

Manuscript of Jan 5<sup>th</sup>, 1993

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## Paulo Reglus Neves Freire A Profile

1. Paulo Freire was born in Recife, the capital of Brazil's Northeast, the most impoverished area of this large Latin American nation. Although raised in a middle-class family, Freire got interested in the education of the wretched of his region. He qualified at the bar and developed a teaching "system" for all levels of education. He was imprisoned twice in his own country and became famous outside. Today Paulo Freire must be considered as the best known educator of our time.

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

This "system" caused Freire's exile in 1964, following 75 days in prison, after being accused of being a "revolutionary and an ignorant." He then spent four years in Chile and one year in the United States. In 1970 he moved to Geneva where he worked for the World Council of the Churches. In 1980 he returned to Brazil to "re-learn" his country.

Paulo Freire published a vast collection of books which were translated into 18 languages. More than 20 universities throughout the world have conferred on him the "Dr. honoris causa" title. His most popular publication, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", is dedicated to the wretched of the world and to those who identify, suffer and fight with the impoverished.

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

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

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



## 2. Key Experiences

### 2.1. Recife / Jaboatão: Early Impressions and Influences

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

Looking back to the strong position of the father in Brazilian middle-class families, Freire often remarked that his father was always ready to dialogue with his family and that he brought up his children with authority, but also with understanding (Freire, 1978a, p.2). Was this the early introduction to a certain outlook on communication?

The father taught Paulo the alphabet even before the boy went to school by taking a piece of wood and painting words from the cultural universe of the child in the sand. He then cut them into syllables and reunited them to words. Was this the foreshadowing of a future "method" of literacy training?

During the world economic crisis 1928-1932, the Freires tried to uphold the standards of middle-class life, but the mother had at times great difficulties to provide for the family. They moved to the province, the small city of Jaboatao, where life was less costly. As a result, Freire lost two years of secondary school. He was considered a mediocre student until he graduated from high school. At the age of 20 he began to study law but his studies were interrupted several times due to economic reasons. He had to earn his living and to contribute to the family's finances very early.

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

In 1944 Freire married Elza Maria Oliveria, a primary school teacher. In his autobiographical notes he remarks that she was "catholic like him" (Freire/Bondy, 1975, p. 12). She encouraged him in his systematical discussion of pedagogical questions. Her influence on his practical and scholarly work until her sudden death in 1986 can hardly be underestimated.

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



administration.

In SESI's kindergartens and schools Freire tried to involve students and parents in discussions about educational and societal problems. Working with children meant for him also considering their social and family environment. Problems like malnutrition and child work could only be solved with the involvement of the parents.

In the framework of so called "Worker-Clubs" Freire and his colleagues tried to encourage the industrial labour force, to "discuss about their individual problems and also general topics" (FREIRE, 1959, p. 15). The workers should not leave the responsibility for solving their problems with the institution SESI. They should try themselves to overcome difficulties and hindrances. The aim of such a work was to "integrate the workers into the historical process" and to "stimulate him to the individual organisation of his life in the community" (Freire, 1959, p. 17).

In spite of the restrictions of SESI's institutional environment Freire showed that the principles of dialogue, "parliamentarisation" and self-governing could be realised partially inside the institutional boundaries. These three principles should be exercised to reach "real democratisation" in Brazil" (Freire, 1959, p. 15).

