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Extending Literate Horizons: Paulo Freire and the multidimensional word

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ABSTRACT *The work of Paulo Freire is held in high regard by many members of the international teaching community. Freire's approach to adult literacy education in Brazil and Chile in the 1960s is succinctly described in two of his early books, Education: the practice of freedom and Cultural Action for Freedom, and has attracted extensive comment over the past 25 years. Freire's later (post-1980) texts provide a rich elaboration of theoretical principles implicit in the earlier practical work. Somewhat surprisingly, few scholars have attempted to integrate insights from Freirean adult literacy programmes with ideas promulgated in Freire's later writings. This paper endeavours to address this objective, albeit in a preliminary way, via the notion of the multidimensional 'word'. The word, for Freire, comprises spoken, written and active dimensions and provides the pivot on which programmes of literacy education turn. The author argues that Freire's concept of literacy is considerably broader than the conventional view. On the Freirean view literacy is a political phenomenon, intimately related to personal and collective experience. Freirean critical literacy implies not merely engagement with printed texts, but the development of a reflective, dialogical, praxical mode of social being, grounded in a narrative of hope, an ethic of struggle and a pedagogy of transformation.*

Introduction

Paulo Freire has been one of the most influential educational theorists this century. With the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in English in 1970 [1], Freirean ideas quickly gained international currency. Freire's pedagogical theory, which built upon his innovative approach to adult education in Brazil and Chile in the 1950s and 1960s, attracted considerable attention from not only educationists, but also political activists, theologians, social workers, counsellors and psychologists, among others. While Freire's profile diminished somewhat in the late 1970s and early 1980s, with the publication of a series of dialogical books in the late 1980s and early 1990s his work has become the subject of renewed scholarly engagement.

Part of the explanation for Freire's (ongoing) popularity, I believe, lies in the profoundly *hopeful* nature of his work. The title of one of Freire's later works, *A Pedagogy of Hope* (Freire, 1994) attests to the importance of this theme in his theory and practice. It is possible to read Freire's entire pedagogical history, from his initial adult literacy programmes to his stint as Secretary of Education for the city of São Paulo in the early 1990s, as a narrative of hope. Even in the most oppressive social circumstances, and perhaps *particularly* in such situations, Freire has never resigned

himself to a position of despair. In *Pedagogy of the City* (Freire, 1993) Freire draws attention to the enormous obstacles facing democratic educators in contemporary Brazil. Other difficulties of a similar magnitude have been to the fore in Chile, Guinea-Bissau, Nicaragua and Grenada: all countries to which Freire has contributed as an adult educator or consultant. Yet Freire has always retained what he unashamedly refers to as a 'utopian dream': a hope that through myriad forms of struggle, a society that is 'less unjust, less cruel, more democratic, less discriminatory, less racist, [and] less sexist' (Freire, 1993, p. 115) might emerge.

The story of Freire's practical experiences in adult literacy education has been conveyed, and reinterpreted, on several occasions over the years—both by Freire and others (compare Freire 1972b, 1976, 1985; Lloyd, 1972; Sanders, 1972; Brown, 1974; Bee, 1980; Roberts, 1994). Rather less has been said, however, about Freire's *theory* of literacy. Of course, Freire would insist that theory and practice ought to be dynamically intertwined. However, there have (somewhat surprisingly) been few detailed attempts to integrate Freire's later theoretical insights on literacy with principles from his earlier accounts of practical adult literacy initiatives [2]. This paper aims to (partially) address this lacuna in the literature. It proceeds from the assumption that Freire's theoretical and practical work in the area of literacy can be understood as one dimension of a broader narrative of hope. Drawing on a range of Freirean texts from the past 25 years, the paper explores some of the major features of Freire's approach to literacy education, concentrating in particular on the word-world relation in Freirean theory.

The paper begins with a brief consideration of the relationship between politics, experience and literacy in Freire's work. Attention then shifts to the pivotal importance of dialogue in Freirean programmes of adult literacy education. This preliminary discussion gives rise, in the third section, to a more detailed analysis of the multifaceted 'word'—comprising spoken, written and active dimensions—as the defining characteristic of Freire's approach to literacy. The final section sketches the parameters for an expansive concept of *critical* literacy, premised on the Freirean conception of humans as reflective, dialogical, praxical beings and squarely grounded in an ethic and pedagogy of hope.

