

40 Years from Education as the Practice of Freedom: New Perspectives on Paulo Freire from Latin America

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Abstract: The year 2007 marks the 40th anniversary of the original publication in Portuguese of Paulo Freire's first book, *Education as the Practice of Freedom*. In honor of this anniversary, this symposium brings together Latin American pedagogues to discuss the development and continued relevance of Freire's work.

Educação e Atualidade Brasileira (Education and Contemporary Brazil) in the Work of Paulo Freire

Maria Luisa de Aguiar Amorim

Translated by John D. Holst and María Alicia Vetter

Educação e atualidade brasileira (Education and Contemporary Brazil) (Freire, 1959) establishes the roots of Freire's ideas that appear in his first published book, *Educação como prática da liberdade* [Education as the practice of freedom] (Freire 1967); keeping the original theoretical framework, with some changes of wording, some re-ordering, adaptations to the context of the military coup of 1964, and the inclusion of his literacy method, *Education and Contemporary Brazil*, published posthumously in 2001, continues to be relevant. It would appear that this first work sets forth issues which his subsequent works address.

Freire's experience in the Social Service of Industry (SESI) made him intimately familiar with the educational issues of the proletariat. It is here that he comes to understand the limits of "welfareism" [*asistencialismo*]: the answer is not to do things *for* people, but *with* people. From this experience, he emerges as an educator that confronts dehumanization, developing ideas that go beyond schooling.

Alienation is a starting point. Humans find themselves lost, submerged in historical conditions that block their emergence to a society in transition (allowing for the transition of consciousness and people's insertion in their reality); as participants in a process of emergence and transition of consciousness (still naïve), without reaching the criticality that is necessary for their integration and participation in their own destiny, humans can be trampled by industrialization.

Confronted with a suffering and humbled humanity, Freire provided measures for overcoming the antinomy that we lived as a result of democratic inexperience, and of the emergence of the working classes in public life due to industrialization. The circumstances demanded measures capable of mitigating the problems of production in conjunction with the insertion of humans in their own times.

Dialogue is outlined negatively. Antialogue reinforces democratic inexperience; the arrogance of a few confronting the *others* mute and silenced, provides the basis for *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1970. Horizontal social relations, common language as a starting point, and respect for common people, are the conditions for dialogue; this is different from the idea of a

public, common interest, which does not exist. The vote depends on family ties, personal friendship, or feelings of gratitude, which reveals ideological inconsistencies.

The common Brazilian is resigned to life! Limited to vegetable-like interests, he or she cannot perceive their own historicity. Commitment presupposes freedom that, taken up responsibly, demands that the external and vertical authority of paternalism becomes flexible, internalized and made critical. Under a different political horizon, the discussion of authority, discipline, and freedom would be taken up again in *Sobre Educação: diálogo* (Freire & Guimarães, 1982).

Moving beyond the majority of educators that identify education with schooling, Freire's project is organic: change humanity, society, and education. Society moves from a predominantly enclosed and authoritarian phase toward a new predominantly open and democratic situation. Assisted by industrialization, technical education should meet human necessities. The lack of scientists and technicians should not stop economic development.

Transition will always be present, but its perspective will not always be the same: change, transformation, or social revolution will exhibit a different type of power. Freire draws on various sources: initially the "phaselological structure" of Jaguaribe (1957) aids society, and other references base the problem in development/underdevelopment. Brazilian intellectuals (Ramos, 1957; Pinto, 1956) lay the foundations for conscientization; liberals and pragmatists support the initiatives of universal schooling. Among other contributions, Mannheim (1950) provides a conceptualization of fundamental democracy through primary groups, upon which Freire bases the concept of dialogue in his first essays. From the writing of 1959 to that of 1967, with a slight alteration, *Education as the Practice of Freedom*, no longer uses the perspective of "flourishing capitalism" but rather "open society". But only in *Cultural Action for Freedom* (1970a), between the texts of the 1968-1974 period, does Freire orient his work toward socialism. The utopian dream of a democratic socialist society will be his final project, renovated in *Pedagogy of Hope* (1994). Freire is not rigorous in an academic sense, but gives rigor a new meaning: the coherence between thinking and acting (Amorim, 1997).

Studies of our development show that Brazil was born mute and submissive. Its predatory economy was constituted by large property ownership—the *hacienda* or the sugar refinery—large distances, land turned over to individuals who were also owners of other human beings, all predisposes people to become either the "big boss" or the dependent, the "protected". Submission creates the "extended hand". Freire relates these behaviors to a political conceptualization of social relations, extending from the private to the public sphere. Here he finds the marks of a verbal education juxtaposed to a sterile school, prejudices against manual labor, and the prohibition of common people to participate in public life, the absence of the idea of serving others in the national habits, and the devaluing and neglect of mass schooling.

