



Conscientização

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What is it?

Conscientização is one of the influential ideas espoused by Paulo Freire, who found it while working with other Brazilian educators in the 1960s.

Conscientização (translated from Portuguese as critical consciousness, consciousness-raising, or critical awareness) calls for the understanding of social realities from both epistemological and critical perspectives as the basis for the effective and sustainable transformation of said realities. The concept is an invitation to take strong critical stances about history, society, and even politics as the first step to meaningful change.

Conscientização is utopian in nature, understood not as mere idealism, but as critical knowledge that becomes a source of hope. In that sense, the idea provides both a space to denounce social inequity and critically question society at large and a moment for social agents to begin to propose the kind of society for which they strive.

Who uses the concept?

The idea of *conscientização* supports research education and social sciences generally, and is at the forefront of Participatory Action Research and some forms of narrative research. Critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and other contemporary forms of critical theory have built their stances to question social inequities as extended forms of *conscientização*.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Conscientização, with its strong calls for social and political stances, is and should be part of today's construction of intercultural dialogue. Without it, as

Freire argued, there may not be real intercultural dialogue, as any cultural exchanges would be then devoid of their necessary critical components, leaving these exchanges as instrumental matters, rather than supporting the transformative goals at which intercultural dialogue typically aims.

What work remains?

Social researchers today continue to use the idea of *conscientização* to question the ways in which society operates while proposing better models to improve agency and social conditions. In a world where larger questions about social inequities loom on the horizon, revisiting Freire's ideas about *conscientização* may provide inspiration to turn social research into a strong tool for advocacy and transformation. The challenge is to strive for the critical, yet hopeful, stances that are necessary to improve cultural exchange and the actual transformation of human conditions.

Resources

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Iddings, A. C. S., McCafferty, S. G., & da Silva, M. L. T. (2011). Conscientização through graffiti literacies in the streets of a São Paulo neighborhood: An ecosocial semiotic perspective. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 46(1), 5-21.