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InstitutoPauloFreire

## **The Paulo Freire University (UNIFREIRE)**

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### **PREAMBLE**

Having surged in the context of a society that had in its rural activities centralization- the mode of feudal production- the University represented yet another step in human liberation, meaning, one of the victories of the burghers in their itinerary of resistance against the domination of the feudal landowner. Originally, it attended to the necessity of corporative organization of "minorities"- that is how they considered the habitants of the urban concentrations that lived under the dependency of the landowner's domain. In fact, the activities of the artisans exercised a marginal role in the feudal economy.

The word university- universitas- was used in the Middle Ages to designate whatever corporative assembly, be it of cobblers or carpenters. It was never used in the absolute sense, in the way that the expression University of Bologna, for example, was just a comfortable abbreviation of the expression the University of Masters and Students of Bologna (PONCE, 1998: 97).

The "Feudal Rebirth" of the XIII<sup>th</sup> century determined an ample movement of the ascending class- the burghers- whose demands forced the Church to exteriorize its pedagogic tariffs, that were earlier turned towards the formation of their own frame of monastic schools. The appearance of the chatedral schools responded, therefore, to the initial necessity of the corporative organization of masters and apprentices, nevertheless, still under the control of the diverse fractions of the dominant class in the European social feudal formations. The majority of the medieval universities were derived from them.

That is how the university and its matriarchal denominations were born in the occidental world- be it the predecessor to studium generale or a definitive universitas studiorum- it already denounced its transnationality. It arose in history in the scene of the mode of feudal production, in the context of the corporative movement, institutionalizing itself, for the time being, as a corporation of masters and a corporation of apprentices (students).

Still today the supremacy of the university cradle is discussed: Paris, Salerno, Bologna? Nevertheless, it is not discussed that the genesis of the latter was impregnated, at the same time, with the democratic and super-national spirit. In fact, history of education scholars are unanimous in affirming that, if it was not the first in chronological order, the University of Bologna was the oldest university organization in the etymological sense of the term: various "nations" of students would gather and hire teachers. In other words, the nationality differences of the apprentices surpassed the organization and institutionalization of the universitas.

Paulo Freire (1921-1997) was the educator of the end of the XX<sup>th</sup> century that stood out the most in defense of the oppressed and in raising of the flag of liberation through a pedagogical process in which the student and the educator are promoted as human beings in communion. His worldwide recognition found its highest expression in the promulgation of the "Paulo Freire Decade," by UNESCO, in the Global Conference of Education of Youth and Adults, realized in Hamburg in 1998.

For the time being, the University built itself in the occidental world, coincidentally, over the patronage of a few principals that are significant in the legacy of the ideas and actions of Paulo Freire and very dear to the freireans of the world. Amongst them a few deserve recognition:

- a) organization of the resistance of the oppressed minorities;
- b) overcoming differences of geopolitical origin;
- c) multiculturalism;
- d) commitment with the scientific rigor;
- e) in Bologna's particular case, the pedagogic initiative of the students which proclaim a reverse character to the instilled order from top to bottom, since it was referred to the "student initiative" instead of the "professor's initiative."

For this reason, there is nothing more emblematic than retaking, in a freirian perspective, the discussion of this secular institution, in Bologna, and from there, reviewing these almost 800 years of History, drinking from its most liberating fountains the sap that should nourish the concept of University, to be constructed in a context of technologic usury and is committed to the liberation of all of the people of the new millennium.

Paulo Freire himself, extracted in various moments in the last years of life, his worries with the "contingence of the individual and collective transcendence", and lulled the idea of constructing an organization to give continuity to his ideas, work, and action, when he is no longer in the world of the living. Thus, the Paulo Freire Institute was created with a group of educators. Although he was the inspiration and founder of the Institute and worked there intensely the last years of his life, he never occupied a directive charge and he placed himself as an institutional member, giving us yet another lesson of correct modesty.