Politics, Experience and Literacy

Literacy is typically regarded as unquestionably worthwhile. Claims about the benefits of literacy—and the undesirability of illiteracy—must, however, be made with caution (see Street, 1984; Graff, 1987; Lankshear & Lawler, 1987; Roberts, 1997). Freire anticipates later critiques of popular assumptions about the value and consequences of literacy in some of earliest writings. In *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Freire 1972b), for example, Freire criticizes the 'digestive' concept of knowledge embedded in many adult literacy education programmes. Illiterates, he points out, are sometimes regarded as 'undernourished', 'poisoned' or 'diseased' beings, in need of the 'cure' of literacy. A mere depositing of (written) words where none existed before supposedly provides the 'bread of the spirit' to be 'eaten' and 'digested' by illiterates (Freire, 1972b, pp. 23–24). This conception of illiteracy fuels a (paternalistic) humanitarianism in literacy campaigns: the words of the lettered coordinators or teachers are to be brought and gifted to those in need in order to save them from the deprivation(s) of wordlessness. Yet, as Freire (1972b, p. 24) observes, '[m]erely teaching men to read and write does not work miracles; if there are not enough jobs

for men able to work, teaching more men to read and write will not create them'. Illiteracy, Freire recognised from the beginning, is a reflection or a manifestation—but not the *cause*—of wider structural inequalities. Freire (1972b, p. 24) speaks of adult illiterates as 'beings for another'—dominated people within an oppressive social order. The solution to this situation does not lie in more deeply immersing illiterates within the structures which oppress them, but in transformation of the conditions of oppression. Literacy is, potentially at least, one element in the struggle to overcome oppressive social conditions.

For Freire literacy must be understood contextually. Reading and writing always take place under specific political conditions, within given social contexts. Any attempt at setting up a literacy programme must (if it is to be humanising) involve an examination of the culture of the region within which literacy educators are working. A literacy initiative will never be successful, Freire contends, unless it recognises the nature of daily life—and the social structures which, in (large) part, determine the limits and constraints of everyday activities—for participants in the programme. This is why Freire insisted from the beginning that the preliminary stage of his practical literacy work in Brazil—the investigation of local themes, practices and conditions—was so important (see Freire, 1976).

Literacy, for Freire, is always a *political* phenomenon. This is so from the moment at which a person is invited (or compelled, as in compulsory reading at school) to learn to read the written word [3]. The decision to encourage someone to become literate is a political one, just as the denial of literacy is also a political decision. (Witness the direct correlation between illiteracy and being denied the vote in Brazil in the 1950s and early 1960s [4]). But, more than this, the *way* in which someone becomes literate and practises reading and writing thereafter is undeniably a question of politics. As far as Freire is concerned, the options are to either institute a form of literacy pedagogy which aims to domesticate and adapt people to accept an oppressive set of social circumstances or to foster forms of reading and writing which seek to challenge these conditions (see Freire, 1972a, ch. 2–3; 1972b, pp. 21–47; 1976, pp. 41–58, 134–162).

Extending this point, the words which form the beginning of any literacy programme must be based on the experience(s)—the lived reality—of participants. Freire's literacy work in Brazil provides a classic illustration of this principle. A series of generative ('charged', emotive) words corresponding to aspects of everyday life in Brazil provided the foundation for the programme (see Brown, 1974; Freire, 1976, pp. 82–84; Bee, 1980). Freire argues that the same principle should apply at all levels in the educational spectrum, whether it is adults or children with whom one is working. The first words for any person learning to read and write must be *their* words: words from their world (cf. Freire, 1983).

This does not mean that personal experience should represent the end-point of a literacy programme. Education, Freire would be quick to say, ought to encourage people to go *beyond* their current understanding of the world (whether this is through reading and writing or any other form of social practice), by challenging them, by demanding something some of them in their thinking than they have been accustomed to, by extending their existing critical capacities and so on. Freire's point is that each person has unique access to at least one domain of knowledge—the reality of their lived experience. No one knows *my* world—my perceptions, feelings, longings, sufferings, activities, etc.—quite the way I do. A literacy programme (indeed *any* educational programme) cannot succeed if learners are unable to relate

in *some* way to what educators or coordinators are saying. The stronger the connection with existing knowledge and experience, the better (other things being equal) learners will be able to proceed with further learning by building on this base.