In addition to his job in SESI Freire was working in other contexts to help with the "democratic awakening" of Brazil. Influenced by the Catholic thinker Alceu de Amoroso Lima and the "new school" pedagogue, Anísio Teixeira, he worked in several parishes in Recife with mainly Catholic-influenced, grass-roots initiatives. In this context we can see, for example, the project which he organised with clerics and lay persons of the parish "Casa Amarela" in Recife. In this project seven pedagogical units of the parish, from kindergarten to adult education, worked together in curriculum development and teacher education. The results of this work would be shared with other groups that should be encouraged to work together in organisation and content. Freire called this kind of union "parliamentarisation of the participants" (FREIRE, 1959, p. 129). Techniques like study groups, action groups, roundtable-discussions, debates and the distribution of themed flash cards were always practised in this kind of work. In this way his collaborators and he himself started to talk of a "system" of educational techniques, the "Paulo Freire System" which could be applied to all levels of formal and non-formal education (Maciel, 1963). Later in the seventies and eighties his technique for literacy work, one element in the system, was interpreted under the heading "Paulo Freire Method" and "conscientização" as a 'passpartout' to revolution. For this reason he stopped mentioning these terms, emphasising the political character of education and its necessary "reinvention" in different historical circumstances (e.g. Freire, 1985a, p.171)

## 2.2. At the university

Paulo Freire's efforts for reforms in the education field and his



activities in the SESI and in the lay persons movement of his Catholic Church earned him a part-time teaching appointment for pedagogics at the "Universidade de Recife" (Freire 1971, p. 499). The bodies of the university wanted to work together with a man, who had experience and reformist ideas, so that they could become known in other places, for example at the University of Recife, in the School of Fine Arts (1955).

The political life of the 50's and early 60's in Brazil was labelled "Appearance of the People" by the defenders of an authentic development model for Brazil. This group of intellectuals including Hélio Jaguaribe, Anísio Teixeira, Roland Corbisier, Alvaro Vieira Pinto based their ideas on European sociologists and philosophers like Karl Mannheim, Karl Jaspers, Gunnar Myrdal and Gabriel Marcel) gathered around the "Higher Institute for Brazilian Studies" (ISEB) in Rio de Janeiro. In the university Freire had more contact with this and other political trends of the time. Following his activities in the Catholic lay persons movement he also read increasingly the authors of the Catholic left like Jacques Maritain, Thomas Cardonnel, Emmanuel Mounier and their radical Brazilian interpreters such as Alceu de Amoroso Lima, Henrique Lima Vaz, Herbert José de Souza and others.

The Catholic Students Club (JUC) was one of the most radical organisation in that period of social and political upheaval. The students demanded fundamental reforms in university, health and social services and housing (de KADT, 1970, p. 62 ). Contrary to former times, when the students only proposed resolutions, they now visited the slums to discuss the problems of the inhabitants and started campaigns (PAIVA, 1973) to overcome the miserable circumstances of daily life.

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

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

This eclecticism and - in my judgement - "theory" requirements imposed upon him by the then dominant university culture at his home university may explain the Freirean tendency to obfuscate his practical work through "leaden philosophical prose" (Boston, 1972, p.87). His writing style thus creates confusion among his readers. His influence is greatest whenever he appears personally and gives lectures and courses, thus gaining a dedicated group of followers willing to experiment and continue the spirit of his work. In this way his kind of prestige is similar to that of many other great educators of our century, e.g.



Montessori (cf. Röhrs, 1982, p.528). They "reinvented" education in their various historical times as art, science and policy (Freire, 1981a).

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

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

Nevertheless, Freire got the opportunity to continue his work at the university because of his friendship with João Alfredo Gonçalves da Costa Lima who first was vice-chancellor and chancellor of the University of Recife since 1962. Freire became special councillor for student relations and later in 1962, Director of the Extension Service of the university.

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

Paulo Freire worked in the education department as the co-ordinator for the projects of adult education. He enthusiastically supported the initiative for the MCP-founding and celebrated the "movement" euphemistically as an "action of the people". It turned out however, that the Catholic, Protestant, and Communist militants inside MCP, interpreted their educative and organisational tasks differently. A primer for literacy work with adults caused a conflict in Freire's department relating to the process of instruction and cultural awareness-raising (Gerhardt, 1978, p.65)

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



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

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

- The convictions and opinions, i.e. the curriculum must come directly from the people and must be elaborated by them; yet
- the convictions and opinions should not contradict the transition phase, which along with the analysis of ISEB and the Catholic Radicals Brazil was experiencing at that time (Freire, 1961, p.24).

