Editorial Introduction. 20th Anniversary of Paulo Freire's Death

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Paulo Reglus Neves Freire (1921-1997) is surely one of the most cited and iconic figures in the contemporary education literature. In fact his impact has been large enough to affect thinking in such areas as social work, communications, nursing, community development, theology, philosophy and sociology. To provide one example, a recent text advocating a critical approach to community development (Ledwith, 2005) considers Freire's pedagogical and political philosophy central to the strategy being outlined. It has been 20 years since Paulo Freire passed away. It is fitting therefore that we devote this issue of Rizoma Freiriano to him. We do so by bringing together some of the greatest interpreters of Freire's work, people who have elaborated his ideas or reinvented them in different contexts, also adding to them by virtue of insights derived from these different places and encounters. It would be appropriate to introduce this issue by highlighting important episodes in his life.

Freire's life and challenges

Freire spent his formative years in the city of Recife in the State of Pernambuco, a city for which Freire always held a tremendous affection. Paulo Freire spent the best part of his most creative years away from his homeland, forced into 16 years of exile by the military regime that overthrew the government led by the populist João Goulart. After having qualified as a lawyer, Freire decided to leave the profession and concentrate on education. He developed an approach to critical literacy involving 'reading the word and the world,' an approach that captured the imagination of the government itself, especially its Minister of Education, Paulo de Tarso Santos; Freire was asked to develop this programme throughout the rest of Brazil. He must have been regarded as subversive by the ruling elite, notably members of the landowning classes and the bourgeoisie, if only because of the fact that by helping many Brazilians to become literate Freire was enabling these people to vote. This by itself rendered the education imparted by Freire and his associates a political act. Add to this the fact that Freire's approach enabled people, through a process of praxis, to gain critical distance from their own reality to perceive it in a more critical light, and one can begin to understand why the military regime, acting

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in the service of the local elites and foreign multinationals, would consider Freire a subversive educator engaged in ‘dangerous knowledge.’

Freire’s years in exile were spent briefly in Bolivia, Chile (this is where he and other Brazilian exiles gained greater exposure to Marxist ideas and where the ideas for his celebrated work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* were developed), the USA (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was published in English there) and Geneva. As a result of his work for the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Freire came into contact with people involved in liberation struggles in the former Portuguese colonies in Africa, as well as different workers from Italy, Spain, Germany and other parts of Europe, including immigrant ‘guest workers’ (see Freire, 1994). He returned to his native land after the *abertura* and sought to ‘relearn Brazil’ finally taking up the position of Education Secretary in the Municipal Government of São Paulo where he introduced reforms into the public education sector and sought cooperation between state and social movements.

Early Work and Ideas

Freire’s early work, *Education as the Practice of Freedom*, which drew from his doctoral dissertation, was rather liberal in tenor, unlike his more radical later work starting from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that draws on a variety of influences. It draws on Christian-Personalist theory (Mounier and Atiade), critical theory (Fromm, Marcuse), other Christian writings (Chardin and Niebuhr), anti-colonial theory (Fanon and Memmi) and Marxist theory including Gramsci (to whom he was introduced by Marcela Gajardo), Kolakowski, Kosik and *noblesse oblige* Marx himself.

Freire could draw on a wide range of early writings by Marx, notably *The German Ideology*, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, the *Theses on Feuerbach* and *The Holy Family.* These early writings by Marx provide important sources of reference for some of the arguments raised in Freire’s best-known work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*(Freire, 1970a). Later writings by Marx, however, feature prominently in such works as *Pedagogy in Process*(Freire, 1978) where Freire attempts to come to grips with the social relations of production in an impoverished African country (Guinea Bissau) that had just gained independence from Portugal. In this work, and precisely in letter 11, Freire adopts Marx’s notion of a ‘polytechnic education’ (Livingstone, 1984; Castles and Wustenberg), arguing for a strong relationship to be forged between education and production (Freire, 1978). Marx had specifically developed this notion in the Geneva Resolution of 1866

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(Livingstone, 1984: 187).

