

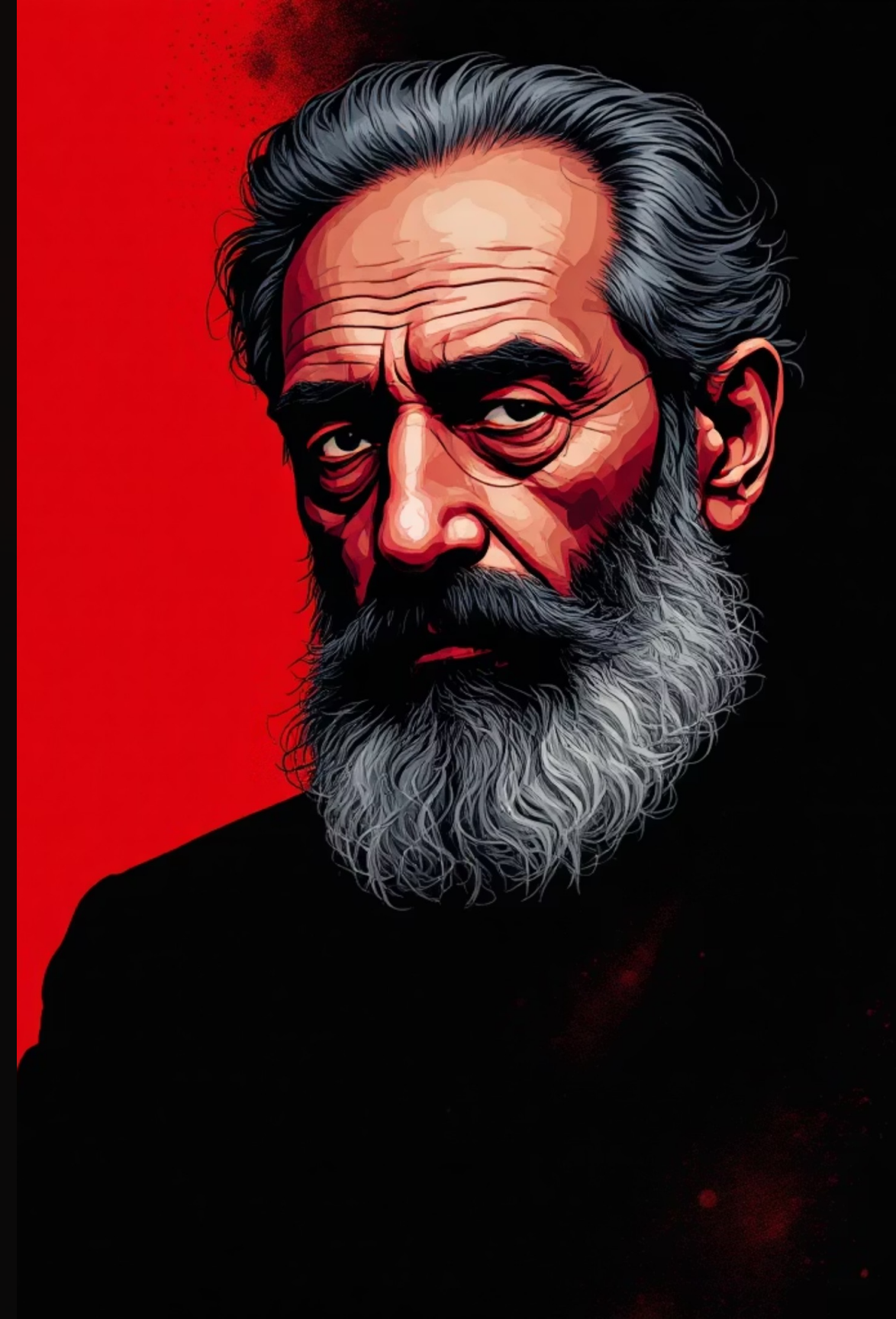
CRITICAL PEDAGOGY & AI

What Would Paulo Freire Think of Generative AI?