The Paulo Freire Institute (IPF) grew a lot through the incorporation of educators of all continents, through the expression and dimension of its work in the area of education, culture, and communication, realizing surveys, studies, and investigations, publishing important works in the above mentioned areas, advising governmental institutions and non-governmental entities committed to the interests of the oppressed, developing and executing political-pedagogical projects expressly turned to the combat of all forms of discrimination, for the salvation of the planet, and for human liberation and promotion.

Meanwhile, the members of the Institute have been preoccupied with the formation of investigators and popular educators through the incorporation of the modern medium of communication at a distance in real time and with a profound scientific rigor, but without the formalities of the typical credentialism of the instituted forming agencies. From the beginnings of the IPF, the "Free Cathedra Paulo Freire" was created and gradually the idea evolved into the constitution of a real University. What is a university? A university is not a group of teachers and students; it is not a library, nor laboratories, or curriculum. A university should not be confused with walls, its equipment, and its sports teams. A university is a body of social and human relations. In short, a university is characterized by a spirit.

Paulo Freire did not leave behind as a legacy books, articles, or videos. He did not leave disciples as followers of his ideas. He left behind a spirit that today unites a body of people and institutions all over the world that we are now passing to denominate as The Paulo Freire University (UNIFREIRE). What is the Paulo Freire University? It is constituted by a network of freirean nucleases spread throughout the entire world and "linked" amongst themselves by the spirit of Paulo's legacy and the most actual means of communication, developing programs and projects on the formation of human resources for the education of the oppressed. It is a University founded in "the dream for a world less malicious, less ugly, less authoritarian, more democratic, more humane", according to Paulo Freire's own words and ideas that transcended borders and critically incorporated the idea of universal pedagogy, directing the action of numerous educators spread throughout the Planet as a testimony of the Paulo Freire Cathedras

and the Paulo Freire Forum that takes place every two years. His popular concept of education, elaborated in reflecting on the practice during various decades became, without a doubt, a great contribution in Latin American theory and in the educative practice of the of the entire world. The notion of learning parting from the knowledge of the subject and teaching parting from generative themes, education as an act of knowledge and social transformation, and the politicization of the pedagogic act are just a few of the elements that constitute the legacy of Paulo Freire, popular education, and critical universal pedagogy.

Paulo Freire's thought impregnated itself in numerous institutions and projects that value solidarity and reciprocity. An example is in the Escola Cidadã (School Citizen) Project of the Paulo Freire Institute. The theoretical concept and its practices developed according to the idea of Escola Cidadã constituted itself as a viable alternative to, on the one hand, the neo-liberal project of education, that is broadly hegemonic and based on market ethics, and on the other hand, the theory and practice of a bureaucratic education sustained by the "State". It is a school that looks to strengthen autonomously its political-pedagogic project, relating itself dialectically- not mechanically and subordinately- with the market, the State, and society. It aims to form citizens in order to control the market and the state. It is simultaneously public in its destination- this is for all- state funded in its finance and communitary in its gestation.

#### Bologna Charter

This is why we, participants of the II International Gathering of the Paulo Freire Forum, meeting in Bologna (Italy), from the 29<sup>th</sup> of March to the first of April of the year 2000, critically inspired in the legacy of its Patron and giving continuity to the commitments with the following principles, thesis, and procedures:

I- Work to constitute, in the Institution of Higher Education, closest to our place of residence or work, a nucleus of the Paulo Freire University (UNIFREIRE), turned to the formation of investigators and popular educators, committed to the cause of the oppressed, constructing a network of poles of critical revision of the role of the Universities of the new millennium,

II- This University turns itself for the formulation and concretization of the principles and dimensions of planetarity, the civilizing process, and the ethnicity of democracy. Because of this, there needs to be a transcendence of boundaries and "customs" created by gender, ethnic, national, economic, cultural, and political discrimination, overcoming physical limits, through the on-line culture and the use of a virtual presence that the modern means of communication place at our disposition for the configuration of a collective intelligence. It must surpass the barrier of time and alienation by rescuing and incorporating the contributions of critical pedagogy throughout History, envisioning the creation of the simultaneous university and, because of this, the university as a goal; it must denounce any and all threats to the relations commanded by ethics and finally, it must work to overturn the democracy that is limited to the rights of institutionalized politics, constructing an economic, social, and cultural democracy.

