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PAULO FREIRE

(1921–97)

Heinz-Peter Gerhardt¹

Paulo Reglus Neves Freire was born in Recife, the capital of Brazil's northeast province, one of the most impoverished parts of this large Latin American nation. Although raised in a middle-class family, Freire became interested in the education of the poor people in his region. He qualified as a lawyer and developed a teaching 'system' for all levels of education. He was imprisoned twice in his own country and became famous outside it. Today, Paulo Freire must be considered as the most well known educator of our time.

The fundamentals of his 'system' point to an educational process that focuses on the students' environment. Freire assumes that the learners must understand their own reality as part of their learning activity. It is not enough to assume a student can read the phrase: 'Eve saw a grape'. The student should learn to understand Eve in her social context, find out who worked to produce the grape and who profited from this type of work.

This 'system' brought about Freire's exile in 1964, following seventy-five days in prison, after having been accused of being a 'revolutionary and an ignorant'. He then spent four years in Chile and one year in the United States. In 1970 he moved to Geneva where he worked for the World Council of the Churches. In 1980 he returned to Brazil to 're-learn' about his country.

Paulo Freire has published a vast collection of books that have been translated into a total of eighteen languages. More than twenty universities throughout the world have conferred on him the title of Doctor *honoris causa*. His most popular publication, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, is dedicated to the wretched of this world and to those who identify with, suffer with and fight for the impoverished.

In 1989, he became Secretary of Education in São Paulo, the most populous state in Brazil. During his mandate he made a great effort to implement his ideas, to review the curriculum, and to increase the salaries of Brazilian educators.

Paulo Freire is a man with a great sense of humour yet, at the same time, a man disgusted with all types of injustice. He is father of five children by his first wife, Elza. After her death, he married his former ex-student, Ana Maria.

This profile is designed to show in more detail the making of Paulo Freire — a sort of archaeological reconstruction of the man and his work.

Early impressions and influences

Paulo Freire was born on 19 September 1921 in Recife, into the household of an officer serving in the military police. Freire and his brothers and sisters were educated in the traditional catholic way by their mother. His father was in close contact with the spiritual circles in the town.

Looking back to the strong position of the father in Brazilian middle-class families, Freire often remarked that his own father was always ready to talk with his family and that he

brought up his children with authority, yet also with understanding (Freire, 1978a, p. 2). Was this the early introduction to a certain outlook about communication?

By taking a piece of wood and drawing words in the sand from the child's cultural universe, his father taught Paulo the alphabet even before the boy went to school. He then broke these words down into syllables and reunited them into new words. Was this the foreshadow of a future 'method' of literacy training?

During the world economic crisis of 1928–32, the Freires tried to uphold the standards of middle-class life, but their mother had at times great difficulty in providing for the family. They moved to the provinces, to the neighbouring city of Jaboatão, where life was less expensive. As a result, Freire lost two years of secondary schooling. Until he graduated from high school, he was considered a mediocre student. At the age of 20 he began to study law, but his studies were interrupted several times for economic reasons since he had to earn his living and contribute to the family's finances from an early age.

According to Freire's own information (Freire, 1985c, p. 9), he was at that time strongly influenced by the lawyer and philosopher Rui Barbosa and the medical doctor Carneiro Ribeiro. Both were great Brazilian intellectuals who transcended the frontiers of their own disciplines. Completion of his law degree qualified Freire to teach in Brazil's secondary schools. He taught 'Portuguese language' from 1944 to 1945. In addition, he worked as a trade union lawyer and gave lectures on legal matters for trade union members in the suburbs of Recife.

In 1944 Freire married Elza Maria Oliveira, a primary schoolteacher. In his autobiographical notes he remarks that she was 'catholic like him' (Freire & Bondy, 1975, p. 12). She encouraged him in his systematic discussions of pedagogical questions. Until her sudden death in 1986, her influence on his practical and scholarly work can hardly be underestimated.

Freire's contacts with the state-run trade unions helped him to receive an appointment in the Serviço Social da Indústria (Social Service for Industry — SESI) as the chief of the Department of Education and Culture (Freire, 1959, p. 14, 17). He became director of this institution in 1954 but resigned after criticism of his democratic, open and free style of administration.

In SESI's kindergartens and schools Freire tried to involve students and parents in discussions about educational and societal matters. For him, working with children meant taking into consideration their social and family environment as well. Problems, such as malnutrition and child labour, could only be solved with the involvement of the parents.

