

Capítulo 1: Las corrientes filosóficas que fecundan la filosofía de Paulo Freire.

Postscriptum: La filosofía de Paulo Freire y la educación popular en América Latina.

Paulo Freire's meta-theoretical inquiry has anticipated, in many respects and for more than two decades, a new paradigm in educational research and practice. In fact, Freire has masterfully bridged the levels of totalities and individualities, of linking structures and action, and of overcoming the micro-macro divide in sociology of knowledge and education. He has always worked on two different lines of theoretical development, an evolving theory of agency and a historical perspective that emphasizes the dialectics of individuals and structures in constructing the material and symbolic dimensions of life. Even Freire himself will recognize that his understanding of subjectivity, experience and power bears some resemblance to certain strains of poststructuralist thought.¹

His theory of consciousness is based on a theory of domination. His project is a reconstructive integration of pedagogy of the Oppressed as pedagogy for decolonization of the lifeworld. At the same time, following the tradition of Dewey and Habermas, he discussed some of the perils of democracy (for instance massification, manipulation of the masses) in the context of populist societies. In his latter work, the crucial elements of domination by virtue of class or race are complemented with clear anti-sexist positions, linking class, race and gender in a complex synthesis.

His intellectual roots have explored different directions, and seem to be continuously evolving. Not by chance, many proponents of theories of agency will find echoes in Freire of Durkheim, Weber or Mannheim. Likewise proponents of theories of action will find at times, some of his analysis and themes, closer to phenomenology or symbolic interactionism. Finally, others will find reverberations of the works of Marx and particularly Antonio Gramsci, as part of Freire's heuristic framework.

Paulo Freire has been able to put together a synthetic yet dialectical approach to structures and social agency in education, and has done so at the level of meta-theory, that is to say, discussing the basic ontological commitments about the inherent nature of social reality, human individuals, history and society, and how that affects the relationships between knowledge, power and education.

For Freire, knowledge is a social construct, is a process and not merely a product. Thus, knowledge seen in terms of a dialectics of oppositions is fundamentally at odds with traditional-idealist and positivist epistemology.² Freire's pedagogy emerged as a critique of the traditional (authoritarian) educational paradigm, but also of its challenger in the region, positivist pedagogy, which was gaining ground in Latin America during the 50's and 60's.³ He proposes a non-authoritarian but directivist pedagogy for liberation. The teacher is at the same time a student, the student is at the same time a teacher; the nature of their knowledge may differ, however, but as long as education is the act of knowing and not merely transmitting facts, students and teachers share a similar status and are linked together through a pedagogical dialogue characterized by horizontal relationships. The educational agenda will not necessarily be carried out in a classroom but in a "culture circle." Emphasis is placed on sharing and reflecting critically upon learner's experience and knowledge, both as a source or rough material for analyzing the "existential themes" of critical pedagogy, and as an attempt to demystify existing forms of false consciousness.

Insofar as the state and the school system represent instances of mediation and control, pedagogues of liberation will develop a hermeneutics of suspicion of schools and perhaps, state institutions. More than twenty years of implementation of Freirean-like approaches show that they seek to design nonformal and NGO's sponsored educational ventures rather than working within schooling or state-sponsored institutions. It is only recently that the notion of public popular schooling has been advanced by Freirean pedagogues in the context of Brazilian debates of school autonomy.⁴ Not surprisingly,

many of the representatives of this pedagogy have worked, politically and professionally, within political parties, universities, and research centres as well as with organizations which have originated in/or are linked to churches. The overall proposal has been defined, ^{three} ~~two~~ decades ago, as conscientization.

The Portuguese word "conscientização," popularized by Freire in educational environments, has been translated as conscientization or critical consciousness in English. It was defined by Freire as follows: "The French "prise de conscience," to take consciousness of, is a normal way of being a human being. Conscientization is something which goes beyond the "prise de conscience." It is something which is starting from the ability of getting, of taking the "prise de conscience." Something which implies to analyze. It is a kind of reading the world rigorously or almost rigorously. It is the way of reading how society works. It is the way to understand better the problem of interests, the question of power. How to get power, what means not to have power. Finally, conscientizing implies a deeper reading of reality, [and] the common sense goes beyond the common sense".⁵

The implications of Freire's proposal for schooling are vast. Consider for example the idea of utilizing the needs of the communities as a prime material for the design of vocabulary for the literacy programs. To implement this community-base curriculum at the classroom, or to practice pedagogy as cultural politics,⁶ will simultaneously undermine the power of "curriculum experts," school administrators and state bureaucracy, while giving back to the individual teacher traditional craft the control over what goes on in the classroom.⁷ However, teachers' control will be in contradiction with the attempts to control curriculum and school practices by other segments of civil society (interest groups, business groups, social movements) or by bureaucratic categories in the state.

From the perspective of cultural politics, curriculum control and teachers autonomy become a dialectical venture that could eventually overhaul the very same

school organization and administration. Obviously, in the context of debates over school excellence for international competitiveness vis a vis equality of educational opportunity or proposals stressing adapting schools to the needs of industry and marketplace, the research and policy agenda of liberating pedagogy will be disruptive of any school "ethos" based on the premises of corporate culture and the technical discourse of managerialism.