However, Freire did not succeed in conveying his message. Parts of MCP started to work with the directive approach, basing itself on the Leninist party doctrine. Thirty years later Freire would experience a similar conflict. As a consequence, Freire reduced his collaboration within MCP and began to elaborate on his own ideas with the help of his staff at the University Extension office.

Taking for granted peoples' inborn talent for reason, he had already experimented with the people's visual and auditory sensory domains while they learn to read and to write. In one of his first experiments he talked to his illiterate house maid about a slide that projected a boy and the Portuguese word for boy (= menino) on the wall. Covering again and again single syllables of the word and repeating the word "menino", Freire observed that Maria noticed the lack of syllables and thus "learned" that the word was composed of syllables (Freire, 1970e, p.9).

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

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

Freire began to experiment with his new approach to literacy training in a cultural circle which he himself co-ordinated as monitor and whose members he knew personally. In his publications, interviews, and lectures, Freire only talks sporadically, quoting single members'



sayings, about the first application of this literacy method in the "Centro de Cultura 'Dona Alegarina'", a MCP- "cultural circle" for discussions of every day problems in the borough of "Poço da Panela" in Recife (Gerhardt, 1978).

### 2.3. Success

Freire reports that as early as in the 21st hour of literacy training, one participant was able to read simple newspaper articles and write short sentences. The slides particularly created great interest and contributed to the participants' motivation. After 30 hours (one hour at five days per week) the experiment was brought to an end. Three participants had learned how to read and write. They could read short texts and newspapers and write letters. Two participants had quit (Freire, 1963, p.19; Freire, 1974a, p.58). Thus, Freire's "method" of literacy training was born.

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

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

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



government of João Goulart (Manfredi, 1976).

Although, already national co-ordinator of the literacy tide within the rapidly spreading Popular Education Movement in his country, Freire was well aware of the pitfalls the national implementation of his and other grass-roots approaches to literacy could cause. The meager outcomes of a pilot-campaign in Brasília (Gerhardt, 1978) clearly pointed towards the dilemma of the now nation-wide famous educator whose "cultural action for freedom" was difficult to implement within the state-run educational system.

The overthrow of the federal government by Brazilian military forces in March 1964, stopped the great experiment (Skidmore, 1967). Freire's second chance on a high administrative post would arrive but 25 years later and pose the same dilemma to him and his collaborators.

### 3. Exile

Imprisoned two times by the military for his "subversive method", the Bolivian embassy was the only one that accepted Paulo Freire as a political refugee. The Bolivian government itself contracted his services as an educational consultant for the Ministry of Education. Yet twenty days after his arrival in La Paz, he witnessed his second coup d'état against the reformist government of Paz Estensoro.

#### 3.1. Chile

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

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

In this period Freire analysed the question of the "rural extension". The result was a book ("Extensión o Comunicación?", first edition by ICIRA in Spanish in 1969) about the communication structure between the



technician and the peasant in the developing agrarian society. He opposed the concepts of extension of culture and the concept of communication about culture. For him the first one is "invading" while the second promotes consciousness. He points out that the interaction between the peasant and the agronomist should promote dialogical communication. One cannot learn if the new knowledge is contradictory to one's context. The educator-agronomist who does not know the world of the peasant cannot attempt to change the latter's attitude. The incipient intention was to emphasise the principles and fundamentals of an education that promotes the practice of liberty. This practice is not to be reduced to a simple technical support but includes man's effort to decipher himself and the other (Freire, 1969d).

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

### 3.2. USA

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

At Harvard he worked as a professor at the Center for the Study of Development and Social Change. There he gave a definite shape to his book "Cultural Action for Freedom" (1970) in which he contrasted sharply his idea of cultural action with cultural imperialism, a theme that he was able to study concretely in the USA. Half a year later he became consultant to the newly installed "Bureau for Educational Questions" of the World Council of Churches and served, e.g. as educational adviser for the Third World governments.

