

- 4 D. A. Allen, *Universities Quarterly*, 1970. (quoted in A. Powell and B. Butterworth: *Marked For Life*, London, 1972, p10).
- 5 HMSO, 1963, App.Two(A), Annek K.
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- 7 Robbins Report, Appendix 2A, Part 4. Cp. Dale, *Universities Quarterly*, 1959.
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- 27 *Examination Strain at Manchester University*; Cp. A. Ryle, *Student Casualties*, 1969.
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- 29 Cp. Powell and Butterworth, *op. cit.*, p3.
- 30 R. G. Carpenter, *British Journal of Preventive and Social Medicine*, 1959, i, pp165-72. Cp. Ryle, *op. cit.*, p105.
- 31 A. Rook, *British Medical Journal*, 1959, i, pp599ff.
- 32 Carpenter, *loc. cit.*
- 33 Cf. the research finding 'that the type of personal development produced through schooling and relevant to the individual's productivity as a worker in a capitalist enterprise is primarily non-cognitive.' H. Gintis, *Harvard*

Educational Review, 42(1), 1972), p86cp. Gintis, *Americal Economic Review*, May 1971; and C. Jencks et al, *Education and Inequality*, NY, 1972.

- 34 Coleman, *Report on Equality of Opportunity in Education*, Dept. of H.E.W., Washington, 1966. Cp. Jencks et al, *op. cit.*; A. Morrison and D. McIntyre, *Schools and Socialisation*, Penguin, 1971, pp13.
- 35 Cox, *Universities Quarterly*, 1967, p334.
- 36 Edwards, *The Observer*, 6 June 1971.
- 37 'Students cannot help but see behind the friendly interest of an unassuming tutor the remorseless judgement of their Finals.' P. Marris, *The Experience of Higher Education*, quoted in Powell and Butterworth, *op. cit.*, p23.
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'Theory' and 'practice' in the sociology of Paulo Freire

Dennis Gleeson

Our education is fraught with problems, the most prominent of which is dogmatism ... the children learn text-books and concepts which remain merely text-books and concepts ... The method of examination is to treat the candidates as enemies and ambush them.

Mao-Tse Tung

Paulo Freire's writings represent a stark reminder of the problems facing the Third World, whilst at the same time raising questions for 'The First' concerning its commitment to growth and opulence. The importance of his work rests in a refusal to accept as given commonly accepted dogmas and myths which are uncritically interpreted to explain the nature of social phenomena. Freire's recent publications *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*¹ and *Cultural Action for Freedom*² have created more than a mere ripple of interest in audiences of teachers and students already critical of existing practices and policies in education.

This article represents an introduction examination of certain main themes emerging from Freire's writings, and is intended as background material for those students and teachers who, after reading this brief account, may wish to pursue his work more deeply.

Background

Freire was born in Recife, North Eastern Brazil, an area populated by peasants and redundant

craftsmen impoverished by continual droughts and land 'reforms'. Today, the construction of the Trans-Amazonica road, hailed as a necessary 'political assertion', as was the building of the new capital Brazilia, has meant a vast resettlement together with its incumbent problems for many of the peasant population of the north-eastern region. For others, the only escape has been to find work on the construction route where they have become part of a proletarian labour force living in the impermanent shanty-towns of the Amazon. As a boy in the late twenties, and early thirties, Freire's comfortable middle-class family status was shattered by the depression, and he was plunged into an unaccustomed milieu of poverty and disorder which has strongly influenced and marked the character of his work. His writings must be seen within the context of the Third World where the eternal circles of colonisation, neo-colonialism and foreign 'aid' create a dependency of the Third World on the First. Such reliance, Freire argues, creates a dependent and alien consciousness among the masses which robs them of the opportunity to intervene and make decisions for themselves. His work represents an attempt to construct methodologies for subverting the vicious circles which create and maintain conditions of poverty and illiteracy. Freire's methodology so strongly influenced literacy campaigns in the North Eastern Region that his work came to represent a threat to the government and he was later imprisoned after the coup in 1964, and subsequently exiled to Chile. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire observes '... one does not expect dialogue from a coup.'

