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PAULO FREIRE: A HOMAGE

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Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Reglus Neves Freire, was born in Recife, Brazil, on September 19, 1921, and died of heart failure in São Paulo, Brazil on May 2, 1997. Paulo was our friend, a wonderful and spiritual man who inspired a whole generation of critical educators. He was a pedagogue who expanded our perceptions of the world, nourished our will, enlightened our awareness of the causes and consequences of human suffering, and about the need to develop an ethical and utopian pedagogy for social change. His death has left us with memories of his gestures and passionate voice, his white bearded face resembling a prophet, and his marvelous Socratic books.

After Paulo's short-lived career as a lawyer, he turned to teaching Portuguese in secondary schools (1941-1947). He later worked in adult education and workers' training, at SESI - Industrial Social Service - (1947-1957) and became the first Director of the Department of Cultural Extension of the University of Recife (1958-1964). Paulo quickly gained international recognition for his experiences in literacy training in the Brazilian Northeast, particularly the experience of literacy training in Angicos, Rio Grande do Norte, that led the populist government of João Goulart to appoint him in 1963 as President of the National Commission on Popular Culture. After the military coup d'état of 1964, he was considered a dangerous political pedagogue, was put in jail for seventy days and was later forced into a fifteen-year exile. Beginning with a short stay in Bolivia, he then went to Chile where he spent five years working for international organization in the context of the Christian Democratic Agrarian Reform movement. After a short teaching at Harvard in 1969, Paulo Freire moved to Geneva to be an special educational adviser to the World Congress of Churches. He worked in Geneva for a decade and finally returned to Brazil in 1979 when the Brazilian military government lifted his travel restrictions.

In addition to this description of his life, it is important that we understand his political philosophy of education and his life-time obsession with integrating theory, research and praxis. Domination, aggression and violence are an intrinsic part of human and social life. Paulo argued that few human encounters are exempt from oppression of one kind or another because by virtue of race, class or gender, people tend to be victims and/or perpetrators of oppression. He stressed that racism, sexism or class exploitation are the most salient forms of dominance and oppression, but he also recognized that oppression exists on the grounds of religious beliefs, political affiliation, national origin, age, size, and physical and intellectual handicaps.

Paulo, starting from a psychology of oppression influenced by the works of psychotherapists such as Freud, Jung, Adler, Fanon and Fromm, developed a

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"Pedagogy of the Oppressed." He believed that education could improve the human condition, counteracting the effects of a psychology of oppression, and ultimately contributing to what he considered the ontological vocation of humankind: humanization. In the introduction to his widely-acclaimed *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he argued that: "From these pages I hope at least the following will endure: my trust in the people, and my faith in men and women and in the creation of a world in which it will be easier to love". *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which has been influenced by a myriad of philosophical currents including Phenomenology, Existentialism, Christian Personalism, Marxism and Hegelianism, calls for dialogue and ultimately conscientization as a way to overcome domination and oppression among and between human beings. Interestingly enough, one of the last books that Paulo wrote, *Pedagogy of Hope*, offers an appraisal of the conditions of implementation of his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in our days.

Paulo Freire was known as a philosopher and theoretician of education, never separating theory from praxis. He attempted to implement his educational philosophy on diverse occasions, including his famous experience as adviser to the revolutionary government of Guinea-Bissau in the mid-seventies that resulted in one of his most popular books, *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau*. Back in Brazil, his appointment as Secretary of Education of the City of São Paulo in January 1989 created an unique opportunity for him to implement his ideas in his own country. When the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Worker's Party or PT) won the Municipal elections in São Paulo in 1988, a natural choice for the Secretary of Education was Paulo Freire, a well-known Brazilian socialist pedagogue, one of the originators of popular education in Latin America who also inspired the constitution of Theology of Liberation. A member of the party since 1979, and President of the PT-sponsored Fundação Wilson Pinheiro (a sort of worker's university), Secretary of Education Paulo Freire took charge of 654 schools with 700,000 students, and also engaged in adult education and literacy training in the City of São Paulo, one of the megalopolis of Latin America. The reverberations of his policy work are still felt in São Paulo due to the implementation of many of the innovations of his administration in curriculum, teacher training, school governance and literacy training which linked social movements with the state.

Throughout his life, Paulo became one of the most recognized pedagogues associated to progressive causes, to the educational New Left and to Critical Pedagogy. Given the wide range of his philosophical and educational contributions, the impact of Freire's work cannot be restricted to literacy training or adult education. Problem-posing education, or the methodology for thematic research, two of the main theoretical and methodological innovations resulting from Freire's work, have been implemented not only in social studies and curriculum studies in adult education, secondary education and higher education, but also in such diverse subjects as the teaching of mathematics and physics, educational planning, feminist studies, romance languages, educational psychology, and so forth.