In the framework of the so-called 'workers' clubs', Freire and his colleagues tried to encourage the industrial labour force to 'discuss their individual problems and also general topics' (Freire, 1959, p. 15). He was trying to tell the workers that they should not leave the responsibility for solving their problems entirely to SESI. They should themselves try to overcome difficulties and hindrances. The aim of such work was to 'integrate the worker into the historical process' and to 'stimulate him to the individual organization of his life in the community' (Freire, 1959, p. 17).

In spite of the restricted nature of SESI's institutional environment, Freire showed that the principles of dialogue, 'parliamentarization' and self-government could be partially achieved inside these institutional boundaries. These three principles should be exercised to reach 'real democratization in Brazil' (Freire, 1959, p. 15). In addition to his job with SESI, Freire was working in other contexts to participate in the 'democratic awakening' of Brazil.

Influenced by the catholic thinker Alceu de Amoroso Lima and the 'new school' teacher Anísio Teixeira, he worked in several parishes of Recife on mainly catholic-influenced, grass-roots initiatives. In this context we can take note, for example, of the project which he organized with priests and lay persons in the 'Casa Amarela' parish in Recife. In this project,

seven educational units of the parish, from kindergarten to adult education, worked together in curriculum development and teacher education. The results of this project were to be shared with other groups who would be encouraged to work together on organization and content. Freire called this kind of union ‘parliamentarization of the participants’ (Freire, 1959, p. 129). Techniques like study groups, action groups, roundtable discussions, debates and the distribution of themed flash cards were typical in this kind of work.

In this way, Freire and his collaborators began to talk of a ‘system’ of educational techniques, the ‘Paulo Freire System’, which could be applied to all levels of formal and non-formal education (Maciel, 1963). Later, in the 1970s and 1980s, his technique for literacy work, one element in the system, was labelled the ‘Paulo Freire Method’, while *conscientização* became a *passepourtout* to revolution. For this reason he stopped mentioning these terms, emphasizing the political character of education and its necessary ‘reinvention’ in different historical circumstances (e.g. Freire, 1985a, p. 171).

At university

Paulo Freire’s efforts at reforming education, as well as his activities in SESI and in the lay movement of his Catholic church, earned him a part-time teaching appointment for pedagogics at the Universidade de Recife (Freire, 1971b, p. 499). The university authorities wanted to work with someone who had experience and a reformist approach, so that these ideas could become better known in other places, for example at the university or in the School of Fine Arts (1955).

Brazilian political life in the 1950s and early 1960s was labelled ‘The appearance of the people’ by the defenders of an authentic development model for the country. This group of intellectuals, including Hélio Jaguaribe, Anísio Teixeira, Roland Corbisier and Alvaro Vieira Pinto, based their ideas on European sociologists and philosophers like Karl Mannheim, Karl Jaspers, Gunnar Myrdal and Gabriel Marcel, and gathered around the Higher Institute for Brazilian Studies (ISEB) in Rio de Janeiro. At the university, Freire had more contact with this and other contemporary political trends. Following his activities in the catholic lay movement, he also began to read increasingly the authors of the catholic left, like Jacques Maritain, Thomas Cardonnel, Emmanuel Mounier and their radical Brazilian interpreters, such as Alceu de Amoroso Lima, Henrique Lima Vaz, Herbert José de Souza and others.

The Catholic Students’ Club (JUC) was one of the most radical organizations during that period of social and political upheaval. The students demanded fundamental reforms at university, in health and social services, and in housing (de Kadt, 1970, p. 62). Contrary to former times, when students had limited themselves to proposing resolutions, they now took to visiting the slums to discuss problems with the inhabitants and started campaigns to tackle the miserable circumstances of daily life there (Paiva, 1973).

During his time at the university, Freire became more and more familiar with the ideas of the radical catholic student movement, expanded his studies of catholic and nationalist classics, and systematized his way of thinking and acting (Freire, 1985c, p. 11).

In his essays of that time, the typical writing style of Paulo Freire can already be discerned. Against his vast background of practical work, he weighs up the most diverse theories and writers, intertwining them in a way that matches with his own experience, but generates controversies (e.g. Saviani, 1990; Jarris, 1987; Allman 1987). Yet, he never denied being an eclectic who quotes specifically selected parts of the premises of, for example, Jaspers, while later on it was Marx. He was not willing to adhere to Marxism or Existentialism because of some interesting points he found in the writings of these two authors (Freire, 1978a, p. 12).

