

# Chapter 3

## The Ontological and Epistemological Connection Between Paulo Freire's Literacy Education and the CLING Project in South Africa

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter explores the link between Paulo Freire's ontological and epistemological philosophies and the community literacy and numeracy group (CLING) project in South Africa. The CLING project is based on the belief that literacy is about mastering reading, writing, and arithmetic skills. It also empowers individuals to reach their full potential and achieve success and fulfilment. The authors discuss how apartheid obstructed the education of black individuals, but Freire's ideologies and educational philosophies aimed to raise awareness and liberate individuals from illiteracy, economic struggles, and inequality. The authors emphasise the importance of critical literacy in promoting social justice. Using a qualitative approach, the authors gathered data from both primary and secondary sources and selected twelve individuals who provided information-rich insights. It was discovered that literacy education, including reading and writing, has helped marginalised individuals and empowered men and women.*

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## **INTRODUCTION: PAULO FREIRE LITERACY EDUCATION IN CONTEXT**

Paulo Freire's approach to literacy education, as outlined in his book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," centres around empowering marginalised individuals who are poor and uneducated. This involves transforming the social realities that contribute to their oppression, with learners playing an active role in the process. According to Suoranta *et al.* (2021), literacy education aims to restore self-esteem, trust, and potential in life. Freire uses education to raise awareness amongst the masses about the realities of oppression - including inequality, poverty, destitution, and illiteracy (Vittoria, 2018). His educational philosophy seeks to liberate individuals from their inferior status and humanise them, countering the forces of oppression. While oppression can alienate individuals from their humanity, Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed is revolutionary in that it fights for liberation, humanisation, and redemption (Pouwels, 2019).

Freire, born in Pernambuco in 1921, is widely recognised as a pioneer in literacy education for liberation. His contributions to critical pedagogy, popular education, and literacy methods have had a lasting impact that extends into the 21st century (Tygel & Kirsch, 2016; McCormack, 2020). According to Suoranta *et al.* (2021), his educational philosophies and ideologies have been adapted and embraced across diverse cultural, economic, gender, racial, and demographic boundaries. As a result, adult educators strive for broader socio-economic and political outcomes (Reder, 2020). At the time, the high illiteracy rate besieged the Northeastern region of Brazil in the 1960s. Of its population, about 72.6% could not read or write (Ferraro & Kreidlow, 2004, cited by Tygel & Kirsch, 2016). Thus, Freire epitomises that learning to read and write can indeed bring about transformation in human life. However, achieving this plight goes beyond learning vocabulary. Freire (1998:6) says it involves "word and action." He, therefore, emphasises that the cognitive dimension of literacy education must be a process of relationships between men and their world through reflection and action aimed at capacity building (Suoranta *et al.*, 2021).

### **Exploring the Concepts of Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy**

According to Freire, problem-posing education requires a unique pedagogy that differs from the conventional banking education method. The learner and educator's roles, the curriculum, and the techniques used in this approach vary. He emphasises that problem-posing education allows learners to actively participate in learning and dialogue with the teacher as critical co-investigators (Freire, 1970). Freire believed that regardless of their level of knowledge or cultural background, every

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