Exploring generative AI through the lens of Freire's critical pedagogy

A technology that can either reinforce **oppressive** education or serve as a tool for **liberation**.

Joseph Vancell



"I consider the fundamental theme of our epoch to be that of domination, which implies its opposite, the theme of liberation, as the objective to be achieved... In order to achieve humanisation, which presupposes the elimination of dehumanising oppression, it is absolutely necessary to surmount the limit-situations in which people are reduced to things".

Slide 2





Freire was no technophobe.

He used projectors in his cultural circles to project codified pictures on peasants' houses.

Later, after his exile, as Secretary of Education for the city of São Paulo he invested in many computers for schools.

Yet, he was not a technodeterminist

The AI Disruption in Education

Large language models like ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini have profoundly disrupted education — generating essays, answering questions, and simulating dialogue.

71%

Student AI Use

College students using AI tools for coursework (2024 survey)

337

Leaders Surveyed

Higher education leaders across the USA

Freire's critical pedagogy offers a powerful framework: education is never neutral. It either **liberates** or **domesticates**.

Core Concepts of Critical Pedagogy

Paulo Freire (1921–1997) built an interconnected philosophy challenging oppressive education. These principles now offer a lens for evaluating AI.



Banking vs. Problem-Posing

Banking education treats students as passive vessels. Problem-posing education makes them co-investigators of reality.



Conscientisation

Developing critical awareness of social contradictions and the capacity to act against oppressive elements of reality.



Dialogue & Humanisation

Authentic education requires horizontal, humanising encounters — not vertical authority. The goal: becoming more fully human.



Praxis

The unity of reflection and action. Neither verbalism nor activism alone but ongoing cycles of both driving liberation.

GenAI as Banking Model 2.0



Packaged Knowledge Delivery

AI delivers instant, polished responses that discourage the messy process of inquiry. Freire would call this "**false generosity**" — appearing beneficial while maintaining oppressive structures.

- An AI that names the world on behalf of students does not liberate; it merely substitutes one form of depositing for another.

Technocratic Neutrality & Displaced Dialogue



Hidden Power

AI embodies creators' values and biases while being marketed as "neutral"



Algorithmic Bias

Training data reproduces racial, gender, and cultural inequalities



Dialogue Displaced

Human-AI interaction substitutes for the collective, dialogic process of conscientisation

AI "hallucinations" and deepfakes (produced by modern oligarchs) compound the problem — students cannot develop critical consciousness when they cannot distinguish accurate from fabricated information.

Freire insisted: *"Reading the world always precedes reading the word."*



GenAI as a Tool for Liberation

Freire was not a technological determinist. Tools serve either oppression or liberation depending on **how** they are used. Several approaches show AI aligning with Freirean principles.

1

Problem-Posing Inquiry

Use AI as a sparring partner — generating hypotheses students then critique — not as an answer engine.

2

Revealing Bias

AI's embedded biases become pedagogical resources when students systematically interrogate outputs for stereotypes and power structures.

3

Extending Dialogue

AI helps students develop thinking individually before bringing provisional ideas into authentic classroom dialogue.

4

Enabling Praxis

Students prototype community interventions with AI, then critically evaluate, test, and refine in ongoing action-reflection cycles.