Paulo Freire's life and thought is intimately related to the history of popular education in Latin America. As demonstrated in chapter 2 of this book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed influenced the origins of participatory action research in Latin America. Participatory action research received important contributions from social sciences outside the region. For instance, the Frankfurt School (Habermas, Adorno) questioned the conventional social research approach based on positivist and empiricist assumptions. Dialectic, Phenomenological, and hermeneutical views suggested different epistemological foundations for research and practices in education.

Participatory action research has been deeply inspired by Freire's thematic investigation and generative word methodologies. The object of thematic investigation is that of finding the generating themes or expressions of the word of the people, with the purpose of facilitating both, educational programming and developing a conscientizing cultural action.

In summary, the origins of participatory action research are related to the contribution of Paulo Freire, his critique of positivist and scientific pedagogy, and the method of thematic research. There is enough evidence to sustain that many of the projects of participatory action research have been developed within the popular education paradigm in Latin America, and both have been influenced by Paulo Freire's political philosophy of education and theory of knowledge.

Common features of popular education projects, are the following: First, they arise from a political and social analysis of the living conditions of the poor and their outstanding

problems (such as unemployment, malnourishment, poor health) and attempt to engage the poor in individual and collective awareness of those conditions. Second, they base their educational practice on collective and individual previous experiences (as previous knowledge), and they work in groups rather than on an individual basis. Third, the notion of education provided by these projects is related to the concrete skills or abilities that they try to instill in the poor . . . and these projects strive to arouse self-reliance among the participants. Finally, these projects can be originated by governments, as in Colombia and Dominican Republic or, as in Nicaragua, with the collectives of popular education, and they may be directed toward adults as well as children.⁸ Participatory action research projects are usually developed in the context of popular education, which is defined by Freire in the following terms: "Popular education postulates, then, as the effort of mobilizing and organizing the popular classes with the goal of creating a popular power."⁹

Paulo Freire has earned a place in the history of educational ideas. Plamenatz argued in 1975, referring to Marx that "The importance of a man's ideas consists in more than what he has succeeded in doing with them; it consists also in what can be done with them."¹⁰ Paulo seems to agree with this position and is continuously inviting us to reinvent his ideas and his program while, at the same time, and in his own words "exploring the Utopian possibilities and practices constitutive of liberatory pedagogy."¹¹

Notas de Pie de Página.

¹ Paulo Freire, Foreword, Peter McLaren y Peter Leonard, editors, Paulo Freire a Critical Encounter. Londres, Routledge, 1992.

² I use epistemology for its convenience. However, Freire's approach is more a theory of knowledge in general than a theory of scientific knowledge (thus epistemology) in particular.

³ The positivist or logical-empiricist approach to the human science is based on several premises including: 1) notions that theory and science can be defined in a unitary manner; 2) it is mostly based on a model of natural science; 3) hence it is based mostly on experimentation (or quasi-experimentation) and measurement; and 4) it is based on causal explanations, often connected to mathematical models or manipulation of statistical analyses.

⁴ Paulo Freire. A educação na cidade. São Paulo, Cortez Editora, 1991; Moacir Gadotti, Uma só escola para todos. Petrópolis, Vozes, 1990.

⁵ Conversation with Carlos Alberto Torres in Learning to Read the World, videotape, ACCESS Network, Edmonton, Canada, October 1990. Reproduced in French in Paulo Freire, L'education dans la ville. Paris: Paideia, 1991. See also Carlos Alberto Torres "From the 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' to 'A Luta Continua': The Political Pedagogy of Paulo Freire," in Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard (Eds.) Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter. London: Routledge, 1992: 119-145.

⁶ Henry A. Giroux, editor, Postmodernism, Feminism, and Cultural Politics. Redrawing Educational Boundaries. Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1991; Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren, editors Between Borders. Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies. New York y Londres: Routledge, 1994.

⁷ Jurgo Torres Santomé, El curriculum oculto. Madrid: Morata, 1992 [1991]; Peter McLaren, Schooling as a ritual performace. Towards a Political Economy of Educational Symbols and Gestures. Londres: Routledge, 1993 [1986]; Michael Apple. Official Knowledge. Democratic Education in a Conservative Age. New York: Routledge, 1993; Thomas S. Popkewitz, A Political Sociology of Educational Reform. Power/Knowledge in

Teaching, Teacher Education, and Research. New York, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1991.

⁸ Carlos Alberto Torres. The Politics of Nonformal Education in Latin America. New York: Praeger, páginas 9-10.

⁹ Paulo Freire, en R. M. Torres, Educación Popular. Una conversación con Paulo Freire. Quito, CECCA-CEDECO, 1986, página 59. Para un tratamiento detallado de este tema en Freire, véase Torres, 1990, páginas 110-111. Finalmente, consultese Moacir Gadotti y Carlos Alberto Torres, compiladores. Educación Popular. Crisis y Perspectivas. Buenos Aires, Miño y Dávila, 1993.

¹⁰ ~~M.~~ ^{Petrin} Plamenatz Karl Marx's Philosophy of Man. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, página 11.

¹¹ Paulo Freire, Foreword, Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard (editors) Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter. Londres: Routledge, 1993, página xii.

che on esta
reflexión. First
name of
author