Main postulates

Freire integrates an educational with a political debate, rather than submerging one as a subsidiary to the other. The imagery in his writings suggests an analogy between an 'invaded' nation and an 'exploited' learner, who are similarly defenceless and dependent upon those who abuse their own monopolistic access to power. Two main postulates are advanced by Freire: first, that all men are potentially capable of active transformation of their own environments, and secondly, that to achieve freedom, men must actively struggle against those typifications or stereotypes made of them by their oppressors. Freire criticises colonialism, neo-colonialism and Western Education in that they create myths which explain poverty and suffering in the Third World as being 'caused' solely by over-population, famine, drought and disease, rather than by political oppression, cultural and financial 'invasion' and violence. Such myths, he argues, are perpetuated by foreign aid, the media, religious and educational programmes which explain underdevelopment in terms of backwardness or primitiveness, innate inferiority and lack of resources. Certain self-fulfilling policies and prophecies emanate from such explanations through the processes of politics, education and social policy whereby the stereotypes concerning 'how such people ought to be treated' become reproduced. Freire points out it is within processes which define people as 'culturally deprived', that they become treated as such.

Freire's criticism of educational policy in the Third World raises radical questions concerning policy makers' notions about the illiterate peasant or slum dweller who is defined as diseased, 'marginal' or culturally deprived. An Adult Education programme which is based on such myths not only insults the adult, writes Freire, but also re-defines his role as 'misfit'. Policy which fails to consider the individual as a human being is 'necrophilic': it merely treats man as a dead object, devoid of choices and capabilities. However, despite Freire's immediate concerns with the Third World, Schaul reminds us that '... we may discover that his methodology as well as his educational philosophy are as important for us as for the dispossessed in Latin America. Their struggle to become free subjects and to

participate in the transformation of their society is similar in many ways to the struggle not only of blacks and Mexican Americans, but also of middle-class young people.'³ Similarly in Britain such groups of people as immigrants, adults, and young students are exposed and at risk to official typifications which are based on notions of 'who they are' and what they 'need to know'. Categories such as the culturally deprived, the 'mature student', the 'married woman' or the 'bright child' spring easily to mind and are well documented in major government reports. Freire argues that education is the basic starting point of liberation, and although the contexts of the First and the Third worlds may be different certain important questions and issues are of a similar nature. Freire underlines his argument by challenging us to make a distinction between '... education as an instrument of domination and education as an instrument of liberation.'⁴

'Banking education'

Freire criticises traditional 'narrative' forms of education as oppressive and likens them to a system of 'banking'. He suggests that education which follows this mode '... becomes an act of depositing in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating the teacher issues communiques and 'makes deposits' which the students patiently receive, memorise and repeat. This is the 'banking' concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the student extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits ... oppression - overwhelming control - is necrophilic; it is nourished by love of death, not life.'⁵ His critique of Banking Education rests in the view that the teacher as 'narrator' encourages a one-way dependence of the student upon the teacher. The memorising and regurgitation of 'facts' creates, and maintains, a gulf between teacher and taught. Freire argues that such a process is 'anti-dialogical' and therefore anti-educational on the grounds that dependency presents a contradiction and an obstacle to authentic free thinking and real consciousness.

Freire maintains that Banking Education merely reflects the consumption-production ethics of capitalism, which equate teaching and learning with such terms as deposits, investment, input and output. Meszaros writing of the 'problem' of leisure in capitalist societies reveals another side of this Banking process: 'The only form of accountancy known to capitalism is a narrow monetary accountancy, while seriously tackling the problems of 'free time' (not idle leisure) requires a radically different approach.'⁶ To subvert this narrowness Freire advances the simple formula of dialogue, in which teachers and students may collaborate in exploring together new questions, possibilities and alternatives. He suggests that narrative education is restricted in that it is essentially anti-dialogical, creating a passive model of the student which robs him of the opportunity to experiment and share his world with others. Maxine Greene points out that Freire's writings pose an illuminating critique of traditional and 'absolutist' perspectives on the curriculum, which posit a notion of knowledge as 'out there' and external to the student. Such traditional conceptions of the teacher and student imply that the teacher merely initiates or inducts the passive student into the 'agreed' worthwhile pursuits. Greene suggests that the student '... must feel himself to be a knower - rather than a passive receiver of someone else's preconstituted definitions of what is worth while. If curriculum is solely concerned with depositing ... it becomes an alien and alienating edifice, a kind of 'Crystal Palace' of ideas...'⁷ Furthermore Freire maintains that the student who is robbed of the opportunity of being creative becomes trapped in a 'Culture of Silence'.