Freire would regard a literacy campaign which left participants with no better understanding of the world at the end of the programme than that which they had when they started as a failure. The notion of change is vital in Freirean education (Roberts, 1996a). But in the process of being challenged to go beyond 'where we are now', it is necessary to constantly relate back to the 'old' (or the existing) in order to understand what is being encountered in the 'new'. In fact, a crucial element of Freire's literacy work was the *reinterpretation* of existing conceptions of reality in the light of new experiences. When Freire discusses 'experience' he is referring to the whole web of practices, relationships, activities and interactions with material phenomena from which a person's understanding of his or her world derives. This form of understanding provides an indispensable route through which to meet new ideas, but it should not be accepted uncritically as the final or most accurate reading of reality (compare Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 98; McLaren & daSilva, 1991, pp. 38–40).

The Importance of Dialogue

The crucial bridge between existing and new forms of knowledge and experience in any educational endeavour (a literacy programme being one example) is dialogue. Dialogue is the means through which one person gains access to the world of another person—as far as this is possible—and comes to recreate his or her own way of being in and with the world. As Freire sees it, dialogue is intrinsic to the literacy process. Learning to read and write implies a relationship between two or more people: it is inconceivable, from a Freirean standpoint, to talk of becoming or being literate alone. This idea springs from Freire's recognition that language is necessarily social and shared. (Wittgenstein's point about private language being impossible is apposite here.) While this is the *starting point* for Freire's notion of dialogue, it does not reveal the particular form Freire believes dialogue should take in educational settings.

Freire (1976, p. 134) talks of intersubjectivity, or intercommunication, as a fundamental human characteristic. The human world, for Freire, could not exist without communication. No human being can think, act or *be* alone. This point has profound implications for the way education and literacy are conceived. Freire states

At the moment in which educators carry out their research, when as cognitive Subjects they stand face to face with a knowledge object, they are only apparently alone. Not only do they establish a mysterious, invisible dialogue with those who carried out the same act of knowing before them, but they engage in a dialogue with themselves to. Place [*sic*] face to face before themselves they investigate and question themselves. The more they ask questions the more they feel that their curiosity about the object of their knowledge is not decreasing. It only diminishes if it is isolated from human beings and the world. (1976, p. 148)

The immediate *physical* presence of other human beings is thus not a prerequisite for all forms of dialogue. Hence it becomes possible to speak of a dialogical relation between readers and texts. Books, from Freire's point of view, ought to be actively *engaged*:

this means entering into a relationship of a particular kind with the text, allowing, in a sense, the text to 'talk' to us while we simultaneously 'talk' to it. Readers ought to both apply the ideas they encounter in books to their own struggles and material circumstances *and* bring their personal experiences to bear in interpreting and 'rewriting' texts. Reading, for Freire, entails 'seizing' or 'grappling' with the text, both challenging it and being prepared to *be challenged* by it (Roberts, 1993). The respect for others necessary for Freirean dialogue is enhanced in a truly critical situation, for to wrestle with a text is to indicate the worth of engaging an author's ideas.

With regard to *education* and, more specifically, pedagogy, Freire talks of dialogue as a process of communication between thinking subjects seeking to know, mediated by the object of study, within a given social context (compare, Freire, 1972a, pp. 60–69; 1976, pp. 109–125, 134–137). Educational (or pedagogical) dialogue is always *purposeful* communication: the object of dialogue is to critically investigate a specific subject, problem or theme, with a view to seeking the *raison d'être* which explains the object of study and to 'naming' the world (see Freire, 1976, pp. 153–154; Freire & Shor, 1987, ch. 4). Dialogue in liberating education is structured and rigorous and demands a certain directiveness on the part of teachers and coordinators (Roberts, 1996b). In this sense pedagogical dialogue *presupposes* a relationship between two or more people, but goes beyond this to a deeper relationship between *knowing* subjects.

Dialogue provides a 'way into' the world of the illiterate (or the world of any learner in an educative situation) for teachers or coordinators; indeed, there is no other way of properly 'tapping' the unique world of each learner's knowledge and experience apart from dialogue. Equally, and this point is often forgotten, dialogue is the means through which learners can enter the (lettered, literate) world of the coordinator. The purpose of dialogue in a literacy programme is not only to facilitate the acquisition of reading and writing abilities, but also to promote a critical comprehension, and transformation, of the participants' social world.