This eclecticism, and—in my judgement—the ‘theory’ requirements imposed upon him

by the then dominant culture at his home university, may explain the Freirean tendency to obfuscate his practical work through 'leaden philosophical prose' (Boston, 1972, p. 87). His writing style thus creates confusion among his readers. His influence is greatest whenever he appears personally and gives lectures and courses, thus gaining a dedicated group of followers willing to experiment and continue the spirit of his work. In this way his prestige is similar to that of many other great educators of our century, e.g. Montessori (Röhrs, 1982, p. 528). At their various epochs, they 'reinvented' education as art, science and policy (Freire, 1981a).

In contrast to many of his colleagues, Freire regarded the students' political activities inside and outside the university as a necessary and important part of the Brazilian phase of transition to a democratic society. He considered it important to discuss national problems at the university. Instead of trying to restore law and order by disciplinary measures, Freire looked for solutions to the country's most pressing problem, i.e. 'the education of the people' together with the students (Freire, 1961a, p. 23).

Freire dealt with his concept of education in detail in his doctoral dissertation (Freire, 1959) which did not receive the approval of the university committee. Considering Freire's criticisms of the undeveloped state of Brazilian university structure, which failed to measure up to the expectations of the 'transition' phase, the committee's decision was somewhat logical.

Nevertheless, Freire got the opportunity to continue his work at the university because of his friendship with João Alfredo Gonçalves da Costa Lima who had been first vice-chancellor and then, in 1962, chancellor of the University of Recife. Freire became special councillor for student relations and later, in 1962, director of the university's extension services.

As in his time with SESI, Freire did not restrict himself to the framework of his professional occupation to promote the Brazilian transition. When, in 1960, the administration of the city of Recife, under the left-wing leadership of Arraes, started the Popular Culture Movement (MCP), Freire was on the side of MCP's most eager advocates and co-founders.

Paulo Freire worked in the education department as the co-ordinator for adult education projects. He enthusiastically supported the initiative for the founding of MCP and glorified the 'movement' euphemistically as an 'action of the people'. It turned out, however, that the catholic, protestant and communist militants inside MCP interpreted their educational and organizational tasks in different ways. A primer for literacy work with adults caused a conflict in Freire's department concerning the process of instruction and cultural awareness-raising (Gerhardt, 1978, p. 65).

The authors of the primer (Godoy/Coelho, 1962) had chosen a directive political approach with five 'generative' words: *povo* (people); *voto* (vote); *vida* (life); *saúde* (health), and *pão* (bread). Using the syllables of these words, sentences, such as 'The vote belongs to the people', 'People without houses live in slums', 'In the Northeast there will only be peace when the grievances are remedied at their roots' and 'Peace emerges on the basis of justice' were created. They were supposed to inspire political discussion and form its structure and content (Gerhardt, 1978, p. 68).

Freire strongly opposed giving messages to illiterate persons. Messages would always have 'domesticating effects', no matter whether they came from the left or the right. Both sides would demand the uncritical acceptance of doctrines. Manipulation would start.

In 1961, to avoid manipulation meant two things for Freire:

- The convictions and opinions, i.e. the curriculum, must come directly from the people and must be prepared by them; yet
- The convictions and opinions should correspond to the 'transition' phase, which along with the analysis of ISEB and the catholic radicals, Brazil was experiencing at that time (Freire, 1961a, p. 24).

However, Freire did not succeed in conveying his message. Parts of MCP started to work with the directive approach, basing themselves on the Leninist party doctrine. Thirty years later, Freire would experience a similar conflict. As a consequence, Freire reduced his collaboration within MCP and began to elaborate his own ideas with the help of his staff at the University Extension Office. Taking for granted peoples' inborn talent to be able to reason, he had already experimented with people's visual and auditory sensory domains while they were learning to read and to write. In one of his first experiments, he talked to his illiterate housemaid about a slide that projected a picture of a boy and the Portuguese word for boy (*menino*) onto the wall. Going over again and again the individual syllables of the word and then repeating the word *menino*, Freire observed that Maria noticed the lack of syllables and thus 'learned' that the word was composed of syllables (Freire, 1970e, p. 9).

Yet, the stimulus was still missing which would enable Freire to arouse an interest in words and syllables in an illiterate person. The 'presentation' of the individual terms was missing. In his work with SESI and MCP, however, he had learned about the interest of many workers in 'political' questions when they relate directly to their needs and difficulties, and were presented in what we today call the media (films, slides, etc.). Furthermore, he could remember well his own first contact with the world of words. It was necessary to show pictures that referred to people's actual problems, and to read and write words that expressed these problems.