Most importantly, though, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is written in a dialectical style which, as Allman points out, is not easily accessible to readers schooled in conventional ways of thinking, often characterized by a linear approach (Allman, 1988). She demonstrates clearly that one cannot fully appreciate Freire's work without rooting it within Karl Marx's dialectical conceptualization of oppression. The more one is familiar with Marx's "tracking down" of "inner connections" and "relations", that are conceived of as "unities of opposites" (Allman, 1999: 62, 63), the more one begins to appreciate *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*'s Marxian underpinning(see Allman, 2001: 39-48.) . This is not the only book Freire has written, but it is the most compact and consistent as far as the dialectical conceptualization of power is concerned (Allman et al, 1998).

Ideology

Freire's respective works are embedded in a Marxian conception of ideology based on the assumption that "The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make one class the ruling one, therefore the ideas of its dominance." (Marx and Engels, 1970a: 64)

Freire sees popular consciousness as being permeated by ideology. In his earlier work, Freire posited the existence of different levels of consciousness ranging from naïve to critical consciousness, indicating a hierarchy that exposed him to the accusation of being elitist and of being patronizing towards ordinary people (Kane, 2001: 50). In his early work, Freire reveals the power of ideology being reflected in the fatalism (see Rossatto, 2005 on this) apparent in the statements of peasants living in shanty towns who provide 'magical explanations,' attributing their poor plight to the 'will of God"(Freire, 1970a: 163). A self-declared 'man of faith,' Freire extols the virtues of the 'Prophetic Church', with its basis in liberation theology, and attributes 'false consciousness' to the "traditionalist", "colonialist" and "missionary" church that he describes as a "necrophilia winner of souls" with its "emphasis on sin, hell-fire and eternal damnation."(Freire, 1985: 131)

Freire provides a very insightful analysis of the way human beings participate in their own oppression by internalising the image of their oppressor. As with the complexity of hegemonic arrangements, underlined by Gramsci and elaborated on by a host of others writing from a neo-Gramscian perspective, people suffer a

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contradictory consciousness, being oppressors, within one social hegemonic arrangement, and oppressed within another. This puts paid to the now hackneyed criticism that Freire's notion of oppressor and oppressed is so generic that it fails to take into account that one can be an oppressor in one context and oppressed in another. The notion of the oppressor and contradictory consciousness suggests otherwise. This consideration runs throughout Freire's oeuvre ranging from his early discussion on the notion of the 'oppressor consciousness' to his later writings on multiple and layered identities (Freire, 1997) where he insists that one's quest for life and for living critically is tantamount to being an ongoing quest for the attainment of greater *coherence*. Gaining coherence, for Freire, necessitates one's gaining greater awareness of one's 'unfinishedness'. (Freire, 1998a: 51, 66)

Resources of Hope

Freire accords an important role to agency in the context of revolutionary activity for social transformation. He explicitly repudiates evolutionary economic determinist theories of social change, and regards them as being conducive to a "liberating fatalism" (Freire, 1985, p.179), a position to which he adhered until the very end, stating, at an *honoris causa* speech delivered at Claremont Graduate University in 1989, that "When I think of history I think about possibility – that history is the time and space of possibility. Because of that, I reject a fatalistic or pessimistic understanding of history with a belief that what happens is what should happen."(Freire, in Darder, 2002: X)

The emphasis on voluntarism and on the cultural and spiritual basis of revolutionary activity is very strong in Freire's early writings, especially the work based on his doctoral thesis, 'Education as the Practice of Freedom.'(Freire, 1973). This particular aspect of his work is generally regarded to have been the product of strong Hegelian influences. The Hegelianism may have partly been derived from the writings of such Christian authors as Chardin, Mounier and Neibuhr. (Youngman, 1986: 159) In later writings, however, this idealist position becomes somewhat modified as Freire begins to place greater emphasis on the role of economic conditions in processes of social change.

