



Paulo Freire was born in 1920 in Recife, Brazil. In 1947 he began work with adult illiterates in North-East Brazil and gradually evolved a method of work with which the word conscientização has been associated. Until 1964 he was Professor of History and Philosophy of Education in the University of Recife and in the 'sixties was involved in a popular education movement to deal with massive illiteracy. From 1962 there were widespread experiments with his method and the movement was extended under the patronage of the federal government so that in 1963-64 there were courses for co-ordinators in all Brazilian States and a plan was drawn up for the establishment of 2000 cultural circles to reach 2,000,000 illiterates!*

Freire was imprisoned following the 1964 coup d'état for what the "new order" considered the subversive elements in his teaching. He next appears in exile in Chile where his method was used and the U.N. School of Political Sciences held seminars on his work. In 1969-70 he was visiting Professor at the Center for the Study of Development and Social Change at Harvard. In 1970 he took up his post as special consultant, Office of Education, World Council of Churches, Geneva.

Professor Freire is married and has five children. His writings include a number of books and articles in Portuguese, French, Spanish and German. In English the Harvard Education Review (May and September, 1970) published 'Cultural Action for Freedom' and in November, 1970 Herder & Herder, New York, published 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed.'

This interview took place in Geneva, November 15th, 1970.

EDUCATION FOR AWARENESS

a talk with Paulo Freire

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RISK I have seen your new book, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In it the idea that education is either for the domestication of people or the liberation of people is a very clear theme. Would you like to explain that a little more?

FREIRE Yes – I think that – first of all it is important to emphasise the impossibility of a neutral education, because, in a general way and for the naïve consciousness, it is not something obvious. Nevertheless, in fact, it is impossible to have the neutrality of education just as it is impossible, for example, to have the neutrality of science. It means that no matter if we are conscious or not as educators, our praxis is either for the liberation of men – their humanisation, or for their domestication – their domination. Precisely because of this I think it is very important to make clear the different forms of action in the field of education in order to make possible our true option or choice. If my choice is a liberating one, a humanising one, it is necessary for me to be absolutely clear concerning the methods, the techniques, the processes, which I have to use when I am before the educatees. Generally, we think that we are working for men, and that is with men, for their liberation, their humanisation; nevertheless we are using the same methods through which we prevent men from becoming free. This is so precisely because we are introjecting in ourselves the myths which we received in our experience, in our schooling, and these myths are myths which make it impossible for us to develop a kind of action for freedom, for liberation. So it is not only necessary to know that it is impossible to have the neutrality of education, but it is absolutely necessary to define both these different and antagonistic actions. Thus, I need to analyse, to know, to distinguish these different ways in the field of education.

RISK Now, I think it is crucial for me to understand a little better what kinds of methods or actions, praxis, you see as liberating.

FREIRE Obviously, in order to answer this question I think that it is necessary to develop some reflections about, for example, the relationships between men and the reality of men in the world; or, in other words, the relationships between consciousness and the world. This might seem to be a kind of escape from the concrete facts, and that would be a kind of metaphysics, but really it is not. Recently I wrote a

paper for a meeting in Rome, in which I said that education for freedom, for liberation, must start from a kind of archaeology of consciousness.

RISK Would you like to explain a little more the phrase "archaeology of consciousness"?

FREIRE First of all we don't have "consciousness" here ^{in the old term}; that is, there is not this dichotomy between consciousness and the world. Second, "consciousness" is not something, some empty space, within man. Consciousness is intentionality towards the world. When I think in this way of an archaeology of consciousness, I am thinking that through the problematisation of the relationships between men and the world, it is possible for man to recreate, to re-make, the natural process through which consciousness appeared in the process of his evolution, precisely in the moment which Teilhard de Chardin calls "hominisation" in the evolution of man. When consciousness appears, there is reflection; there is intentionality towards the world. Man becomes different, essentially different, from animals. Man can now not only know, but can know that he is knowing.

RISK Would you see any connection between this way of approaching the problem and, say, the Freudian insight about psychoanalysis

— that to penetrate into one's unconsciousness is to discover oneself?