Experience had also shown him that it was not sufficient to begin with an intensive discussion of reality. Illiterate persons were strongly influenced by their failures at school and in other learning environments. In order to lessen these hindrances and to set in motion a motivational impetus, Freire experimented with the distinction between the abilities of human beings and animals in their particular environments. This distinction was also demonstrated by the new appreciation of folk art (pottery, weaving, wood-carving, singing, amateur theatre, etc.) and was originally put forward and theoretically described by the German sociologist Max Scheler: Man as creator of culture.

Freire began to experiment with his new approach to literacy training in a cultural circle which he himself co-ordinated as monitor and whose members he knew personally. In his publications, interviews and lectures, Freire only talks sporadically, quoting single members' sayings, about the first application of this literacy method in the 'Centro de Cultura Dona Alegarina', one of MCP's 'cultural circles' for the discussion of everyday problems in the borough of Poço da Panela in Recife (Gerhardt, 1978).

Success

Freire reports that after only twenty-one hours of literacy training, one participant was able to read simple newspaper articles and write short sentences. The slides, particularly, aroused great interest and contributed to the participants' motivation. After thirty hours (at one hour per day for five days per week) the experiment was brought to an end. Three participants had learned how to read and write. They could read short texts and newspapers and write letters. Two participants had quit (Freire, 1963a, p. 19; Freire, 1974a, p. 58). Thus, Freire's 'method' of literacy training was born.

Up to its applications in the city of Diadema (State of São Paulo) in the years 1983–1986 (Werner, 1991, p. 136) and—partly—within the so-much-disputed MOVA framework (Torres, 1991; Freire, 1991a, p. 129) in the city of São Paulo (1989–92) during the 'Freire administration', the various steps of the method remained the same, although there would be changes in order and content due to the socio-economic situation at the various training sites (Gerhardt, 1983; 1989). These steps might best be summarized in the following way:

- The educators observed the participants so as to ‘tune in’ to the universe of their vocabulary;
- An arduous search for generative words and themes took place at two levels: syllabic richness; and a high degree of experiential involvement;
- A first codification of these words into visual images, which stimulated people ‘submerged’ in the culture of silence to ‘emerge’ as conscious makers of their own culture;
- Introduction of the ‘anthropological concept of culture’ with its differentiation between man and animal;
- The decodification of the generative words and themes by a ‘culture circle’ under the self-effacing stimuli of a co-ordinator who is not a ‘teacher’ in the conventional sense, but who has become an educator-educatee in dialogue with educatee-educators;
- A creative new codification, this one explicitly critical and aimed at action, wherein those who were formerly illiterate now begin to reject their role as mere ‘objects’ in nature and social history. They undertake to become ‘subjects’ of their own destiny.

The ‘method’ had an overwhelming success all over Brazil. It would now be possible to make the illiterate population—at that time 40 million—literate (as literates they were allowed to vote) and conscious of the nation’s problems. Reformists and leftist forces invested in Freire and his team, which was soon entrusted with the task of implementing a National Plan of Literacy Training (1963). Money poured in from all sides, among them the regional office of the Alliance of Progress in Recife, the reformist governments in the Northeast and the populist Brazilian federal government of João Goulart (Manfredi, 1976).

Although already national co-ordinator of the literacy tide within the rapidly spreading Popular Education Movement in his country, Freire was well aware of the pitfalls the national implementation of his and other grassroots approaches to literacy could cause. The meagre outcomes of a pilot campaign in Brasilia (Gerhardt, 1978) clearly pointed towards the dilemma of the now nationally famous educator whose ‘cultural action for freedom’ was difficult to implement within the state-run education system.

The overthrow of the federal government by Brazilian military forces in March 1964 stopped the great experiment (Skidmore, 1967). Freire’s second chance to assume a high administrative post would arrive but twenty-five years later, and pose the same dilemma to him and his collaborators.

Exile

Imprisoned twice by the military for his ‘subversive method’, the Bolivian embassy was the only one that would provide Paulo Freire with haven as a political refugee. The Bolivian government itself contracted his services as an educational consultant for the Ministry of Education. Yet, twenty days after his arrival in La Paz, he was to witness his second coup d’Etat, this time against the reformist government of Paz Estensoro.

CHILE

Freire decided to seek haven in Chile where, through the victory of a populist Christian-Democrat alliance, Eduardo Frei had just taken office. Freire stayed in Chile for four-and-a-half years working with a governmental institute called ICIRA (Institute for Training and Research in Agrarian Reform) and with the governmental Special Bureau for Adult Education under Waldemar Cortéz. He became a professor at the Catholic University of Santiago and worked as a special consultant to UNESCO’s regional office in Santiago.