Overcoming democratic inexperience implies revising education and the school together: grades and types, their technical and humanist content, their formal and informal breadth. In terms of the common people and their schooling, "when they have any, its on average between two and three years" (Freire, 1959, p. 88, our translation). Schooling of a few hours, with a program removed from reality, does not help in understanding vital problems. Illiteracy is alarming; overcoming it means more than simply eradicating an exposing an injustice, but rather reading is the right to "say one's word", to write, and the power to make history by transforming it.

"How do we learn to discuss and debate in a school that does not train us to think, because it imposes its own agenda?" (Freire, 1959, p. 97, our translation). We discuss without

searching, negating rediscovery; this will be rethought with *Cultural Action for Freedom*, when Freire's close contact with the Christian left and the popular movements bring Freire more clearly to Marxism that proposes a rediscovery of society, power, knowledge, and education.

Education and Contemporary Brazil provides a critique of education in general, and specifically a theory of adult education, drawn from a process of exclusion that found its *raison d'être* in class oppression. It is a question of still unresolved social justice. For Freire, education is *human* education [*formación*] (Amorim, 1997). While it is easy to see his project of popular education from 1959 forward and his methodology of adult literacy from 1963 forward, it seems more difficult to understand how they emerged from a pedagogical analysis in general, including schooling. Dialogue seems overlooked as a constructor of knowledge and new conditions of life. This results in the idea that the discussion of vital themes seems appropriate in one area and not in another. The fact that it is the social structure that generates exclusion seems forgotten, isolating popular and adult education. Education and critical consciousness, the linking of knowledge and life, theory and practice, popular knowledge and scholarly knowledge, is part of the process of the recuperation of our humanity (Amorim, 1997). Moreover, individuals who learn to speak their own words direct their own future, but it is only in the collective that they can become concretely humanized.

Paulo Freire and the Cuban Revolution

Felipe de. J. Pérez Cruz

Translated by John D. Holst and María Alicia Vetter

The topic of the relations between Paulo Freire and the Cuban Revolution is understudied.

Without a doubt, Freire was a Latin American of an epoch marked by the triumph of the first socialist revolution in the western hemisphere. The military coup of 1964 that fractured the democratic process in his country and that led him along with hundreds of educators and progressive people first to jail and later to exile, is part of the dynamic of revolution/counterrevolution that shaped the fortunes of the Latin American and Caribbean peoples of the second half of the twentieth century. Like the majority of people of his generation, he had a profound sympathy for the Cuban Revolution. He confessed to Rosa Maria Torres in 1986, "I have a special passion for Cuba" (Freire in Torres, 1986, p. 79). He would also be bound to Cuba by the fact that his wife Elsa "his teacher," "his lover and educator of his children" as he liked to say, "loved Cuba" (Freire in Freire, Pérez, & Martínez, 1997, p.14).

The Encounters

To understand the relations between Paulo Freire and Cuban pedagogy it is essential to study the little known journey of his encounters with Raúl Ferrer and with other Cuban educators. Freire met Raúl Ferrer in 1965 at the World Conference against Illiteracy in Tehran (Ferrer, 1988, p. vii). Ferrer (1976) had been the main pedagogical architect of the literacy campaign of 1961 and later the most important proponent of adult education in the country (Pérez, 2001). Freire was profoundly moved by the Cuban accomplishment of making literate over 900,000 people in less than one year. Freire and Ferrer would meet again 14 years later in 1979 in the context of the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua, where Ferrer and other Cubans played an important consulting role in the National Literacy Crusade (J. Chávez, personal communication, February 10, 2006). Ferrer and Freire left undone their idea of writing a book together (J. Canfux, personal communication, November 22, 2005); Ferrer died in 1993.

Freire involved himself in the national liberation movements in Africa at a time when thousands of Cuban internationalist combatants, workers, and teachers were assisting the struggles of these peoples. In June-July of 1976 Freire met with the Cuban advisors who were working in the Angolan Ministry of Education (S. Legón, personal communication, December 27, 2005; J. Villasana, personal communication, March 15, 2006). Freire became particularly interested in the literacy primer and manual that the Cubans had designed as the main pedagogical instruments. These Cubans explained to him the historical Cuban experience with these instruments and their validity for accomplishing mass literacy campaigns.