When a learner is defined as a passive object, a context is created wherein he becomes perceived as not only dependent, but also 'mute' in the face of

'superior' knowledge and power. Freire describes this predicament as the 'Culture of Silence' in which large numbers of people are trapped in the processes of their own 'defined' ignorance. Within such a context, Freire claims, it is impossible for the dispossessed who are forced to mimic the dictates of their paternal overlords, to have authentic voices of their own. Furthermore, he suggests, where man is conditioned to fear freedom in a state of utter dependence on his exploiters, there can be no autonomous or true consciousness. However, this is not entirely a passive theory of socialisation as one might suppose, because as Freire points out, men may be trapped in the poverty of their environment but it is within the contradictions of such traps that the seeds of radicalism emerge. Sartre explains this quite simply: 'The settler has only recourse to one thing: brute force when he can command it; the native has only one choice between servitude and supremacy.'⁸ Freire reminds us that centuries of exploitation have left the oppressed with an internalised view of power based on the sadistic models of their oppressors. He maintains that the oppressed house the oppressor within themselves because they know of no other model of power. Furthermore, he is at pains to point out that if revolutionary change is to be anything other than the mere replacement of one oppressive elite by another, a radical pedagogy must be achieved wherein models of power are based on love rather than hate. It is only within the framework of such a pedagogy, Freire argues, that the reproductive processes of necrophilic power may be subverted. The culture of silence or the fear of freedom will persist as long as oppressors live within the consciousness of the oppressed, and therefore a truly revolutionary pedagogy must incorporate a recognition of this face in order to succeed. Freire is critical of so called Left Wing movements which have risen to power on the back of the peasants and subsequently become oppressive themselves. He has little time for empty words and slogans. How might then, the Culture of Silence be subverted?

'Conscientization'

At the root of Freire's philosophy and deeply embedded in the concept of the Culture of Silence of the oppressed, is the notion of 'conscientization' which is a methodology for subverting the Culture of Silence through cultural action. Conscientization is a human process of dialogue within the immediate social context of the illiterate which enables the individual to transform himself in relation to his fellows and hence to act critically towards himself and society. Freire argues that men, unlike animals, are able to intervene in reality by objectifying their experiences in time, space and culture. When consciousness becomes fragmented, like that of the oppressed, men are denied access to each other in their collaborative search for a picture of totality. It is in the interest of the oppressor to maintain fragmentation of consciousness and, Freire argues, where he unwittingly allows men to collaborate in dialogue, he invites revolution. Freire writes: 'Because men are historical beings, incomplete and conscious of being incomplete, revolution is as natural and permanent a human dimension as is education.'⁹

The literacy programmes initiated by Freire in slum areas and villages reveal more clearly the meaning of conscientization. Here, Freire posits alternative definitions of the activities of teaching, learning, reading and writing. Such definitions follow the codification of sociological aspects extracted from the learners' immediate environment which are readily identifiable through the sharing of common cultural experiences. A real or concrete context therefore provides the focus of debate for a discussion group or 'cultural circle' of learners. For example the word slum (Favela) may be taken as a basis for an investigation of man's existential situation in such conditions. Through the processes of sharing and challenging one another's views, theories and opinions, the learners construct a meaningful

picture of a slum environment. Freire refers to this example as: 'The slum reality as a framework for the objective facts which directly concern slum dwellers.'¹⁰ The cultural circle analyses the coded phenomenon (for example, a photo, slide or picture of a slum scene), and discusses critically its implications. The activity of reading or writing will not commence until several hours of discussion have been completed in which the coded object has been analysed deeply in relation to its place in the social, political and economic context of the learners' experiences. Similarly, the analysis of a commonplace tool such as a plough would include the consideration of such questions as: who uses this instrument and for what purpose? By whom and for whom? Where do such workers and their families live? How much do they earn and where do their children work? What do the wives of the ploughmen work at, and why etc? In other words the concepts 'slum' or 'plough' become meaningful within the immediate contexts of the learner's life experience rather than words to be remembered, spelt, pronounced and recorded as if they were 'out there' and removed from the learner. Freire refers to this stage as the 'theoretical context' which calls into question the placement of phenomena in the social environment whereby obvious or taken-for-granted assumptions can be made problematic. The importance of this stage, Freire argues, is that: 'The deeper the act of knowing goes the more reality the learners unveil for what it is, discarding the myths that envelop it.'¹¹ It is at this important stage that the existing code is broken down, de-coded and re-constructed more realistically in relation to its contextual position. For example, within the cultural circle, certain patterns or particular themes will emerge from discussion concerning distinct and typical examples of slum living or peasant farming. It is through the discovery motive in learning to read and write that the dispossessed become able to formulate their own views of the world based on critical knowledge rather than naive opinion, and to question the validity of the typical or given nature of their situation.