In his second country of exile, Freire dedicated himself primarily to the field of adult education for peasants. The process of capitalistic modernization of Chilean agriculture had brought new machines and knowledge to the countryside, but the property and wage structures had remained the same. For this reason, Freire proposed an educational project that would highlight the contradiction and promote discussions on how to overcome it. Freire started to understand that the reforms undertaken by the US-American label 'Alliance for Progress' were a facade for a subtle, modern, technical-scientific domination of the South by the North. The technology exported to South America under the slogan 'technical assistance' was used as a tool to maintain political and economic dependence. This explains the emphasis given by Freire to his concept of 'cultural invasion' in his first publications after he left Brazil (Sanders, 1968).

In this period Freire analyzed the question of 'rural extension'. The outcome was a book (*Extensión o comunicación?*), first Spanish edition by ICIRA in 1969) about communication between the technician and the peasant in a developing agrarian society. He opposed the concepts of extension of culture and the concept of communication about culture. For him the first one is 'invading' while the second promotes awareness. He pointed out that the interaction between the peasant and the agronomist should promote dialogue. One cannot learn if the new knowledge contradicts one's context. The educator-agronomist who is not familiar with the world of the peasant cannot attempt to change the latter's attitude. The incidental intention was to emphasize the principles and fundamentals of an education promoting the practice of liberty. This practice should not be reduced to simple technical support but includes man's effort to decipher himself and others (Freire, 1969d).

In 1967 Freire went for the first time to the United States of America as an invited speaker at seminars conducted in the universities of various states. It was the period when his first, and until then only, book (published 1968 in Chile) *Education: the practice of freedom* had already been well received in intellectual circles in Santiago, Buenos Aires, Mexico and New York. In 1969 he received a letter of invitation to lecture for two years at Harvard University in Massachusetts. Eight days later he received an invitation from the World Council of the Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, an organization which at that time played an important role in the liberation process of former African colonies, to become a full-time consultant.

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Paulo Freire was eager 'to experiment' with North American culture, to discover the Third World (ghettos, slums) in the First World (Freire, 1985a, p. 188). Yet he would regret losing contact with some kind of concrete pedagogical experience in developing countries. He considered it unsatisfactory to leave South America only to study inside libraries. He therefore suggested to Harvard University that he would stay for only six months.

At Harvard he worked as a professor at the Center for the Study of Development and Social Change. There he gave definite shape to his book *Cultural action for freedom* (1970) in which he contrasted sharply his idea of cultural action with cultural imperialism, a theme that he was able to study concretely in the United States. Half a year later he became consultant to the newly installed Sub-Unit on Education of the World Council of Churches where, among his functions, he served as educational adviser to Third World governments.

Only after 1970 did Freire's pedagogical theory and practice become recognized throughout the world. In exile, Paulo Freire wrote his most famous books, *Education: the practice of freedom* (Freire, 1974a) and *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Freire, 1970d). The first is a compilation of ideas previously published in various articles and in his doctoral thesis (1959). He advances a pedagogical proposal for Brazil in the transition phase from the

colonial agrarian society to an independent and industrialized one. The three main problems of this phase—industrialization, urbanization and illiteracy among the rural and urban masses—have to be overcome through the construction of this new society. Democracy has to be learned by practising it (Freire, 1974a).

Ten years later, in *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Portuguese manuscript from 1968, first published in English and Spanish in 1970), he advocated a revolutionary pedagogy which has its goal in the conscious, creative action and reflection of the oppressed masses about their liberation (de Oliveira et al., 1975, p. 24; Freire, 1970d).

For the Freire of *Education: the practice of freedom*, science and education appear to be relatively neutral, whereas in the Freire of *Pedagogy of the oppressed* they become tactical weapons in the midst of the class struggle. From an emphasis on the relationship and confrontation nature/culture, human being/animal (the educational goal being the cultural liberation of Man as a means of social liberation), Freire moved on to focus on liberation from the oppressive mechanisms within the social structure in the service of the dominant classes. The educational goal is now to facilitate radical transformation of the social structure.

There are several epistemological claims in Freire's first Brazilian phase until 1964, particularly in connection with the concept of critical transitivity: (a) the development and exercise of a critical consciousness is the product of 'critical educational work'; (b) the task of education as instrument in the process of development of consciousness depends on two basic attitudes and activities: criticism and dialogue; (c) a critical consciousness is typical of societies with a truly democratic structure. These claims depend on the assumption according to which 'human reason' is perfectly capable of discovering 'the truth'. With this assumption, he had been successful in developing his own approach to literacy training.