From the point of view of the Cuban educators, the Freirean method of generative words required a teacher or activist with a relatively high level of education and schooling. The need to massify the number of people who would be made literate, as was the case in the Cuban campaign of 1961 as much as in the one that was underway in Angola, forced them to enlist literacy workers who could read and write but did not necessarily go beyond the general low educational level inherited from the deposed colonial and neocolonial systems. Freire expressed his satisfaction with the rationale provided by the Cuban advisors. In São Tomé, Freire would later experiment with the Cuban idea of the primer and manual.

In 1987 Freire visited Havana to attend a psychology conference. At that time, he met with those in Casa de las Américas who worked in the popular education movement, and he also met with people in the Ministry of Education. A recording was made of an historic interview where he expanded on his thoughts about Cuba. His death impeded his expected return to Cuba in May of 1997.

The Ideas of Freire on the Revolution, Che Guevara, and Fidel Castro

Freire repeatedly acknowledged José Martí, Cuban National Hero, and one of the essential thinkers and pedagogues in the history of ideas, culture, and education of the 19th century in the Americas. Martí is considered the intellectual author of the current Cuban Revolution.

Freire followed closely the thought of Fidel Castro and Ernesto Che Guevara. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970b) cites Che to insist on the need to consider the level of ideological and psychological hegemony that the dominant culture reaches—“the oppressor housed in the oppressed”—in the masses. Freire places Fidel and Che under the category of “pedagogues of the revolution”.

For Paulo Freire “the Cuban Literacy Campaign, later followed by the Nicaraguan campaign, constitutes one of the most important facts in the history of education in the twentieth century” (Freire in Freire, Pérez, & Martínez, 1997, p. 15, our translation).

Freire in Cuba

The works of Freire began to be known in Cuba during the events on popular education that Casa de las Américas sponsored in 1984 and 1986. This had to do with a particular moment, of which a collective investigation has only yet begun to take place. I am referring to the ideological struggle that emerges within the Cuban intellectual movement in those years over the resistance of more than a few *compañeros* and collectives to the imposition of dogmatic and unilateral readings of Marxism developed by Soviet officialdom. In this climate of resistance, the reaffirmation of the national essence centers on Martí, and, from there, the insertion into the Latin American cultural ambit is deepened. Along these lines, very valid efforts were made to incorporate the work of Freire, along with other important pedagogues of the popular education

movement, into the Cuban debate. Today, the most important places of Freirean studies can be found in the Martin Luther King Memorial Center (CMLK) and in the Association of Cuban Pedagogues. Specifically, the distinguished popular educator Esther Pérez, from CMLK, published in 2004 the text *Freire entre nosotros* [Freire among us], where she brings to light the history of commitment and work of those in the country who have maintained and developed the popular education movement (Pérez, 2004).

After the debacle of soviet socialism and the increase in relations with Latin America, there has been a relative increase in the awareness of the work of Freire among Cubans, but not enough to make him a figure that is fully incorporated into pedagogical development and debates. This is a debt we still owe to this great thinker and to our colleagues in America, Africa, and the world; a debt that we still owe to ourselves.

Freire and his followers can help us with our contemporary challenges, which are not just about schooling. Without doubt, Freire and popular education, because of its strategic identity, accumulated experience, and its proposal of participatory work, can strengthen the socialist front. This is due to the links that Latin American popular education has made with the daily reality of people in the transformation of daily practices as an indispensable dimension for the transformation of the social structures and, above all, for the development of humanistic relations, objectively socialist. Freire and popular education can contribute to the ideological struggle against the negative inheritance of centuries of oppression, against individualism and capitalist consumerism, selfishness, machismo, sexism, intolerance of various kinds, institutional and personal verticalism. In addition, they can help us understand and overcome the errors that have been made and the deficiencies that still exist in the forging of a new society.

The Construction of a Critical and Transformative Curriculum for Education Between Adults in Latin America: The Possible Freirean View of Today.

Rolando N. Pinto Contreras

Translated by María Alicia Vetter and John D. Holst

The curriculum as an expression of the institution of schooling has been implemented in adult education with the same technical-instrumental epistemological perspective as it has been employed with children and adolescents. Educational reform processes currently taking place in Latin America are characterized by the novel cognitivist, constructivist, and praxeological approaches that identify socially determined elements as official knowledge, on the one hand, and the emerging knowledge that comes from the world of the students, on the other. These new curricular approaches are also applied to adult students and thus we speak of “education between adults” (Pinto Contreras, 1979). In this latter case, more than an influence on the organization of the curriculum’s content, what is sought is a change in the type of pedagogical relationship between the adult educator and the adult student.

In this paper, I hope to present for discussion some of the principles and mechanisms involved in the organizing of the curriculum that will direct the education between adults to be a critical and transformative action of the subjects, their knowledge, as well as of the world that surrounds adults. To accomplish this, I situate my proposal from a Freirean perspective, since Paulo Freire is the only educator/intellectual in Latin America who was successful in establishing a foundational dialectical relationship for a historical-situational vision between education and society.