Only after 1970 did Freire's pedagogical theory and practice become recognised world-wide. In exile Paulo Freire wrote his most famous books, "Education: The Practice of Freedom" (Freire, 1974a) and "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (Freire, 1970d). The first is a compilation of ideas previously published in various articles and in his doctoral thesis (1959). He advances a pedagogical proposal for Brazil in the transition phase from the colonial agrarian society to an independent and industrialised one. The three main problems of this phase industrialisation, urbanisation and illiteracy of the rural and urban



masses have to be overcome with the construction of this new society. Democracy had to be learned by practising it (Freire, 1974a).

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

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

There are several epistemological claims in Freire's first Brazilian phase until 1964, particularly in connection with the concept of critical transitivity: (1) the development and exercise of critical consciousness is the product of "critical educational work;" (2) the task of education as instrument of the process of development of consciousness depends on two basic attitudes and activities: criticism and dialogue; (3) critical consciousness is typical of societies with a truly democratic structure. These claims depend on the assumption according to which "human reason" is fully enabled for the discovery of "truth". With this assumption he had been successful in developing his own approach to literacy training.

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

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



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

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

### 3.3. Geneva - Africa

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

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

Freire was very pleased when in 1975 he and the IDAC-team received the invitation of Mário Cabral, then Minister of Education in Guinea-Bissau, in order to contribute to the development of a national literacy program. As a result of this collaboration a great amount of learning occurred among the IDAC-team, the teachers, the learners and the



administrators of the educational system in this small African country. The deficiency of the material resources, the low performance of certain teachers, the remainders of the old ideology intervening in the development process of the country, were all well recorded, studied, and examined (Gerhardt, 1981). Africa gave back to Paulo Freire and his collaborators the practical field for new experiences they had longed for (Freire, 1977a).

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

Between 1975 and 1980, Freire also worked in São Tomé and Príncipe, Mozambique, Angola and Nicaragua (Assmann, 1980) always not only as a technician but also as a militant who combined his commitment with the cause of liberation with the love for formerly oppressed people. The African state of São Tomé and Príncipe, newly liberated from the Portuguese colonisation, entrusted Freire with a program to promote literacy. The results of this program were above expectations. Four years later, Freire received a letter from the education minister stating that 55% of the students enrolled in the schools were no longer illiterate as well as the 72% who had already graduated (Gadotti, 1969). These results were the nearly same as in the small culture circle "Poço de Panela" mentioned above.

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

#### 4. Back in Brazil

Freire arrived in Brazil when the Popular Education Movement, which he had helped to establish in the early sixties was going to have its second period of influence in a time of economic crisis and the consequent willingness of the military rulers to relinquish power. Freire had to "relearn" his country. But soon he was able to discover the same social actors as in the sixties yet with different political influence.

Brazil's working class, which during the military rule (1964 - 1984) had to carry the main burden of the "Brazilian Miracle" and which is still suffering from the "Brazilian Debt Crisis", seems to be better organised and works on political projects of its own. Included among them is the foundation of a new political party, the Worker's Party (PT). Paulo Freire became in 1980 one of its founding members.



The middle class (shattered by considerable income losses) once again radicalised, joined forces with the working class, and turned out to be the most active proponent of re-democratisation in the country (1978 - 1984).

The National Bourgeoisie, in the majority, had collaborated with the military government, a collaboration that had already begun before 1964 because of the overly vigorous advancement of the popular movement. They once again tried to play an important and more independent role in the economy and politics; yet always with a fearful eye towards their international counterparts, especially in the USA. As in the fifties and early sixties, the National Bourgeoisie normally does not take part in the educational enterprise. Their support consists mainly of a political and financial backing.

Today, all three social strata contribute in their way to Brazil's Popular Education Movement, moulding once again its form and defining its ends (Gerhardt, 1986).