FREIRE In my point of view education for freedom implies constantly, permanently, the exercise of consciousness turning in on itself in order to discover itself in its relationships with the world,



trying to explain the reasons which can make the world. But it is not enough. It is important to point out that the reflection alone is not enough for the process of liberation. We need praxis or, in other words, we need to transform the reality in which we are. But, in order to transform reality, in order to develop my action upon reality, transforming it, it is necessary to know reality. Because of this my praxis is, necessarily and constantly, the unity between my action and my reflection.

RISK Now, this is an integral part of your thinking. I wonder if we could move from the more sophisticated area of your philosophy to something in the way of your own praxis, the kinds of things you were involved in which may have helped you perceive this understanding.

FREIRE In the beginning of my experience in Brazil, many years ago, even though I exercised a critical reflection on my action in this process of looking for ways of working, it was possible for me to reflect again on my last "reflection action" in order to theorise that "reflection action". So, first of all, I acted.

RISK Could you give an example?

FREIRE There is a very good example which I can give now. When I was thinking in Brazil concerning the possibility of developing a kind of method through which it was possible for men, for illiterates, to learn how to read and write easily, I thought, in my library, when I was studying and reflecting — I thought — and I have never said this before — for the first time I am saying it — I thought that the best way was not to challenge the critical mind — the critical consciousness of man, but (it is very interesting to note now the change which I made)... but to try to put into the consciousness of people some symbols associated with words without challenging

challenge them critically in order to rediscover the association between certain symbols and the words, and so, to apprehend the words. And I remember that I invited an old woman, a very good woman – a peasant, illiterate – she worked with us in our home – she was a cook; and one Sunday I told her, “Look, Maria” (that’s her name) “I am thinking to start a new way to help people who cannot read, how to read – and I need your help. Would you like to help me in this search?” She said, “Yes.” And I invited her to my library, and I projected a picture with a boy and under this picture it was written in Portuguese **menino**, which is boy, and I asked her, “Maria, what is this?” She said, “**Menino**, it’s a boy, a **menino**.” I projected another picture with the same **menino** but orthographically the word **menino** without the middle syllable – so **meno** instead of **menino** – and I asked her, “Maria, what is this?” She said, “**Menino**, again” and I asked her, “Maria, there is something missing?” And she said to me, “Oh yes, the middle is missing.” I smiled and I showed another picture with the same **menino**, but orthographically without the last syllable, **meni**, only **meni**, and I asked again, “Is something missing?” – “Yes, the last piece of this!” We discussed, we talked, more or less 15 minutes with different situations with **menino** – **menino**, **meno**, **nino**, **meni**, etc., and every time she captured the part, rather the lack of the part, of the word, and she told me, “Look, I am tired. It is very interesting, but I am tired.” She was able to work really all the day, but nevertheless with ten minutes, fifteen minutes of an intellectual exercise she became tired. It is normal. But she asked me, “Do you think that I was able to help you?” I said, “Yes. Yes you give me a great contribution. Because of you I have changed my way.” She said, “Thank you.” It is fantastic the capacity of love.

And then she left my library and in five minutes more she came back with a cup of coffee for me. Then immediately I stayed alone in my library re-thinking my first hypothesis and I said to myself – now use your reflection on that last experience. I discovered that the way really would be to challenge from the beginning the intentionality of consciousness, that is the capacity of reflection of consciousness, the active dimension of consciousness and not the other way in which I was thinking. So, I think that is a very good example – no? – in order to demonstrate how to act and to reflect constantly and to change in the process of the search in which we are engaged. So with this simple example with Maria, I became convinced that the way would be another way, I would have to challenge the critical consciousness from the beginning. Some days later, after this experience with Maria, I started with a group of five men, but this time challenging them in a critical way.

When I told you before that it is necessary to try a kind of archaeology of consciousness, I don’t want to say that it is necessary to invite people in order to discuss Chardin – in order to discuss the scientific dimensions of evolution! No, no, no! The archaeology of consciousness implies only to invite men who are at the naïve level of their consciousness, ideologised in a concrete reality in which they cannot express themselves, they cannot express the word, they don’t know that they can know! To invite them in order to discover that it is possible for them to know precisely because men can know that they are knowing.

RISK Now is this the process which is called conscientisation? Because this is a word which I think people don’t quite understand.