The Multidimensional Word in Freirean Theory

Freire's approach to adult literacy education relied upon a dynamic integration of oral and literate modes of communication. Learning to *read* the word, for the adults with whom Freire was working, emerged from purposeful discussion of generative words and codifications through the medium of the spoken word. Dialogue provided the *bridge* between oral and literate forms of interpreting, understanding and transforming the world. In fact, there was no rigid separation between 'speaking' and 'writing' in Freire's literacy work, at least not into clearly defined 'stages' in the literacy process. Generative words were simultaneously an object for dialogue through speech and the means through which this speech was reflected upon and modified in a 'lettered' way (see Freire, 1976).

The word-world relationship was dialectically redefined through this process. Freire stresses that no one comes to read the word without first having read the world (see Freire & Macedo, 1987). Not all readings of reality, though, are especially critical. Freire (1972b, 1976) argues that many participants in his literacy programmes tended to view or interpret—i.e. 'read'—their world 'magically', attributing the overtly oppressive conditions they endured to 'fate' or 'God's will' (see further Smith, 1976). Introducing the written word in unison with critical discussion

via the spoken word allowed this reading to be *re-read*—that is to say, transformed. At the same time, the lettered world of coordinators was demystified: as participants learned to combine syllables from generative words to form new words, the (perceived) 'magical' character of writing itself was deconstructed (even if only in a rudimentary way, given the time available).

Freire's integration of speech, writing and action is effectively captured in the notion of the multidimensional 'word'. In a literacy programme which is truly dialogical these three dimensions become intertwined. There is a constant interaction between the spoken word, written words and *true* words in the process of learning to read the write. The word, for Freire, is a praxis: a synthesis of reflection and action, 'in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers' (Freire, 1972a, p. 60). 'Word', 'work' and 'praxis' are interchangeable terms for Freire: all imply conscious transformation of reality through relationships with others. According to Freire (1972a, p. 61) speaking the word—which is not merely a verbal but an active process—is a *primordial* human right. It follows for Freire that literacy 'belongs' to all human being *as* human beings. To *be human* is to be literate, if we understand 'literacy' in Freire's special sense. Speaking the word—which includes, but is not limited to, 'reading' and 'writing' the printed word—is, Freire (1972b, p. 30) stresses, a basic right for *all* human beings, and should not be the privilege of an elite few.

The word-world relationship is crucial in understanding Freire's concept of literacy. Freire does not suggest that there is no difference between 'word' and 'world' or 'text' and 'context': he simply identifies and discusses different *kinds* of 'words' (spoken, written and 'true') and 'texts' (written texts and the text that is social reality itself). The world, for Freire, is more than simply a complex collection of dancing signifiers: reality has a concrete, objective, material dimension. The 'world' in the word-world relation comprises the reflective activity of human beings, the social institutions human beings create, the relationships they forge with each other and the material sphere of the objective world. These are the dimensions of reality to be transformed when Freire talks of 'speaking a true word'. 'Words' are both a part of the 'world' and the means through which it is shaped and transformed. Speaking a 'word', of any kind, always implies a process or an act and a *relationship* with others and with the world. Hence, it is the larger 'world' on which the 'word' works, and this is a necessarily social process.

Thus words are always but one element of the larger world, i.e. they are necessarily 'in' the world. But the world is also always 'in' the word. This is a difficult idea to grasp, but it is pivotal in understanding the Freirean concept of literacy. Words—whether in the form of speech, writing or reflective action—are always spoken or written in a given context, within a particular set of material circumstances, subject to specific ideological influences and as part of a distinct web of social relationships. But these features which mark out the 'setting' or the 'context' or the 'framing' for speaking or writing the word also *'live through'* the word itself. For words are not lifeless formations which arise seemingly from nowhere: they are forged, created and conditioned by the world in which they evolve.

Extending Literate Horizons: critical reading and writing

The overriding feature of all of Freire's literacy work is his emphasis on the importance of being *critical* in reading and writing. In both his practical work with

illiterate adults and his numerous theoretical statements on literacy Freire has always upheld the worth of a critical approach toward both the 'word' and the 'world'. This applies not only to adults, but also to children: 'No matter the level or the age of the students we teach, from preschool to graduate school, reading critically is absolutely important and fundamental' (Dillon, 1985, p. 19). Even where Freire talks about the aesthetic moment in reading, the beauty of books or the emotions involved in literate activity, these things are defined against the dominant theme of becoming critical (see for example Horton & Freire, 1990, pp. 23–27, 31–32). Reading is 'joyous' to the extent that it becomes an active, dialogical, critical process; books become 'beautiful' when critically engaged (Roberts, 1996c). Unless it is critical, reading cannot become an act of *knowing* (Freire, 1983, pp. 10–11; Dillon, 1985, pp. 18–20).

