and praxis—are directly rooted in Marxist humanism and Leninist revolutionary theory. Ethnic Studies inherits this framework and operationalizes it into a structured curriculum emphasizing identity, systems of oppression, ideology critique, and community-based political action. Contemporary Ethnic Studies pedagogies—including counter-storytelling, privilege analysis, critical literacy, dialogical circles, and transformational resistance projects—reflect Freire’s educational program almost verbatim. This treatise demonstrates that modern Ethnic Studies is the most fully institutionalized form of Freirean Marxist pedagogy in the American school system.

1. Introduction

Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2000) is widely regarded as the foundational text of critical pedagogy. Scholars such as Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, Antonia Darder, bell hooks, and Christine Sleeter have identified Freire as the key intellectual architect linking **Marxist revolutionary theory to educational practice** (Giroux, 2011; McLaren, 2000; Darder, 2018; Sleeter, 2011).

At the same time, contemporary **Ethnic Studies curricula**—including the California Model Curriculum (2021), the Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (LESMC, 2020), and university Ethnic Studies departments nationwide—identify **critical consciousness, systems of oppression, identity as positionality**, and **transformational resistance** as core pedagogical aims. These concepts are directly indebted to Freire’s theoretical apparatus.

This treatise analyzes that intellectual lineage and demonstrates that Ethnic Studies functions as **an applied, institutional instantiation of Freirean Marxist pedagogy**.

2. Marxist Foundations of Freire's Pedagogy

Freire's work is explicitly Marxist in its ontology, epistemology, and political intentions.

2.1 Oppressor/Oppressed as a Marxist Social Ontology

Freire begins with a Marxist premise: societies are structured by domination.

“In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform.” (Freire, 2000, p. 49)

This echoes Marx's analysis in *The German Ideology* (1846/1970) that dominant groups maintain control through economic and ideological structures.

Ethnic Studies inherits this ontological framework through its focus on:

- settler colonialism
- structural racism
- white supremacy
- hegemony (Gramsci; see Gramsci, 1971)
- systems of power and privilege

The **Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum** mirrors Freire's oppressor/oppressed binary in its definition of *power*, *privilege*, and *systemic oppression* (California Department of Education [CDE], 2021, pp. 12–14).

2.2 Consciousness as Historical Materialism

Freire directly cites Marx's dictum that “social being determines consciousness.”

“The oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, must overcome the contradiction in which they are caught; only then can they surmount the ‘fear of freedom’... and become beings for themselves.” (Freire, 2000, p. 47)

Conscientização mirrors Marx's *class consciousness* (Marx & Engels, 1848/1978).

Ethnic Studies operationalizes conscientization through identity mapping, positionality statements, power analyses, and “counter-storytelling” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

2.3 Humanization and Alienation

Freire's concept of humanization comes from Marx's theory of alienation:

“Dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order.” (Freire, 2000, p. 44)

Ethnic Studies adopts this framework in its emphasis on:

- reclaiming cultural identity
- healing from historical trauma
- restoring community agency

(See Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015; CDE, 2021.)

2.4 Praxis: Reflection + Action

Praxis is the core of Freire’s Marxism:

“Reflection—true reflection—leads to action.” (Freire, 2000, p. 66)

“To speak a true word is to transform the world.” (Freire, 2000, p. 87)

Ethnic Studies adopts this as its culminating outcome: *transformational resistance* (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Students move from analysis → reflection → collective social action.

3. Freirean Methods Embedded in Ethnic Studies Pedagogy

3.1 Dialogical Pedagogy

Freire rejects “banking education”:

“Education becomes an act of depositing... instead of communicating.” (Freire, 2000, p. 72)

Ethnic Studies replaces teacher-led instruction with:

- dialogue circles
- co-construction of curriculum
- oral histories / testimonios
- narrative sharing

Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum alignment:

CDE (2021) emphasizes “dialogue-based pedagogy,” “community circles,” and “co-learning spaces.”

3.2 Critical Literacy and Ideology Critique

Freire's students "read the word and the world" (Freire, 1983, p. 21).

Ethnic Studies uses:

- Critical reading of dominant narratives
- Dismantling "master narratives" (Tuck & Yang, 2012)
- Textual deconstruction (CRT-informed literacy)

These directly follow Freire's ideological critique.

3.3 Counter-Narrative and Identity Storytelling

Freire emphasizes the oppressed naming their world:

"The great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed is to liberate themselves." (Freire, 2000, p. 44)

Ethnic Studies uses:

- Testimonio (Córdova, 1998)
- Counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002)
- Identity development assignments
- Community cultural wealth analysis (Yosso, 2005)

These map precisely onto Freirean narrative liberation.

3.4 Transformational Resistance Projects

Ethnic Studies culminates in action:

- policy advocacy
- campus activism
- community campaigns
- restorative justice projects
- participatory action research (YPAR)

YPAR explicitly cites Freirean praxis (Cammarota & Fine, 2008).

4. Ethnic Studies Curriculum as Applied Freirean Marxism

Ethnic Studies curricula generally contain four pillars:

1. **Identity (positionality)**
2. **Critical consciousness**
3. **Systems of oppression**
4. **Community engagement / activism**

These correspond precisely to Freire's model:

Ethnic Studies Pillar	Freirean Concept	Marxist Origin
Identity/positionality	Naming the world	Class location
Critical consciousness	Conscientização	Class consciousness
Systems of oppression	Oppressor/oppressed	Structural domination
Activism/praxis	Praxis	Revolution/transformational action

There is no conceptual daylight between these systems; Ethnic Studies is a **systematized Freirean program**.

5. Conclusion

Paulo Freire is the essential bridge between Marxist revolutionary theory and modern educational praxis. His categories—oppressor/oppressed, conscientization, dialogical pedagogy, humanization, and praxis—form the **core architecture** for contemporary Ethnic Studies.

Ethnic Studies:

- employs Freire's Marxist ontology of oppression
- adopts his epistemology of critical consciousness
- uses his methods of dialogical, identity-based pedagogy
- culminates in the praxis of community activism

Thus, **Ethnic Studies is best understood not as a descriptive academic discipline but as the institutional realization of Freirean Marxist pedagogy in K–12 and university settings.**

References

- Apple, M. (2013). *Can Education Change Society?* Routledge.
- Cammarota, J., & Fine, M. (Eds.). (2008). *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion*. Routledge.
- California Department of Education (CDE). (2021). *Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum*. Sacramento, CA.
- Córdova, T. (1998). "Power and Knowledge: Colonialism in the Academy." *Latino Studies Journal*.
- Darder, A. (2018). *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A Pedagogy of Love*. Routledge.
- Freire, P. (1983). *The Importance of the Act of Reading*. University of Massachusetts Press.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (30th Anniversary Edition). Continuum.
- Giroux, H. (2011). *On Critical Pedagogy*. Bloomsbury.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. International Publishers.
- McLaren, P. (2000). *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Solórzano, D., & Delgado Bernal, D. (2001). "Transformational Resistance." *Urban Education*.
- Solórzano, D., & Yosso, T. (2002). "Critical Race Methodology." *Qualitative Inquiry*.
- Sleeter, C. (2011). *The Academic and Social Value of Ethnic Studies*. NEA Research.
- Tintiangco-Cubales, A. et al. (2015). "Toward an Ethnic Studies Pedagogy." *Journal of Education Foundations*.
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization*.
- Yosso, T. (2005). "Whose Culture Has Capital?" *Race Ethnicity and Education*.