FREIRE Yes, it is one of the dimensions of the **conscientização** process. And it is important also to underline this in order to understand what **conscientização** really is, it is necessary to avoid two kinds of mistakes into which we can fall. First, the mistake of idealism, the mistake of the subjectivism, in which consciousness would be the creator of the world, that is of reality – we create a reality in our consciousness, consciousness creates the reality! The second mistake is a mistake in which we have only the objectivity, the hypertrophe of objectivity which implies the objectivism, that is, the exacerbation of the power of objectivity in creating or in conditioning consciousness – consciousness appears in the relationships between man and the world, and reality. Nevertheless, it is not only the reflex of reality, because it is reflective. No? So, both of these mistakes cannot illuminate the process of **conscientização**.

Only when we understand the “dialecticity” between consciousness and the world – that is, when we know that we don’t have a consciousness here and the world there, but on the contrary, when both of them, the objectivity and the subjectivity, are incarnating dialectically, it is possible to understand what is **conscientização** – and to understand the role of consciousness in the liberation of man. I think that it is very important to emphasise this aspect, because many times people think that I am defending a kind of idealism, that I am here writing, thinking, saying, that men can liberate themselves in their consciousness yet it is impossible and I never said it. What I say is that if reflection itself alone is not enough for the process of the liberation of men, because we need action, so action itself alone cannot do it, precisely because man is not only action, but is also reflection.

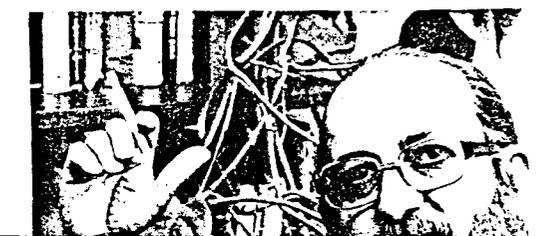
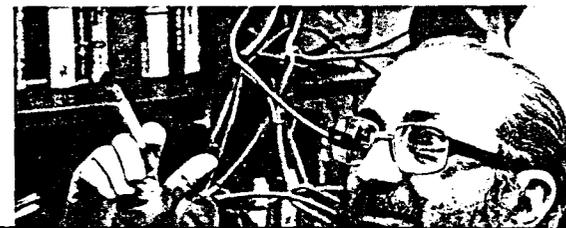
RISK Does this mean that there must be a political dimension to the process of conscientisation? I would think that the man who is in the process of liberation, or discovering his liberated consciousness, can only continue the process at the same rate at which he involves himself, commits himself, to the world.



FREIRE Yes, it is exactly what you are saying. In my point of view, we cannot liberate the others, men cannot liberate themselves alone, because men liberate themselves in communion, mediated by reality which they must transform. So, the process of liberation is not a gift which I give to you. I think that the same thing concerns salvation, from the theological point of view.

RISK Tell me, in your experience now, how has some of your thinking been worked out? What are some of the examples of the praxis that you know of? Has there been any more development, or have there been any other subtle changes that you know of, as the praxis has gone on?

FREIRE I think that it is very interesting to tell you some changes in my praxis, in the very theorisation; not actually made by myself, but by other groups of young people and educators. For example, in Mexico, every year I go to Cuernavaca to give a seminar for Latin American groups. Last year in June I went there in order to coordinate a seminar for a week, with 150 people, more or less, from Latin America. And last January I went there again, and I met a group of 15 people, young people, and ecumenical – because there were Protestants and Catholics in this group. After the seminar in June they created a group in order to begin to work. And between June and January, when I went there again, they had a very



good experience with results, objective results, and they told me
“Look, Paulo, we would like to talk with you in order to show you something which we do differently to you.” And I said, “Oh, fantastic.” And when they explained to me, they had made at least one thing differently to me, and I think that it is better than mine. I will tell you what was this dimension. I said in my works, in my articles and books, that in the process of literacy, if your choice is a liberating and humanising one, we cannot start from our words, the generative words, but, on the contrary, we have to make a research with people in order to get their words. You have to start from the words of the people and not from your words – but they made something very, very good. Instead of making a search in order to discover the words of the people before a process of literacy, they started the process without the investigation! Now, how? They proposed to the teams of illiterates some pictures, and I used also these pictures, in order to discuss precisely the relationships between men and the world in order to discover, for example, the difference between culture and nature, etc., the action of men on reality, transforming reality, creating the world of men, which is the world of culture and history, etc. And, through the discussion of the first picture, which they taped, they took the first word. That is, in discussing the first picture, which concerned the relationships between man and reality, they took the first generative word from the people. And the second day they discussed the first generative word without knowing the second. In the discussion of the first generative word, they captured the second word and so on.