'The Freire in exile' emphasizes more the Hegelian motif of the incorporated oppressor (rather than mere 'culture of silence') within capitalistic socio-economic structures (rather than the ideal of liberty in terms of Western democracy). He also highlights the political character of science and education (Freire, 1970d).

When he had been in Brazil prior to 1964, Freire was well aware of the political costs and difficulties involved in his pedagogical programme. However, his epistemological postulates led him to interpret such resistance as something rather accidental and bound to be removed by means of tactical opposition to a given dictatorship and its allied interests. With the explicit adoption of a new political perspective, his theoretical postulates regarding ideology and knowledge changed. From 'tactics', Freire shifted to 'strategy'. The 'conscientization process' became a synonym for class struggle. Cultural integration changed into political revolution. This is once again particularly reflected in Freire's concept of critical transitivity: in the early writings, it has much in common with the notion of the scientific attitude (Dewey). Later, critical transitive consciousness became revolutionary consciousness (Freire, 1974a; Freire, 1970d; cf. Schipani, 1984).

The shift in epistemological claims is also reflected in the change of authorities and bibliographical sources from *Education: the practice of freedom* (Scheler, Ortega y Gasset, Mannheim, Wright Mills, Whitehead, etc.) to *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Marx, Lenin, Mao, Marcuse, etc.), although this does not yet necessarily mean that the former book has become irrelevant. This change had significant implications in regard to the understanding and ramifications of some key concepts. The concept of transformation in *Education: the practice of freedom* means participation and integration within a democratic system, i.e. a kind of liberal approach. In *Pedagogy of the oppressed* and subsequent essays, transformation includes the possibility of subversion and revolution—i.e., a 'radical' political option and practice. With *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, the following three major themes are found at the centre of Freire's concerns: conscientization, revolution, and the dialogue and co-operation between vanguard and masses in order to maintain the spirit of the revolution (Freire, 1970d).

Parallel to this change towards revolutionary radicalism in Freire's thought, a shift also took place in regard to the meaning and implications of the very concept of conscientization. The educational praxis became a more revolutionary praxis, and a greater emphasis was placed on the subject of commitment for and with the oppressed. In his letter of acceptance to the World Council of Churches, Freire, in line with his new thinking stated emphatically: 'You must know that I have taken a decision. My case is the case of the wretched of the earth. You should know that I opted for revolution' (Simpfendorfer, 1989, p. 153).

GENEVA—AFRICA

In Geneva a group of Brazilians in exile, among them Freire, founded IDAC, the Institute of Cultural Action. This institute aimed to offer educational services, especially to Third World countries struggling for their full independence. This struggle was to be based on the process of consciousness-raising as a revolutionary factor inside education systems. Freire was elected president of IDAC (Freire et al., 1980).

In the following years, IDAC reached such a level of popularity, with requests for collaboration becoming so numerous, that it almost became an institute organizing seminars and workshops to disseminate the idea of *conscientização* worldwide. Freire was not happy about gradually becoming the 'guru' of an international community of followers who saw in his work the new evangelism of liberation and who did not try to reinvent his ideas in their own context. At this time Paulo Freire even stopped using the term *conscientização* because he did not want to contribute to the misleading conception that it would be sufficient to interpret the world critically and not to transform concomitantly the social structures conceived as oppressive (Freire, 1985c, p. 23).

Freire was very pleased when, in 1975, he and the IDAC-team received the invitation of Mário Cabral, then Minister of Education in Guinea-Bissau, to contribute to the development of a national literacy programme. As a result of this collaboration, a great amount of learning occurred among the IDAC-team, the teachers, the learners and the administrators of the education system in this small African country. The deficiency of the material resources, the low performance of certain teachers and vestiges of the old ideology intervening in the development process of the country, were all well recorded and examined (Gerhardt, 1981). Africa gave back to Paulo Freire and his collaborators the practical terrain for new experiences they had longed for (Freire, 1977a).

In exile Freire experienced thoroughly the dialectics between patience and impatience. It is necessary to be patient, impatiently, he once said; and it is necessary to be impatient, patiently. A banished person who is not able to learn this lesson could be considered as really lost. If one breaks this relationship, if one tends to be only patient, this characteristic is transformed into an 'anaesthetic' leading to unfulfilled dreams. If, on the other hand, one tends to be only impatient, there is a risk of falling into activism, voluntarism and disaster. The only path is the one toward 'a contradictory harmony' (Gadotti, 1989, p. 63).