The following are the curricular parameters of a proposed critical-transformative curriculum: definition of those areas of knowledge that are connected to the social and productive practices as experienced by adult educators and adult students and, the understanding

of the formative culture that the curriculum must give expression to, as dimensions of the cultural diversity of the Latin American situated adult and of the needs for learning that these adults express when they propose the construction of a world and of democratic ideals for it in their daily life.

Epistemological Need for Curricular Change

There is no doubt that when attempting to innovate the curriculum in the education of adults in Latin America, we must understand what Escudero (1999) calls “Culture of Change” and, of course, the organization that would facilitate the development of such culture. But this gets complicated when this innovation must be examined from a theoretical critical perspective as we situate it in the different Latin American realities. From such perspective, not all innovations may be understood as a change in the social relations of power, nor would every change be necessarily innovating. This dialectic of contradictory meanings is what causes that any curricular innovation in Latin America will entail being particularly attentive to the political motivations and theoretical and methodological focus of the actors behind the innovation. Thus, while generally true for any educational decision, when applied to the education between adults, where we should be able to find a negotiation of the orientation and organization of the most participatory formative processes, the matter of the motivation behind innovation becomes ever more complex and contradictory.

Reflexive rigor will be necessary as we examine the political and scientific intentions of those actors who speak to [*lenguejean*] (Maturana, 1992) the innovation, and who will carry it out, when we try to understand curricular innovations between adults. What will be evident is that, as long as the innovation actually reflects a negotiation of the meanings and interests of the educators and students involved in formative interaction, the curriculum will result in more transformative learning. On the other hand, when the established curriculum is designed by the “experts of disciplinary knowledge or of critical and creative knowings” (Pinto Contreras, in press, our translation), the result is to simply reproduce official culture, allowing for the installation of the curriculum as a “banking education” (Freire, 1970b) which accommodates educators and students to the systemic interests of the “experts”

In this way, we are faced with the configuration of the curriculum as a particularly important political and cultural situation at the very onset of the planning for a more emancipatory and solidarious adult education. Therefore, the big challenge is to be democratic when developing this type of education. Thus, this means framing the organization of curriculum as a change in the social relations of power in the formative situations that take place in the context of dominant capitalism.

It is here that notions of space and time emerge for the debate we propose. We must uncover the philosophical, political, cultural, and ideological intentions we have when we position ourselves and decide to embark in education between adults. And, in this sense, also unveil our true motivations for the change we so vociferously demand in adult education in Latin America today. We might be surprised to discover how in Latin America so many attempts at liberatory adult education, more specifically, some efforts in popular literacy and technical and political training for the rural sectors that claim themselves to be “revolutionary,” merely accomplish adaptation or accommodation, or the fulfillment of domination.

When we must find theoretical and methodological references to sustain actions for curricular change and alternative transformative practices for a formative culture in the education between adults, the only theoretical and pedagogical coherent reference is Paulo Freire.

Nevertheless, even when it comes to Freire, the conceptual precision needed to work towards a transformative curriculum for Latin American education is still an unfinished task.

The Major Parameters for the Design of the Curriculum for Education Between Adults

1. The need for an anthropological analysis of *being* and place in Latin America, as a historical-situational context for the critical educational innovation. Here we identify a few aspects of content that should center the curriculum:
 - The presence of the body and its movements, as production of theoretical thought.
 - The wise or knowing relationship of academia for understanding of the social institutional organization.
 - Productive work as a base for the political and cultural construction of the lifeworld.
 - A humanist vision of the divine as an embodiment of an animist popular theology.
 - The ethical experience of reciprocity and of complementation [complementariedad] as values to construct civil society or communal citizenship.
 - The equilibrium between diversity and commonality in Latin-American identity as the construction of a pedagogy of inclusion and of formative pertinence.
 - The epistemological vision that stems from the cross between intuitive reasoning and positivist reason, as the epistemological base of scientific knowledge and the critical curiosity of the adult towards his/her surroundings.
 - Finally, the crossroads of the aesthetic and the ethical dimensions of knowledge, as a base for commitment and desire for change and educational renewal.
2. The understanding of Latin American inter- and multi-culturality as the new framework for the selection, organization, and implementation of the Latin American culture and school curriculum.
3. The development of the curriculum as critical pedagogical action that proposes a new language and a new intellectual organization for the educator and the educational institution, with the purpose of generating a new political-social alliance of the forces for curricular change for the education between adults in Latin America.

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