

Paulo Freire DFP-OPF-07-066**Experiments In Education**

Paulo Freire's theory of education is based on the firm belief that every human being, however ignorant, is capable of critically examining his or her environment. As the oppressed become critically aware of their personal and social life, discerning its contradictions and identifying the causes and consequences, they can prepare themselves to transform that reality by means of practical action. What 'conscientization' thereby implies, is a growing objective and critical awareness of experienced reality with a view to changing it. Freire's theory of education is, therefore, both 'liberating' and 'critical'.

Other critical components of Freire's educational philosophy and activity need to be stressed. The first is 'dialogue'. It is through a dialectic process of continuity (the permanence of the word) and discontinuity (pauses for reflection) that Freire proposes to educate people to meet the challenges of a changing society. Secondly, Freire does not subscribe to the traditional notions of 'illiteracy', for he believes that nobody is ignorant because nobody ever starts from scratch. The so-called 'illiterate' is through life-experience, continuously undergoing a process of self-education. What is important, however, is an ability to use self-learning in a critical way, which brings new understanding to one's social situation and life's chances. In many nations, whether poor or rich, to eliminate oppression, it is of little use to learn to read and write, for what is there to read (excluding the material and natural sciences) except that which the ruling classes have written. Moreover, when one reduces an oppressed individual to an 'illiterate', one stresses something that in their opinion - that of a literate, educated, qualified specialist (whether in education or otherwise) - is essential, but one says nothing about the real essence of the person.

A final element Freire stressed, was that those who had acquired critical awareness and literacy must continue to educate themselves. An important aspect of this process was the need to be open to critical self-evaluation and dialogue. True societal advancement in other words can only take place when a society or its leaders are willing, if required, to undergo a 'revolutionary praxis'...combining action with reflection, and not shirking from steps at radical change.

Freire expressed these ideas over the years in a number of books, among some of which are *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1972), *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1974), *Education: The Practice of Freedom* (1976), and *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau* (1978).



Needless to state, Freire's revolutionary ideas on the educational process did not find favour with the Brazilian armed forces or its traditional elite. He was imprisoned and eventually sent into exile for nearly twenty years in Bolivia, Chile, the United States, and Geneva. In 1982 he was finally allowed to return to Brazil, after that country's transition to a more democratic regime.

On September 16, 1986 Dr. Paulo Freire was awarded the \$60,000 UNESCO Prize for Peace Education at a ceremony in Paris. In his acceptance speech, he said that he "...owes a great debt to North American and Latin American Indians; Blacks from North American ghettos, groups called 'aborgines' by whites of Australia, New Zealand, or the South Pacific Islands...university students from Asia, Latin American, Africa, Europe, and the United States...to the fears they express when learning a fundamental lesson with me, to their doubts, their fears, uncertainties, and innocence...(for) helping me to see more clearly about things I thought I already knew too well, (and) to help me learn to think clearly and to work better".

In an interview with George S. George, a Ph.D Candidate in the Department of Sociology, Syracuse University, Dr. Freire spoke on education, modernization and emerging trends in the developing world.

Q. It was as an educationalist in the field of adult literacy in Brazil, that you were able to formulate an educational approach to make the rural masses aware of political, economic and social realities. It was radically different from the existing educational approach borrowed from the capitalist precepts. How did you start?

A. I was born in a village in the northeast of Brazil and in my childhood I came across a fantastic level of poverty and misery, particularly among peasants. I was myself fortunate. My parents could afford to send me to school then to college. But my earlier consciousness of poverty was wide awake within me. And the ideas on the philosophy of education were crystallized in my doctoral work at the University of Recife. I eventually became a professor of history and educational philosophy at the same university, and it was among the illiterates of that area that I experimented with my initial approach to the problem of education.

I felt that what is important is not only to read and write words, but to learn to read and write reality. And we can do this in two ways. We can inject a comprehension of reality simultaneously with the learning of the words, and secondly we can coordinate adult literacy programmes with the day-to-day experiences.

The illiteracy rate in Brazil is presently around 55



per cent and it was higher some time back. Most of our initial educational efforts were through the use of audio-visual slide techniques. Each slide was basically related to daily problems, and the general socio-economic situation. The people used to respond spontaneously to the slides, and to each such response from the viewers we used to put a counter-question. There was thus a progression from one idea to another. People became aware of the unjustness of the existing situation...started awakening from the culture of silence to which they had been subjugated. The response to this experiment was fantastic and in two weeks we were able to make aware and educate about 6,000 people.

Q. Regarding motivation towards a state of dynamic transition, where do you place India?

A. In India I do not really think that such a motivation exists now. Maybe it did exist during the period just after Independence or during the initial emergence of your new government. In the ultimate analysis, however, people have to formulate themselves the extent of radicalization they want, because a foreigner takes time to immerse himself in another nation's cultural waters.

Q. Would you see any part of this new motivation in India in the context of the National Adult Education program being launched now?

A. It does not make sense to me to propagate adult education programs in areas where the oral tradition is very strong. The program has significance only if

there is a bid to change the economy of the region also. Otherwise the social structure in which the people are enmeshed will not be sufficiently flexible to accept the new situation, particularly if this drive has any content of making the people aware of the wider social and economic situation. Illiteracy is present because of political, economic and social conditions. It is therefore, strange that through the process of the new adult education drive those who were prevented from going to school yesterday, could be expected to transform the society of today and tomorrow by educating themselves now.

Q. In some of your writings, particularly in your 'Letters to Guinea-Bissau' an impression is conveyed that you are opposed to modern technology. Is this impression valid?

A. No. Technology is the expression of the creative ability of a human being and a certain level of it is indispensable. However, technology cannot be neutral. The fundamental questions are, technology for what, for whom, and to what purpose. And whether we want a capitalist model of technology, in which case it is specific and is accompanied by large doses of alienation... of the objectification of the worker, or whether we want to develop the material, spiritual and cultural basis of society with the total participation of the people. This question is fundamental because with technology infusion from the west also comes an ideological fusion and thus more dependence.

Q. There has been a lot of discussion about what the concept of 'modernization' really means, particularly in the context of the developing societies with their own cultural values and ethos. Do you feel that the models of modernization should be aimed at, or that societies evolve and change as a result of their own in-built socio-cultural pressures over which they have no real control except in a broad sense?

A. I do not believe in transplantation of models. I believe in re-creation, re-conversion of models... of experiences, in the transplantation of experiences. The model to me implies a political choice which has to do with a certain model of production. There are thus the capitalist and the socialist models of production which of course also vary according to the particular social and cultural stages through which they are passed... points in history. When higher science is being applied at an ever growing rate to the technological process, then we are approaching the concept of modernization.

Q. One of the disquieting trends in many developing countries is the alienation of its scientists and intellectuals from the rural folk and environment. Is such a trend also prevalent in the regions you have studied?

A. For me this reluctance of the scientists to go into the field is a class phenomenon. The academic training that the scientists and many of the urban literati receive is related to their class position, and this usually cuts them off from the masses; from reality. The scientist believes that his specialized job does not warrant field activity. And there is really no method of convincing intellectuals to go out into the field. To me the whole issue narrows down ultimately to the question of political choice. The problem we are facing now is that we do not have the schools and the systematic motivation to create the kind of scientists that we want. This is thus ultimately a question of praxis... of political choice.