Between 1975 and 1980, Freire also worked in São Tomé and Príncipe, Mozambique, Angola and Nicaragua (Assmann, 1980). Wherever he worked, he was not only a technician but also a militant who combined his commitment to the cause of liberation with a love for formerly oppressed people.

The African State of São Tomé and Príncipe, newly liberated from Portuguese colonization, entrusted Freire with a programme to promote literacy. The results of this programme went beyond the expectations. Four years later, Freire received a letter from the education minister stating that 55% of students enrolled in schools were no longer illiterate, as well as the 72% who had already graduated (Gadotti, 1989). These results are very similar to those obtained in the small cultural circle at Poço de Panela mentioned earlier.

In August 1979, Freire visited Brazil for one month. After this visit he returned to Geneva to discuss with his family, IDAC and the World Council of Churches his definite return to Brazil. This took place in March 1980.

Back in Brazil

Freire arrived in Brazil when the Popular Education Movement, which he had helped to establish in the early 1960s, was entering its second period of influence at a time of economic crisis and when the military rulers were consequently willing to relinquish power. Freire had to 'relearn' his country. But soon he was able to discover the same social actors as in the 1960s, yet with different political influences.

Brazil's working class, which during the military rule (1964-84) had to bear the main burden of the 'Brazilian miracle' and which is still suffering from the 'Brazilian debt crisis', now seemed to be better organized and was involved in its own political projects. Included among them was the foundation of a new political party, the Worker's Party (PT). Paulo Freire became in 1980 one of its founding members.

The middle class (staggering from considerable losses in income) once again radicalized, joined forces with the working class, and turned out to be the most active proponent in the process of returning the country to democracy (1978-84).

The National Bourgeoisie, in its majority, had collaborated with the military government, a collaboration that had already begun before 1964 because of the overly vigorous advancement of the popular movement. Once again it tried to play an important and more independent role in the economy and politics; yet always with a fearful eye towards its international counterparts, especially in the United States of America. As in the 1950s and early 1960s, the National Bourgeoisie normally did not take part in the educational enterprise. Its support consisted mainly of political and financial backing. Today, all three social strata contribute in their own way to Brazil's Popular Education Movement, moulding once again its form and defining its goals (Gerhardt, 1986).

Freire was invited by the Catholic University of São Paulo and by the State University of São Paulo in Campinas to become a professor in their respective educational departments. His academic activities soon developed in parallel to more political ones as, for example, he became President of the Wilson Pinheiro Foundation sponsored by the PT. He also associated himself with a small organization of dedicated educationists, called 'Varela', on the same lines as the early IDAC days. Through these institutions and organizations Freire achieved once again the linkage between theoretical and practical work which he defends in his writings. The ecclesiastical base communities, neighbourhood association, the feminist movement and ecological associations, along with Freire's analysis, are the cornerstones in Brazil's present transition phase. Although he would soon once again assume political responsibility on a PT ticket and, as before, counsel the Secretariats of Education in numerous cities of Brazil, he maintained his scepticism about overcoming tendentially sectarian party structures on the right and on the left. Political parties seem not to be able to collaborate closely with the aforementioned social movements in tackling the impact of unemployment, the lack of housing, limited health coverage or educational infrastructures. Once again he advocated 'education as the practice of freedom' with educators and politicians who were prepared to say 'yes' to risk-taking and to adventure, who said 'yes' to the future and to the present, and who dealt critically with the present (Freire, 1991*b*, p. 32).

In the municipal election of 1988, the Workers' Party won the majority of the votes in the city of São Paulo. The new mayor, Luiza Erundina de Sousa, appointed Paulo Freire as Secretary of Education on 3 January 1989 (Freire, 1991*a*). Freire resigned two years later, on 27 May 1991, in order to resume his academic activities, and his lecturing and writing. His

former Chief of Cabinet, Mário Sérgio Cortella, succeeded him. The Workers' Party administration lost the November 1992 municipal election. A former military-appointed mayor of São Paulo won, in free elections, the majority of the votes of a population that consists mainly of workers, a quarter of them unemployed, and middle-class people. What went wrong with the *conscientização* process in the few years of an educational administration *à la Freire*?