In Freire's earlier work (Freire, 1972b, p. 42; 1976, p. 43) the critical aspect of literacy was defined in relation to the concept of 'conscientization' [5]. In the literacy programmes with which Freire was involved the aim was for illiterate adults to move from a state of either magical or naive consciousness toward (an ever-evolving) critical consciousness. More specifically, Freire's goal was '... to make it possible for illiterates to learn quickly how to write and to read, and simultaneously learn also the reasons why the society works in this way or that way' (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 84). In other theoretical discussions, Freire constantly stresses the need for a certain attitude in the literacy process. We are advised to approach texts in a searching, questioning, curious, restless manner (see for instance Freire, 1985, pp. 2–3) [6]. It is the *quality* of reading, not the number of books read, that matters (Freire, 1983, p. 9; Freire & Shor, 1987, pp. 83–85).

Becoming, and being, critically literate in a Freirean sense implies the development of a particular orientation toward the world. Reading 'texts' critically, from a Freirean point of view, necessitates and is only possible through a critical reading of a given *context*. 'Word' and 'world' become dynamically intertwined in Freirean critical literacy. Critical reading involves a constant interplay between text and context. Contextualizing a text demands, for example, that the author's historical circumstances be taken into account in analysing a book; on the other hand, a text can allow the reader to reinterpret aspects of his or her world. The aim, then, is to develop a more critical understanding of text *and* context through interrogating one in relation to the other.

At a deeper level, however, the conventional distinction between 'text' and 'context' can be collapsed in Freirean critical literacy. While 'texts' can be taken as the equivalent of 'books' in many of Freire's discussions of reading, there is also a much broader notion of 'text' in his writings. Freire talks of praxis—'reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it'—as a process of 'speaking a true word' (Freire, 1972a, pp. 28, 61). 'True words', as the earlier discussion indicated, represent the dialectical synthesis of theory and practice, action and reflection, word and world. The 'text' to be 'read' and 'written' or 'rewritten' in speaking a true word in social reality itself (see further Peters & Lankshear, 1994; Macedo, 1993). Freirean critical literacy can thus be seen as a form of, or an aspect of, transformative, reflective social action. More specifically, critical literacy implies a conscious, practical, dialogical attempt to understand, challenge and change oppressive social structures.

Hence, a Freirean view of critical literacy is inclusive of, but also goes beyond, the notion of (merely) critically analysing and evaluating books. Freire does not deny the value of dissecting an author's arguments, identifying key themes and ideas,

questioning and problematizing pivotal assumptions, etc; in fact, he explicitly recommends that readers adopt such practices (see for instance Freire, 1985, pp. 1–4). But there is more to Freire's ideal than this. For Freire critical literacy can be seen as a mode of discursive practice: a way of 'being in (and with) the world'. To read and write critically is to engage in a form of dialogical praxis: it is to enter history as a critically conscious subject, naming and transforming both the word and the world. Critical literacy, as Freire understands it, is one element in the struggle for liberation from oppression. Learning to read and write (in the conventional sense) does not in itself bring about the overthrow of oppressive attitudes, practices and structures, but it can contribute to this process.

A Freirean notion of critical literacy is, in short, concerned with the development of a particular mode of *being* and *acting*—not simply a way of dealing with books. Reading is just one of the myriad activities to which a critical approach might be applied. This is where the real significance of Freire's construct of 'reading the word and the world' lies. Critical literacy, for a Freirean educator, has to do with much *more* than reading and writing in the conventional (technical) sense: in many ways the actual reading of texts is secondary to the emergence of a deepening understanding of the world in a literacy programme. Texts are not humanising: people humanise themselves—in *part* through engaging books and other written texts, but, more profoundly, through reading (i.e. interpreting, reflecting upon, interrogating, theorizing, investigating, exploring, probing, questioning, etc.) and writing (acting upon and dialogically transforming) the social world.