His work has been the subject of hundreds of Ph.D. dissertations during the past decades. The increasing bibliographies of his work are now amounting to thousands of references, from those who implemented any aspect of Freire's proposals to those who critically argue against them. He received dozens of *Honoris Causa* doctorates from universities all over the world and numerous prizes, including UNESCO's Peace Prize in 1987. The Association of Christian Educators of the United States gave Freire and his late wife Elza the prize of outstanding Christian educators in 1985.

No doubt, future generations of educators will turn to Paulo's work for guidance and inspiration. Fortunately, before his death, he collaborated actively with the Paulo Freire Institute in São Paulo in producing what is a key source of information about his life and work: Moacir Gadotti, et al., *Paulo Freire: Uma Biobibliografia* (São Paulo, Brazil, Cortez Editora, UNESCO, and Instituto Paulo Freire, 1996). While arrangements for translation of this book into English and other languages are being made, the legacy of Paulo Freire's work, and many of his own writings and videos, can be found in the holdings of the Paulo Freire Institute.

The Paulo Freire Institute was created at the suggestion of Paulo Freire himself on April 12, 1991, after a lecture at the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, at UCLA, in Los Angeles. In conversation with Moacir Gadotti and Carlos Alberto Torres, Paulo Freire suggested to us, urged to us the creation of the Paulo Freire Institute congregating scholars and critics of his pedagogy, in a permanent dialogue that would foster the advancement of new educational theories and concrete interventions in reality. This is exactly the focus of the work of the Paulo Freire Institute, which is carried out by 21 scholarly nuclei located in 18 countries.

Today, the Paulo Freire Archives are located in São Paulo and include many of Freire's original documents. At the Institute we are dedicated to maintaining alive and active the legacy of Paulo Freire, primarily through a critical and systematic study of his work through research and professional development, and in dialogue with other authors.

Paulo Freire had a genuine passion for the debates and discussions that occur daily at the Institute in São Paulo. A few days before his death, we were discussing various projects planned for the development of the Paulo Freire Institute, which represented for him a discussion space and a way to search for new educational perspectives, among them the "Citizen School". He had intended to give various courses, including one for foreign students. He told us that he felt his international trips were becoming increasingly difficult and that he felt it better that foreign students who wanted to dialogue with him would be welcome in the Institute. He died at the peak of his intellectual production, with an unfinished book and many projects.

What legacy did Paulo Freire leave us?

In the first place, Paulo Freire leaves us with a life, his biography. Paulo enchanted us with his tenderness, his sweetness, his charisma, his coherence, his commitment and his seriousness. His words and actions were words and actions of struggle for a world "*menos feio, menos malvado, menos desumano*," (less

ugly, less cruel, and less inhumane) as he used to always tell us. Living from the perspective of love and hope, he also leaves us a legacy of indignation about injustice, which he used to say we could not speak about with sugar-coated words. In addition to the testimony of a life of commitment to the cause of oppressed peoples, he leaves us with an immense body of work, transmitted through many editions of books, articles and videos which are found throughout the world.

Why did his pedagogy have such success?

Because his "pedagogy of dialogue" did not humiliate the student or anyone else. A conservative pedagogy humiliates students and the pedagogy of Paulo Freire gave students dignity. It placed the teacher at their side, with the task of orienting and directing the educational process but as a being that, like the student, was also in the act of searching. The teacher was also a learner... this is also the legacy of Paulo Freire.

Through the development of his theory of education, Paulo Freire succeeded, on one hand, in demystifying the dreams of the educators active in the 1960s who, at least in Latin America, expected the schools to do everything and, on the other, overcoming the pessimism of 1970s when schools were viewed as merely reproducing the status quo. In doing this overcoming naive pedagogy and negative pessimism - he was able to keep true and loyal to a vision of utopia, dreaming possible and attainable dreams.

Several generations of educators, anthropologists, social scientists and political scientists, and professionals in the sciences and business, felt Freire's influence and helped to construct a pedagogy based in liberation. What he wrote became a part of the lives of an entire generation that learned to dream about a world of equality and justice, that fought and continues to fight for this world today. Many will continue his work, even though he did not leave behind 'disciples.' In fact, there could be nothing less Freirean than the idea of a disciple, a follower of ideas. He always challenged us to 'reinvent' the world, pursue the truth, and refrain from copying ideas. Paulo Freire leaves us with roots, wings, and dreams.

Years ago one of us said that in the confusion of today's world, educators can be with Freire or against Freire, but not without Freire. His life taught us the meaning of honesty, decency, creativity and struggle. His death taught us so many things that cannot be captured in a sentence. And even if Paulo is no longer with us, we remember him and are grateful for his life, his work and the inspiration which they represent.

The real legacy of Paulo Freire is not to be found in his books, nor in his library, but in his commitment to the oppressed. Now more than ever the members of the Paulo Freire Institute are convinced of the need to continue Freire's commitment to the wretched of the earth. This is the only legacy that counts.

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PS: For more information about the life and work of Paulo Freire and about the Instituto Paulo Freire, contact the home page: <http://www.ppr.com/ipf>