RISK Now, when you use the phrase “generative word” you are describing obviously a particular word. Would you give me an example of what a generative word is?

FREIRE Yes. In a syllabic language, like Portuguese and Spanish, for instance, the generative words are those which, being composed in syllables, make possible through the combination of these syllables, the creation of other words. For example, you have in Spanish the word *paloma* – the bird of peace, a dove. If you break up this word *paloma* is *pa, pe, pi, po, pu*; the family of the second is *la, le, li, lo, lu*; called a linguistic family. That is the family of the first syllable of *paloma* is *pa, pe, pi, po, pu*; the family of the second is *la, le, li, lo, lu*; and of the third is *ma, me, mi, mo, mu*. After the breaking up of this word into its syllables, you have the three linguistic families – and now

... on each word through two combinations in his and I think it is more or less eighty words, no? And precisely because these illiterates are not orally illiterate (you understand, men can be illiterate and yet speak, talk in their language) so they can recognise new words in the combinations, and in the possibility of combining these syllables, they can recognise their vocabulary – and so they recreate their vocabulary. But the question with this team of Mexicans was that I started investigating the seventeen generative words which are necessary, in Spanish or Portuguese, for the process of literacy, before the process itself. They started from the discussion of man in the world and through the discussion they captured a generative word. And I think that it is very important, in certain regions above all, in which people are not believing any more and are tired – it is very important to start with people immediately the process of literacy – and through these initial discussions it is possible to capture the words of people.

RISK Now, what do you think about the problem of schooling? Coming back to this original idea that you had that there can be education for liberation and education which is for domestication, where do you see the school? Most people would argue that, well, the school system is where we combat illiteracy, yet it is a very expensive way. Is it possible that the method you are talking about is a choice, an option, in this problem of literacy?

FREIRE I see. Look, for example, in Brazil when we were working at the national level – I don't remember just now precisely the cost of each educational unit – but it was very, very, very accessible for an underdeveloped country like Brazil. I remember that the projector which we imported from Poland cost \$2.50, bought in Brazil, and the strip film \$1 more or less for an educational unit. I think that in total, each unit for the literacy process was around \$5, or \$6-\$7 more or less. But in two months you have, in each unit, 25 men reading, using the same material, so in four months, with 50 men reading, the cost disappears.

RISK You certainly reveal the cost of your method. I take it that you have a team of illiterate people and you work with them for about eight weeks, and using your method of discovering words through pictures, and through talking about the generative word and how this grows – that in eight weeks you will achieve a certain level of literacy which I take it then is sufficient, a kind of take-off point?

FREIRE Yes, only this.

RISK So that in eight week periods you can achieve this take-off with adult illiterate people, but a child, going through to reach the same level of literacy, would take so many years in an expensive

school system, so that comparison in expense alone, in cost analysis, is in favour of your literacy programme.

FREIRE Yes, I think so, yes.

RISK But you would have other objections to schools, beside the cost element, surely?

FREIRE Yes, look. I think that Ivan Illich is absolutely right when he describes the schools, no matter their levels – primary or not – as instruments of social control. Really, schools themselves are domesticating institutions. I don't know whether you know a very beautiful song by Tom Paxton, I think, and the song is sung by Pete Seeger, in which he asks the little boy, "What did you learn today in school, little boy of mine?" – I think that the answer which the boy gives in this song would be, with some differences, the same answer which millions and millions of children would give today in the world. That is, a school itself builds the alienation of us, in us, precisely because the task of schools – in a wrong way... in a wrong perception – is to transfer to the students the existing knowledge, but, look – it is very, very important to note – the existing knowledge exists because consciousness, in its reflective power, can know. Man as a conscious body can not only know the existing knowledge, but can know new knowledge, or can make new knowledge. Really, the existing knowledge today was born from the knowledge of yesterday, which became old; as well, future knowledge must be born from the existing knowledge of today. That is, knowledge is a process. But what does the school mean? It is a house in which the students are invited to assume a passive attitude in order to receive the transference of the existing knowledge without reflection on the very possibility of the creation of this knowledge! I don't know if I am very clear. It is because of this I talked before of the archaeology of consciousness. Instead of transferring the existing knowledge it is necessary to invite consciousness to assume the active attitude without which it is impossible to