A crucial pre-condition for such a process occurs only where students and teachers collaborate and share their experiences in a dialogically open situation. Through de-coding, Freire writes, '... the learners gradually, hesitatingly and timorously place in doubt the opinion they held of reality and replace it with a more and more critical knowledge.'¹² Once an image or picture of the work has been evoked through dialogue the word *Favela* itself is introduced and then broken down into syllables. Freire writes: 'This is the decisive moment for learning. It is the moment when those learning to read and write discover the syllabic composition of words in their language.' (For a more complete elaboration of this process see the appendix to *Cultural Action for Freedom*). Schaul suggests that peasants experiencing such forms of learning achieve hope and a new awareness of self-dignity. He has recorded some of their comments: 'I realise now I am a man, an educated man', 'We were blind, now our eyes have been opened', 'Before this words meant nothing to me, now I can make them speak'.

Freire advances the view that there is more to the processes of learning to read and write than the mere memorising, defining and identifying of words solely as representative of objects or abstractions. Many school children, for example, are taught to relate words to objects before they have understood the nature of the relationship involved, and often punishment follows the failure to conceptualise such links. It could even be argued that a similar pattern is evident in the educational experiences of university students. Learning to read and write or teach and learn must therefore take on greater meaning, Freire argues, than the traditional processes of identification and memorising of letters and objects for both students and teachers. He suggests that '... this is as obvious as affirming that a man learns to swim in the water, not in a library.'¹³ Such a perspective represents an alternative to what has previously been referred to as Banking forms of

education wherein man is defined as a passive receptacle rather than an active protagonist.

Phenomenological implications

A phenomenological perspective emphasises a need to return to the nature of phenomena in everyday life, that is, to contexts as they are immediately and inter-subjectively experienced by members of society. The phenomenological perspective in Freire's work rests in his attempt to derive meaning from theory and practice within the life experiences of the poor, that is, sharing and understanding the meanings which they give to their predicaments. It is from such understanding that Freire derives his methodology of conscientization which attempts, through dialogue, to subvert the culture of silence.

Freire's writings carry us back to the phenomenon of reaching and learning, and make problematic the nature of this apparently obvious activity. He examines obvious or taken-for-granted assumptions which, for many, have become accepted as second-nature, and explores alternative ways of 'looking'. One is reminded of Gouldner's statement concerning reflexive thinking, which might easily apply to Freire's work: 'A reflexive sociology embodies a critique of the conventional conception of segregated scholarly roles and has a vision of an alternative. It aims at transforming the sociologist's relation to his work'.¹⁴ Three main factors could be identified as examples of reflexive thinking in Freire's writings. First, he does not accept uncritically, as given, the currently accepted explanations of phenomena; second, his writings emerge from his commitment to sharing the world of the 'dispossessed', and finally his conception of 'alternatives' are constructed within, and through, the action-reflection context of the methodology of conscientization. Roger Dale argues, 'Phenomenologists see man not as a mere passive recipient of his world but an active interpreter and constructor of it. The phenomenological sociologist must therefore seek to elucidate the processes whereby actors generate and maintain their view of the social world.'¹⁵ What emerges from such a perspective, in Freire's work is not the navel-gazing, of idle self-indulgent solipsism but rather the insistence that teaching and learning must be a shared experience as opposed to '... a situation where one knows and others do not; it is rather the search by all, at the same time to discover something by the act of knowing...'¹⁶

The importance of Freire's contribution to the sociology of knowledge rests in his timely introduction of an alternative concept of man - man standing on his own feet as an active enquirer, rather than a passive receiver of the ideas of others. He believes that all men are capable of sustaining a critical relationship with their environments, and that through reflection and action they will be able to de-mystify and de-ideologise oppressive knowledge. From the concept of a dialogically shared inter-subjective world, Freire advances a methodology of cultural action for freedom, that is '... the way in which we attack culturally our own culture. It is to take culture as always problematic and to question it without accepting the myths that ossify it and ossify us.'¹⁷ For these reasons conscientization, as a reflexive process, is a 'painful business', because it demands not only our commitment but also a radical re-examination of self in relation to others. Freire acknowledges the phenomenological orientations in his work when he says: 'The more one acquires conscientization (conscientizes oneself) the more one discovers reality, the more one penetrates the phenomenological essence of the object one has in front of oneself in order to analyse it.'¹⁸

Critique

The intention of this brief critique is to point to issues and questions in Freire's work which would not seem to have been fully elaborated upon.