III- As cyberculture, more than the result of the best use of resources that electronica has placed at the disposition of telecommunications, it inserts itself today in the revolutionary and republican ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity" (LEVY, 1996) because it facilitates the universalization of the access of information and knowledge. UNIFREIRE will search to develop other procedures that will permit the construction of knowledge- confused in the actual institutions of learning with information and knowledge- once wisdom surges at the moment in which we are able to construct our own intelligence of the world, associating collected data through information and processes formulated by knowledge.

IV- Unifreireans will search to surpass the mistaken tendency of actual universities, the institutionalization of knowledge. UNIFREIRE will only use institutionalized knowledge as a point of departure, through the dynamic processes of the incorporation of popular wisdom and taking

the universal symbols of the construction of existence of the oppressed as the generative context of the pedagogic process.

V- UNIFREIRE will have as a goal the recuperation of the character of universitas of the institution, as a strategy to eclipse the corporative character that ended up predominating in itself, through the construction of the dimension of planetarity, opposite to globalism that is meant to create a project of the individualistic society; meritocratic, discriminatory, and exclusive.

VI- UNIFREIRE will be developed in the Superior line of Escola Cidadã (School Citizen), therefore inspired in the principle that information is a primary right, fundamental- the first of all rights- since without it we will not arrive at consciousness, and consequently, to the access of other rights. It is basic for the survival of all. This is why it should not be bought or sold, but made available to all. One of the functions of UNIFREIRE should be this availability, for the education of the future to be less exclusive, less regulated by the market games, by political interests, by the legislative and bureaucratic furor of credentialism, for it to be more democratic.

VII- Scientifically, UNIFREIRE does not consider as truth affirmations and "impartial" observations, because who affirms and observes always does it from a certain point of view. "It is an error to not have a certain point of view, but to absolutize it," as Paulo Freire used to say. The point of view of UNIFREIRE will be from the oppressed and excluded of the Earth.

VIII- If the formative practice of human resources should be, in a freirean perspective, impregnated in the universal ethics of the human being, UNIFREIRE condemns the exploration of the work force, any and all forms of immobilizing fatalism, a falsification of the truth, the illusion of the careless, any and all forms of violence- from the physical to the symbolic- attacks on the weak and defenseless, the perversion of purity in Puritanism, of ethics in moralism, of tolerance in conviviality and in complacency, the discriminatory manifestations of race, gender, and class; finally, any and all forms of domination, alienation, marginalization, and exclusion. Freirian ethic still implies a permanent search for coherence between proclamations and practices.

IX- If in the same perspective –freirean- "to teach is not to transfer knowledge but to create the possibilities for its production and construction" and if "who teaches learns in teaching and who learns teaches in learning", UNIFREIRE, as an institution of learning, observed the following methodological and pedagogic principles:

- a) learning proceeds teaching and teaching dilutes itself in the founding experience of learning;
- b) right thinking is that learning, not merely contents, is taught;
- c) right thinking is to be always in doubt, based on the observation of the world, with certainties themselves;
- d) ingenuous curiosity must substitute epistemological curiosity, this means that the approach of reality by the knowledge of pure experience must be progressively substituted by the methodologically rigorous approximation of the cognoscible object.

X- The members of UNIFREIRE recognize that of all of the titles and certifications of whom, formally or informally, concludes studies, investigations, and practices characterized by the principals contained in this Charter, who should decide over the legitimization and quality of these "certificates" is society and the learner. In other words, in the era of planetarized information will the need for diplomas still exist?

Bologna, 1<sup>st</sup> of April of 2000.