From Passive Consumption to Critical Inquiry

Practical Strategies

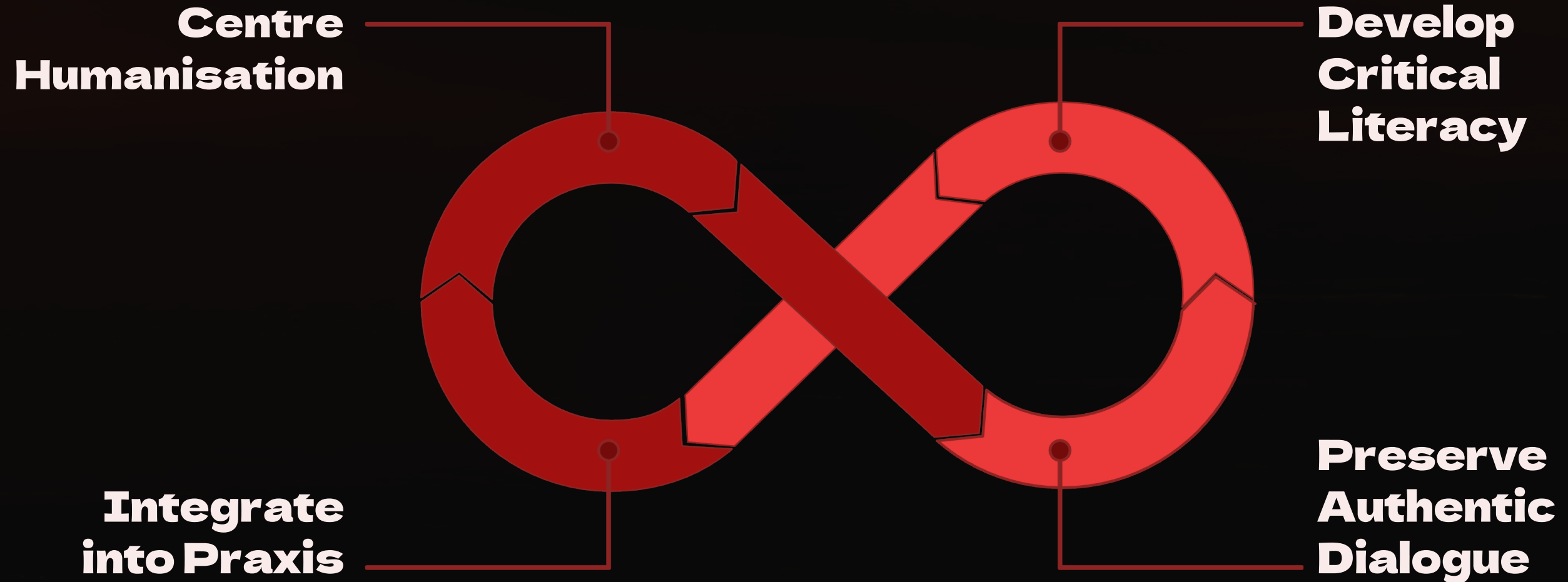
Alm & Watanabe demonstrate that AI can co-create scenarios students then critique, positioning learners as **active knowledge constructors**.

- Design assignments requiring critique of AI outputs
- Compare multiple AI responses to the same query
- Audit AI systems for disparate impacts on communities
- Use AI for scaffolding inquiry, never as final answers

Applications span nursing education, language learning, and writing studies — always keeping AI subordinate to conscientisation.



Towards a Freirean Praxis of AI



Freire would call for neither uncritical embrace nor reflexive rejection but **deliberate, ongoing critical engagement in service of humanisation and liberation.**

Key Orientations for Critical AI Integration



Address Bias & Equity

Audit AI content for cultural bias. Ensure equitable access. Involve diverse communities in adoption decisions.



Problem-Posing Design

Frame AI as a tool for generating questions, not final answers. Treat outputs as provisional texts to be critically read.



Democratic Control

Resist proprietary black-box systems. Involve students, teachers, and communities in decisions about AI tools and implementation.



AI as Contested Terrain

The question is not whether to use AI in education, but **how** to use it and **for what purposes**.

Freire would view GenAI as neither inherently emancipatory nor oppressive — but as a site of struggle. The smoother AI delivers knowledge, the further we may be from the productive discomfort authentic learning requires.

**Education is
never neutral**

**Technology
serves human
purposes**

**Liberation
requires critical
consciousness**

Transformation emerges from praxis

Will we use this technology to integrate students into oppressive structures — or transform it into a tool for collective liberation? The choice is enacted continuously through praxis.

A final thought inspired by Freire

AI's most dangerous feature isn't **hallucination**.

It's **fluency**.

When the language sounds perfect, we stop questioning the thinking behind it, thereby creating the conditions for **banking education** and **domestication** - even in developed countries.



Thank you.

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