Concluding Comments

The expansiveness of Freire's view of reading and writing is reflected, and partially encapsulated, in his assessment of the Nicaraguan literacy crusade. Making the link between literacy and praxis quite explicit, Freire maintains

Literacy in the case of Nicaragua started to take place as soon as the people took their history into their own hands. Taking history into your own hands precedes taking up the alphabet. Anyone who takes history into his or her own hands can easily take up the alphabet. The process of literacy is much easier than the process of taking history into your own hands, since this entails the 'rewriting' of your society. In Nicaragua the people rewrote their society before reading the word. (Freire & Macedo, 1987, pp. 106–107)

On other conceptions of literacy this quotation might appear contradictory: it seems odd, on the surface, to talk of rewriting society before one is 'able' to read and write. But, for Freire, *all* human beings are 'readers' and 'writers' of the world (though some are more critical than others in this). Reflecting upon ('reading') and transforming ('writing' or 'rewriting') reality has been a feature—indeed, the defining characteristic—of humankind for thousands of years (see Freire & Macedo, 1987). In a society such as pre-revolutionary Nicaragua, however, the impediments to liberating social transformation were enormous. The 'rewriting' of Nicaraguan history, culminating in the insurrection of 1979, represented a momentous moment in the struggle to reclaim the 'word' by changing the world. Freire would say that the Nicaraguans who participated in this process spoke a 'true word', through the communicative 'word' of dialogue, thereby furnishing the conditions for learning the

written word. In 'taking up the alphabet', Nicaraguans acquired the means to continue 'rewriting' their society in the sense of (literally) rewriting the history of Nicaragua.

In one sense, then, we can speak of reading and writing playing a *part* in the wider process of social transformation. At another level, however, literacy—as a reading and writing, which is to say a 'naming', of both 'word' and 'world'—is the transformative process itself. This speaks directly to the link between Freire's literacy work and the wider narrative of hope discussed at the beginning of the paper. Literacy is humanising to the extent that it becomes critical, dialogical and praxical. This quest involves struggle, often against seemingly insurmountable odds, yet it is precisely through confronting such challenges that the spark of hope—Freire's utopian dream—remains alive.

This paper has suggested that for Freire critical literacy education implies both the learning of letters, words and sentences and the development of a particular orientation toward the world. To become 'literate' requires not merely the mastery of signs and symbols, but also a willingness to participate in the process of building and rebuilding one's society. This point is elegantly conveyed by Giroux in his introduction to Freire & Macedo's *Literacy: reading the word and the world*:

Central to Freire's approach to literacy is a dialectical relationship between human beings and the world, on the one hand, and language and transformative agency, on the other. Within this perspective, literacy is not approached as merely a technical skill to be acquired, but as a necessary foundation for cultural action for freedom, a central aspect of what it means to be a self and socially constituted agent. Most importantly, literacy for Freire is inherently a political project in which men and women assert their right and responsibility not only to read, understand and transform their own experiences, but also to reconfigure their relationship with wider society. (Giroux, 1987, p. 7)

Freire's work presents a view of literacy which differs markedly from the positions typically espoused by politicians, reading psychologists, most adult literacy programme planners and many literacy studies theorists. 'Literacy', for Freire, implies not merely the acquisition of print skills but the development of a particular *mode of social being*, grounded in reflective, dialogical, transformative action. Being *critically* literate, in a Freirean sense, demands an attempt to contest prevailing conditions of oppression and the (dominant) ideas which support such circumstances. This critical commitment must be constantly renewed afresh, given an ever changing world. A narrative of hope is always possible, whatever difficulties lie ahead, provided the will to challenge and to change remains.

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NOTES

- [1] The 1970 version of the text was published by Herder and Herder. All references in the present paper will be to the Penguin edition (Freire, 1972a).
- [2] Perhaps the best efforts thus far is Taylor (1993).
- [3] On the myriad senses in which education and literacy might be said to be 'political' see Shor (1993).

- [4] In *We make the Road by Walking* it is noted that while illiterates now have the right to vote in Brazil, they are not permitted to stand for political office (see Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 84).
- [5] For an extended discussion of conscientisation see Roberts (1996d).
- [6] In the last two decades of his life Freire had a great deal to say about what it means to take a critical stance in the act of *reading*, but he said rather less about what it might mean to be engaged in critical *writing*. This remains an under-theorised aspect of his work and an area ripe for philosophical inquiry.

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