In his evaluation, Torres (1991, p. 36) analyses the situation somewhat cryptically:

Very often, technical competence in the context of politically feasible and eventually workable educational reforms is at odds with ethical principles upholding beliefs in social justice and fairness for everyone in the context of political and economic democracies. Sometimes, politically feasible reform projects based on an ethics of democratic compassion lack technical expertise, rendering failure inevitable. Finally, technically competent and ethically correct democratic projects may not be politically feasible or workable, remaining in the realm of illusions, dreams or the unconscious of practitioners, teachers and policy makers.

As thirty years before, in Recife, popular education within the boundaries of state-run institutions did not arrive at a fruitful outcome. Different ideologies within the ruling party, difficult working relationships between public sectors and social movements, the unresolved relationship between an unchanged superstructure and educational reform (Secretaria Municipal de Educação, 1989) and the necessary 'reinvention of power' (Freire, 1975, p. 179) had been the key problems to be dealt with. Other radical educators will have to continue where Freire and his team in São Paulo left off.

Conclusion

Primarily, Freire devised and tested an education system, as well as a philosophy of education, over several years of active involvement in Latin America. His work was further developed in the United States of America, in Switzerland, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé, Nicaragua and other countries in the Third and First Worlds. Freire's educational thrust centres on the human potential for creativity and freedom in the midst of politico-economic and culturally oppressive structures. It aims at discovering and implementing liberating alternatives through social interaction and transformation via the 'conscientization' process. 'Conscientization' was defined as the process by which people achieve a deepened awareness, both of the socio-cultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality. It involves praxis, understood as the dialectic relationship of action and reflection. Freire proposes a praxis approach to education in the sense of critically reflective action and critical reflection based on practice.

Freire's system of education and philosophy of education have their origins in a myriad of philosophical currents, such as phenomenology, existentialism, Christian personalism, humanist marxism and hegelianism, a detailed delineation of which would have exceeded the frame of this profile. He participated in the import of European doctrines and ideas into Brazil, assimilated them to the needs of a specific socio-economic situation, and thus expanded and refocused them in a thought-provoking way, even for the intellectuals and educational thinkers of Europe and North-America.

To the anger of many more traditional academics in the First World (Berger, 1974, p. 136; Boston, 1972, p. 87; London, 1973, p. 56) his philosophy and 'system' became so current and universal that the 'generative themes' he advanced have remained at the centre of educational debates in critical pedagogy for the last three decades (Torres, 1991, p. 5). Ever since he found himself in exile, the scope of his work has transcended the boundaries of the Third World countries (Schulze & Schulze, 1989; Dabisch & Schulze, 1991), a limitation which Giroux, who was sympathetic to Freire's approach, still suggested in 1981 (p. 139).

Because Freire has worked in and written about specific educational cultures, there is a sense that he has developed only those parts of his theory that are relevant to the social situation in which he was working; consequently there is ‘only’ a synthesis of perspectives on education that relate to those areas of concern rather than a fully developed sociology of, or philosophy of, education. What he has written is related to his convictions, rather than always being carefully argued within the confines of the more traditional academic framework (Jarris, 1987, p. 278).

His individual fate (exile, imprisonment) surely contributed to the air of mystique surrounding his work. Yet it neither possesses a solid theoretical framework nor was it ever carried out and evaluated in a way that would allow for objective confirmation. Freire is a very charismatic personality with a very personal and unique talent for understanding, dealing with and interpreting educational situations and processes. He has exercised this approach to education since his return from exile through a myriad of interviews, published in a multitude of journals and books (cf. Freire, 1991*a, b & c*; 1985*a*; 1987; Freire & Guimarães, 1982; 1986; 1987).

A systematic delineation of his theory by himself is missing from this period. The question of whether radical educational work can take place within state institutions or state-founded projects has still to be tackled more thoroughly. Freire has experienced various expressions of oppression. He should use them to formulate his institutional critique and analysis of the ways in which dominant and oppressive ideologies are embedded in the rules, procedures and traditions of institutions and systems. In so doing, he should remain the utopian he is, maintaining his faith in people’s ability to have their say and thus to recreate the social world leading to a more just society.

Notes

1. Heinz-Peter Gerhardt (Germany) Professor of social education and lecturer in international and comparative education at the Federal College of Public Administration, Cologne, and at the University of Frankfurt-am-Main. Visiting professor at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte in Natal (Brazil) and at the State University of New York at Albany (United States of America). Author of *Zur Theorie und Praxis Paulo Freires* [Paulo Freire’s Theory and Practice] with translations into English and Portuguese. He has published extensively on literacy problems worldwide, and on international academic exchanges and further training.

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