Freire was invited by the Catholic University of São Paulo and by the State University of São Paulo in Campinas to become professor in their respective educational departments. His academic activities soon developed parallel to more political ones as, e.g. President of the Wilson Pinheiro Foundation sponsored by the PT. He associated himself also with a small organisation of dedicated educationists in the line of the early IDAC days, called "Varela". Through these institutions and organisations Freire achieved once again the linkage between theoretical and practical work which he defends in his writings. The Ecclesiastical Base Communities, neighbourhood association, the feminist movement and ecological associations along with Freire's analysis are today's cornerstones of the actual transition phase in Brazil. Although he would soon take once again political responsibility on a PT ticket and before had counselled the Secretariats of Education in numerous cities of Brazil, he maintained his scepticism about overcoming tendentially sectarian party structures at the right and at the left. Political parties seem not to be able to collaborate closely with the aforementioned social movements in tackling the impacts of unemployment, lack of housing, limited health or educational infrastructure. He advocated once again an "Education as the Practice of Freedom", with educators and politicians who say yes to risk taking and to adventure, who say yes to the future and to the present and who deal critically with the present (Freire, 1991, p.32).

In the municipal election of 1988 the Workers Party (PT) won the majority of the votes in the city of São Paulo. The new mayor, Luiza Erundina de Sousa, appointed Paulo Freire Secretary of Education at January 3, 1989 (Freire, 1991). Freire resigned two years later on May 27, 1991, to resume academic activities, lecturing and writing. His former Chief of Cabinet, Mário Sérgio Cortella, succeeded him. The PT-administration lost the November 1992 municipal election. A former military-appointed mayor of São Paulo won in free elections the majority of the votes of a population that consists mainly of workers, a quarter of them unemployed, and middle class people. What went wrong with the



"conscientização" process in the few years of an educational administration à la Freire?

In his evaluation Torres (1991, p.36) analyses somewhat cryptically: "Very often, technical competence in the context of politically feasible and eventually workable educational reforms is at its odds with ethical principles upholding beliefs in social justice and fairness for everyone in the context of political and economic democracies. Sometimes, politically feasible reform projects based on an ethics of democratic compassion lack technical expertise, rendering failure inevitable. Finally, technically competent and ethically correct democratic projects may not be politically feasible or workable, remaining in the realm of illusions, dreams or the unconscious of practitioners, teachers and policy makers".

Like 30 years before in Recife, Popular Education within the boundaries of state-run institutions did not arrive to a fruitful end. Different ideologies within the ruling party (PT), difficult working relationships between public sectors and social movements, the unsolved relation between an unchanged superstructure and educational reform (Secretaria Municipal de Educação, 1989) and the necessary "reinvention of power" (Freire, 1975, p.179) had been the problems to be dealt with. Other radical educators will have to continue where Freire and his team in São Paulo stopped.

## 5. Conclusion

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

Freire's educational system and philosophy of education has its bearings on a myriad of philosophical currents, such as Phenomenology, Existentialism, Christian Personalism, Humanist Marxism and Hegelianism a detailed delineation of which would have exceeded the frame of this profile. He participated in the import of European doctrines and ideas to Brazil, assimilated them to the need of a specific socio-economic situation and thus expanded and refocussed them in a thought-provoking way even for the intellectuals and educational thinkers of Europe and North-America.

To the anger of many more traditional academics in the First World



(Berger, 1974, p.136; Boston, 1972, p.87; Griffith, 1972, p.67; London, 1973, p.56) his philosophy and "system" became so current and universal that the "generative themes" he advanced have remained at the centre of educational debates in critical pedagogy for the last three decades (Torres, 1991, p.5). At least since his exile, the scope of his work transcended the boundaries of Third World countries (Schulze, 1989; Dabisch et. al., 1991), a limitation which Giroux, in general sympathetic to Freire's approach still suggested in 1981 (p.139).

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

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

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

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