He rejected the view that the conditions of their time determined the limits of what is possible. Freire recognized developments within capitalism, witnessed during his lifetime (Neo-Liberalism), for what they were – manifestations of Capitalist reorganization to counter the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, owing to the ' crises of overproduction'(Allman and Wallis, 1995; Foley, 1999). Understanding the

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contemporary stages of capitalist development according to what they represented was a crucial step for Freire to avoid a sense of fatalism and keep alive the quest for working to attain a better world driven by what Henry A Giroux calls an anticipatory utopia prefigured not only by critique of the present but by an alternative pedagogical/cultural politics (Giroux, 2001). The fatalism of neo-liberalism, buttressed by the propagation of an 'ideology of ideological death.' (Freire, 1998b: 14), was a key theme in Freire's later writings. It was intended to be the subject of the work he was contemplating at the time of his death (Araujo Freire, 1997: 10). Freire could well have been on the verge of embarking on an exploration of the conditions that the present historical conjuncture, characterized by Neo-liberalism, would allow for the pursuit of his dream of a different and better world. Alas, this was not to be.

Love

The humanizing relationship between teacher and taught (teacher-student and student-teacher, in Freire's terms) is a relationship characterized by love. It is love that drives the progressive Freire-inspired educator forward in teaching and working for the dismantling of dehumanizing structures. And the entire process advocated by Freire is predicated on the trust he had in human beings and on his desire to help create "a world in which it will be easier to love" (Freire, 1970a: 24; see Allman et. al, 1998: 9). This concept has strong Christian overtones as well as revolutionary ones. In the latter case, the influence could well derive from Ernesto Che Guevara who, according to Freire, "did not hesitate to recognize the capacity of love as an indispensable condition for authentic revolutionaries." (Freire, 1970b: 45).

The theme of 'Love' is given prominence by Puerto Rican scholar, Antonia Darder in her two books on Freire, one entitled *Reinventing Paulo Freire A Pedagogy of Love*(1997) and the other more recent book, a small book, for a series by Routledge. It is great to have Antonia write a piece for this special issue.

Education in its broadest context

The terrain for education action is a large one in Freire's conception. Throughout his writings, Freire constantly stressed that educators engage with the system and not avoid it for fear of co-optation (Horton and Freire, 1990; Escobar et al, 1994). Freire exhorted educators and other cultural workers to 'be tactically inside and strategically outside' the system. Freire believed that the system is not monolithic. Hegemonic arrangements are never complete and allow spaces for "swimming

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against the tide" or, to use Gramsci's phrase, engaging in 'a war of position.'(Freire, in Escobar, 1994: 31, 32) In most of his work from the mid eighties onward, Freire touches on the role of social movements as important vehicles for social change.

He himself belonged to a movement striving for a significant process of change within an important institution in Latin America and beyond, namely the Catholic Church. When Education Secretary in São Paulo, a position that allowed Freire to tackle education and cultural work in their broader contexts, Paulo Freire and his associates worked hard to bring social movements and state agencies together (O'Cadiz et al, 1998; O'Cadiz, 1995). These efforts on behalf of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT) continue to be exerted by the party itself in other municipalities, most notably the city of Porto Alegre, in Rio Grande do Sul, where the PT had, until recently, been in government since the late eighties, and presumably the other municipalities and states where the party won the elections in the Fall of 2000. There were also high hopes that these efforts would be carried out throughout the entire country once the PT leader, Luiz Inacio "Lula" da Silva, won the federal presidential elections, though perhaps too much was expected of Lula who, in the words of many Brazilian sympathizers, is said to have won the government but not the State. The last years of Freire's life were exciting times for Brazilian society with the emergence of the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*(MST). The Movement allies political activism and mobilization with important education and cultural work.(See Ch. 4, Kane, 2001)

The movement is itself conceived of as an "enormous school."(Ibid: 97) Freire insisted, in an exchange with Ira Shor, one of the contributors to this issue, that education should not be romanticized. He also argued, in the same exchange, that teachers ought to engage in a much larger public sphere.(Freire, in Shor and Freire, 1997: 37). This has been quite a popular idea among radical activists in recent years, partly also as a result of a dissatisfaction with party politics. The arguments developed in these circles are often based on a very non-Gramscian use of the concept of 'civil society.' In his later work, inspired by his experiences as Education Secretary, Freire sought to explore the links between movements and the state (Freire, 1993; O'Cadiz et al, 1998) and, most significantly, movements and party, a position no doubt influenced by his role as one of the founding members of the PT.