create knowledge. But this is not happening in the primary school in the university it is the same thing – and it implies a mythologisation of reality, because only education for liberation implies demythologising reality, while education for domestication implies mythologising reality, no? It is very interesting, no? But it is not possible for the power élites, for example, to prevent men from thinking. Okay? It is impossible. It is impossible because to think – thinking – results from our relationships with the world and because we became, in our process of evolution, reflective beings. So it is impossible to prevent men from thinking. But, if it is not possible to prevent men from thinking, it is necessary, in order to maintain the *status quo*, to mythologise reality, in order to mythologise consciousness. Because it would be impossible also to falsify reality without falsifying consciousness. because reality is a reality of consciousness. so it is necessary to falsify the consciousness of reality. So – the falsification of reality is itself the falsification of consciousness, and, because of this, it is necessary to use propaganda – the more you are falsifying reality – mythologising reality – you are mythologising the consciousness of men. Men live by myths, and men are involved in myths and not in the truth, but having the illusion that they are thinking correctly. Education for liberation, on the contrary, has to demythologise reality in order to demythologise consciousness and because of this, I repeat, I talked about the *archaeology of consciousness* and in the education for domestication we have another kind of archaeology, it would be the “archaeology of irrationality”.

RISK You have marvellous phrases! ... You see, implicit in what you are saying in challenging the schools as being what Illich calls instruments of social control is surely a very direct challenge of the churches, because they are equally instruments of social control. Not only because they maintain a number of schools, in fact historically they have played a large part in creating the kind of school system which is now being sacralised throughout society, but they themselves still persevere, I should think, in this kind of mythologising of reality. Now, what would you say about the churches in this context?

FREIRE Recently I wrote a letter answering another one to a young American theologian in which I said something about this. I think that the real role of the church should not be the role of mythologising, the role of domestication, the role of developing the bureaucracy of faith.

RISK Exactly.

FREIRE In my point of view, on the contrary, the role of the church must be the role of liberation, of the humanisation of man... Precisely because of this I am more and more interested in working with

theologians. In my point of view theology today has many things to do. That is, from my point of view, theology is not something superfluous. No, on the contrary. But, it is obvious, I don't mean a false theology, not a theology of bla, bla, bla – idealist theology – but a **theology which is part of anthropology**, which is engaged historically in order to discuss, for example, the Word of God, and our relations with the very Word of God. How must my attitudes be, for example, before the Word of God? I think that my attitude cannot be the attitude of an empty being waiting to be filled by the Word of God. I think also that in order to listen to it, it is necessary for me to be engaged in the process of the liberation of man. Because of this I think that theology, such a theology, should be connected with education for liberation – and education for liberation with theology. I am very interested, and. I am thinking for example, to make it possible next year – not necessarily through the World Council of Churches – to have a meeting in Geneva with some Catholic and Protestant theologians of the Third World (not geographically speaking, but the Third World of the First World, also) in order to discuss this kind of theology – it is a great preoccupation today in Latin America. We have between the Protestants and between the Catholics a preoccupation with such a theology.

Finally, I think that our task as Christians cannot be a paternalistic one. That is, I cannot be author of your salvation. I cannot leave my home in order to look for sinners to save them. I have to live as a man among men! – discussing, acting, transforming, creating – and in all the dimensions of my life, my existence, I can find the presence of God, but the presence of God does not mean the imposition of God. God is a presence – nevertheless, this presence does not prevent myself from making history, that is the history of the liberation of man.

RISK Perhaps the theology of liberation and the liberation of man may well be ultimately the liberation of God?

FREIRE Yes, because God, too, in a certain way, is mythologised by us.