Underlying much of Freire's writing runs a strong vein of liberalism which places great emphasis on the power of real education as a rationalising force opposed to arbitrary forces of exploitation. Jerez and Hernandez argue that Freire's writings represent a liberal perspective similar to that of the Jeffersonian model of man, as a civic participator, actively involving himself in school, club, union, work or church.¹⁹ For these reasons it would seem unclear why Freire's work has become associated with the 'de-schooling movement'. His 'ideal type' model of co-operative man involving himself, with others, towards building a democratic society is more likely to support formal education than to oppose it. Indeed it is through the integration of mass involvement and problem posing perspectives in education that Freire attempts to achieve the dawning of a radical pedagogy.

It is Freire's belief that educational processes are crucial in developing a revolutionary consciousness among the masses which is most open to debate. This is a central focus of his thesis and yet he fails to provide adequate elaboration of certain key questions associated with it. For example: what does he mean by 'authentic', 'true' or 'real' consciousness? To what extent can knowledge be anything other than ideological? How can Freire be sure that conscientized revolutionaries will not become oppressors themselves? To what extent can radical 'literate' peasants untrained in guerrilla tactics and without organised military strategies be capable of resisting government troops? What kinds of political, industrial and agricultural policies should radical Third World governments adopt in order to survive? It is through consideration of such questions that Mao has succeeded in his writings, where Freire has merely skimmed the surface. Though it might be naive to expect answers to these questions it would seem necessary to indicate that Freire's thesis tends to simplify the complexities of the problems involved.

In overlooking these issues Freire exposes himself to certain criticisms. It is not clear how far social change can be achieved through 'problem posing' education. Literacy campaigns led by intellectuals and radical students may themselves unwittingly create a new oppressive cult of conscientizing colonisers. Indeed, the methodology of conscientization as a radical force will have little effect on those not predisposed towards radicalism. Similarly, oppressive regimes could make equal use of Freire's methodology to achieve exactly opposite ends. Furthermore, certain Left Wing groups might not view education as the most desirable starting point for change in that Freire's methodology is not only a slow moving process but also reflects a form of liberal 'revisionism'. Freire points descriptively to problems but oversimplifies his explanation in a highly repetitive style, which raises two further questions. First, could he be accused of indulging in those very activities he most abhors, that is, using empty words, sloganising and mystifying: and second, as a corollary to the first point, is he himself in danger of becoming a cult figure?

Conclusion

The essence of Freire's thesis rests in a faith in man's potential to transform and transcend himself and his environment in dialogue with others. Coutinho writes: 'In other words the characteristic of the human species is its repeatedly demonstrated capacity for transcending what is merely given, what is purely determined'. Freire's writings demand a re-examination of cultural processes and taken-for-granted practices which have historically and culturally trapped man, and violently intimidated those who have dared to speak out.²⁰ The value of Freire's work lies in the emphasis he places on the hitherto unexamined political nature of education, which has important implications for not only the Third, but also the First World. Freire's work demonstrates

great faith in the power of education as a liberating force as opposed to an agent of domestication. However, to achieve this end, the dispossessed require their own pedagogy. It is through such suggestions and through positing other models of teaching and learning that Freire advances radical alternatives to existing narrative forms of education. His thesis may indeed be interpreted as utopian. However, those who reject Freire's perspective in that it is naive and unrealistic, might perhaps consider the substance of the nature and faith upon which their own optimism and idealism rests. For to argue that his views are acceptable in theory but not in practice is to admit one's own failure to exercise control over such relationships.

Notes

My thanks to Edwine Connell for her help in preparing this paper.

Mao quotation from Jerome Ch'en, *Mao Papers*, London, Oxford University Press, 1970, pp21-2/

- 1 P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin, 1972.
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- 20 J. Da Veiga Coutinho's preface to *Cultural Action for Freedom*.

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against economic breakdown; a warranty that everything precious will be looked after for the future. A revolutionary oppositionist culture is necessary, not in the sense of a number of subscribers to New Left Books or *Radical Philosophy*, but in the sense of a materially subversive movement with positive open bonds of socialist friendship and solidarity. For this reason at least, it seems to me very important that the left does not over the coming period go right over to an exclusive and opportunistic preoccupation with wages, but promotes, develops and spreads socialist forms of struggle, forms which already have an obvious 'spontaneous' basis. After all, the mere erosion of bourgeois morality is compatible with lumpen cynicism - a passive precondition of fascism.