Freire argues that the party for change, committed to the subaltern, should allow itself to learn from and be transformed through contact with progressive social movements. One important proviso Freire makes, in this respect, is that the party should do this "without trying to take them over." Movements, Freire seems to be

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saying, cannot be subsumed by parties, otherwise they lose their identity and forfeit their specific way of exerting pressure for change (Freire, in Escobar et al, 1994: 40)

Freire, therefore, explores links between the party and movements within the context of a strategy for social change. At the time when Paulo Freire was still alive, the PT enjoyed strong links with the trade union movement, the Pastoral Land Commission, the MST and other movements and exercised a leadership role when forging alliances between party, state and movements in the municipalities in which it was in power. The Participatory Budget project in Porto Alegre, an exercise in deliberative and participatory democracy, provides some indication of the direction such alliances can take (Schugurensky, 2002).

Praxis

The discussion has veered towards a macro-level analysis. It would be opportune now to bring the discussion back to the micro level of adult education with an emphasis on concepts that lie at the heart of the pedagogical relation as propounded by Freire. He regarded *praxis* as one of the key concepts in question. Praxis becomes a constant feature of his thinking and writing. It constitutes the means whereby one can move in the direction of confronting the contradiction of opposites in the dialectical relation (Allman, 1988; 1999). It constitutes the means of gaining critical distance from one's world of action to engage in reflection geared towards transformative action. The relationship between action-reflection-transformative action is not sequential but dialectical (Allman, 1999). Freire and other intellectuals, with whom he has conversed, in 'talking books', conceive of different moments in their life as forms of praxis, of gaining critical distance from the context they know to perceive it in a more critical light. Exile is regarded by Freire and the Chilean Antonio Faundez (Freire and Faundez, 1989) as a form of praxis. The idea of critical distancing is however best captured by Freire in his pedagogical approach involving the use of codifications, even though one should not make a fetish out of this 'method'(Aronowitz, 1993) since it is basically indicative of something larger, a philosophy of learning in which praxis is a central concept that has to be 'reinvented' time and time again, depending on situation and context.

Authority and Freedom

Freire emphasised the notion of authentic dialogue throughout his work, regarding it as the means of reconciling the dialectic of opposites that characterised the

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hierarchical and prescriptive form of communication he calls ‘banking education’. Knowledge is not something possessed by the teacher and poured into the learner who would thus be conceived of as an empty receptacle to be filled. This would be a static use of knowledge. Freire insisted on a dynamic process of knowledge acquisition based on epistemological curiosity involving both educator and educatee who regard the object of knowledge as a centre of co-investigation. Both are teachers and learners at the same time since teachers are prepared to relearn that which they think they already know through interaction with the learner who can shed new light on the subject by virtue of insights including those that are conditioned by his or her specific cultural background. The learner has an important contribution to make to the discussion. Having said this, Freire warns against *laissez faire* pedagogy that, in this day and age, would be promoted under the rubric of ‘learning facilitation’ (sic). This is the sort of pedagogical treachery that provoked a critical response from Paulo Freire. In an exchange with Donaldo P. Macedo, Freire states categorically that he refutes the term ‘facilitator’ (although he had used it earlier in such pieces as the essay in *Harvard Educational Review* concerning the literacy process in São Tome and Principe), which connotes such a pedagogy, underlining the fact that he has always insisted on the *directive* nature of education (Freire, in Shor and Freire, 1987: 103; Freire and Macedo, 1995: 394). He insists on the term ‘teacher,’ one who derives one’s *authority* from one’s competence in the matter being taught, without allowing this authority to degenerate into *authoritarianism*(Freire and Macedo, 1995: 378): “Authority is necessary to the freedom of the students and my own. The teacher is absolutely necessary. What is bad, what is not necessary, is authoritarianism, but not authority.”(Freire, in Horton and Freire, 1990: 181; Freire, in Shor and Freire, 1997: 91)

Emphasis is being placed, in this context, on ‘authority and freedom’, the distinction posed by Freire (see Gadotti, 1996) who argues that a balance ought to be struck between the two elements. In *Pedagogy of Hope*, Freire argues that the educator’s “directivity” should not interfere with the “creative, formulative, investigative capacity of the educand.” Otherwise, the directivity degenerates into “manipulation, into authoritarianism”.(Freire, 1994: 79) The encouragement of human agency is a key feature of the work of Paulo Freire.

Some Criticisms

Needless to say, Freire has had his critics over the years. Some have argued that his vision is anthropocentric, a fair comment on Freire’s work especially his earlier

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work, although it has to be said that the institute to which he helped give rise, now the Paulo Freire Institute, is working hard within the context of the Earth Charter in the area of ecopedagogy. He has also been the target of several attacks by feminists concerning what bell hooks regards as his “phallocentric paradigm of liberation” (hooks, 1993: 148) although hooks would always affirm the validity of Freire’s work in a process of liberation, and she draws extensively from Freire’s work. Her book, *Talking Back*(hooks, 1989) is full of citations from *Education for Critical Consciousness* and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* Recent works which combine Freire’s insights with those deriving from feminist theory and practice for a ‘Freirean feminist praxis’ of community development include Margaret Ledwith’s text on community development (Ledwith, 2005). Collaborators from North America, especially Donaldo Macedo, also pressed Freire hard, in interviews, on the gender issue and it is to be said that, in numerous later works, Freire tackled the issues of machismo and gender, as well as issues concerning multiple and contradictory subjectivities (Freire, 1997). Of course, despite his preference for talking books in the late eighties and early nineties, we never came across any such book in English dealing with either a woman or a person of colour that would have made discussions concerning patriarchy and ‘race’ sustained.(Mayo, 2004) One major criticism of these talking books is that they broach many subjects but not always in the depth required. The dialogical book format conditions both speakers to flit from one topic to another.

Others see contradictions in the fact that, despite his emphasis on dialogue, it is always the teacher who holds the cards (Coben, 1998) to which the distinction between authority and authoritarianism, mentioned earlier, and the dangers of laissez faire pedagogy, are referred to in defence of what is a complex notion of dialogue. Of course, unless the educators are well prepared there is always the danger of having a travesty of Freirean pedagogy (see Bartlett, 2005 for a discussion on the limits and possibilities of Freirean pedagogy; see also Stromquist, 1997). One standard criticism of Freire’s work is his supposed use of ‘binary opposites’ (e.g. oppressor –oppressed., Subject-object, action-reflection, etc.) when, in actual fact, the relations, as in Marx, are dialectical (Allman, 1999) and therefore the two elements are intimately connected (Darder, 2005: 92).

Other criticisms concern his over emphasis on popular culture; he eschews discussions concerning higher order thinking and high status culture in his works that contrast with the work of, say, Gramsci who places emphasis on the critical appropriation of the dominant culture (Mayo, 1999). There is little such material

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concerning high order thinking and high status culture even with regard to the interdisciplinary curriculum, based on generative themes, of the ‘popular public’ schools in São Paulo, even though the reform did not last long enough for anyone to be able to witness the transition from the popular and situationally-embedded knowledge to the high order thinking and knowledge which can prevent the pupils from remaining on the periphery of political life. This issue concerns not only the popular public school, which benefited from insights derived from popular education, but also popular and adult education.

Finally, one major criticism of Freire is that, in his later years, he produced one book too many, especially as far as books in the English language are concerned, and there is quite a lot of repetition across these books. On the other hand, there are those who would lament the fact that some excellent talking books, such as the exchange with Frei Betto and Ricardo Kotscho (Betto and Freire, 1986) and the exchange with Moacir Gadotti and Sergio Guimarães (Gadotti, Freire, Guimarães, 1995), never saw the light in English translation.

Other critical insights are no doubt present in the papers that are contained in this issue. There are criticisms and also hitherto unrevealed positive aspects of his pedagogical approach. The latter will enrich the range of insights regarding critical pedagogy as inspired by Paulo Freire. The former will indicate some of the pitfalls to avoid when taking the Freirean critical pedagogy project further.

Paulo Freire stands out as one of the towering figures of 20 th century educational thought. He has provided us with a huge corpus of literature containing ideas that can inspire people committed to the fostering of greater social justice. It is now left to others to make creative use of his theoretical and biographical legacy with a view to making sense of the contexts in which they operate, through a process of reinvention and not transplantation. And this issue provides yet another body of evidence regarding creative uses of this legacy.

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