

**Afterward:
Ten Short Years—
Acting on Freire's Requests**

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It's been a short ten years since Paulo Freire died—a ten years that has witnessed 9-11 and George W. Bush's use (with the assistance of his neo-conservative puppet masters) of the tragedy to justify a plethora of fascist oriented changes in U.S. geo-political ambitions, domestic policies, civil and human rights legislation, and, of course, public and private education and curriculum development. It not hard to deduct that Paulo would have hated to witness these regressive changes. Indeed, his unrelenting, transgressive hope would have been challenged. The authors included in this volume have touched on these issues and many more. In this afterward I'd like to think about Paulo's request to always study his work in the context of the new times that would face us and to constantly reinvent his work in our own historical moments. Before getting to that task, I would like to briefly place Freire in historical context.

Paulo Freire (1921-1997)

With Paulo Freire the notion of critical pedagogy as we understand it today emerged. Born in Recife, Brazil, in 1921, Freire learned about poverty and oppression through the lives of the impoverished peasants around whom he lived. Such experiences helped construct a devotion to work that would improve the lives of these marginalized people. Beginning his educational work in Recife, Freire became the most well known educator in the world by the 1970s. Peter McLaren (2000) has called Freire the "inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy" (p. 1).

Indeed, all work in critical pedagogy after him has to reference his work. His work with the Brazilian poor was viewed as dangerous and subversive by wealthy landowners and the Brazilian military. When the military overthrew the reform government of the country in April of 1964, progressive activities were shut down and Freire was jailed for his insurgent teaching. After serving a 70-day jail term Freire was deported. He continued his pedagogical work in Chile and later under the umbrella of the World Council of Churches throughout the world.

Not only have scholars in education employed Freire's work, but individuals working in literary theory, cultural studies, composition, philosophy, research methods, political science, theology, sociology, and other disciplines have used it as well. In this context Freire reconstructed what it means to be an educator, as he upped the ante of what professional educators need to know and do. After Freire a progressive educator cannot be viewed as a technician, a functionary carrying out the instructions of others. Educators in the Freirean sense are learned scholars, community researchers, moral agents, philosophers, cultural workers, and political insurgents. In this context Freire taught us that education is always political and teachers are unavoidably political operatives. Teaching is a political act—there's no way around it. Freire argued that teachers should embrace this dimension of their work and position, social, cultural, economic, political, and philosophical critiques of dominant power at the heart of the curriculum. His notion of critical praxis characterized as informed action demanded curricular and instructional strategies that produced not only better learning climates but a better society as well.

Freire used a variety of strategies to produce this ambitious undertaking. In order to help students develop wider conceptual lenses to view their lives and social situation, Freire developed what he called codifications—pictures and photographs as part of a research process directed at the students' social, cultural, political, and economic environment. The pictures in this codification process depicted problems and contradictions in the lived worlds of students. Freire induced the students to step back from these pictures, to think about what they told them about their lives. What are the unseen forces and structures that are at work in these images, covertly shaping what is going on in the areas they depict? In this context students began to see their lives and the hardships they suffered in a new way. They began to understand that the way things presently operated was not the only option available. The possibility for positive change embedded in this understanding is the key to Freire's educational success. Students were motivated to gain literacy in order to take part in changing both their own lives and the society. The process of learning was inseparable from individual empowerment and social change. They

could not achieve the goals they sought without knowing how to read and write. Since the dominant classes did not want students from the peasant class to succeed with their academic studies, Freire's students knew that they had to excel in their studies in order to overcome the oppressors.

Such experiences helped Freire understand in profoundly concrete terms the ways that schooling was often used by dominant interests to validate their own privilege while certifying the inferiority of students marginalized by social and economic factors. Understanding schools as impediments for the education of the poor, Freire sought numerous ways for students to intervene in this dehumanizing process. Freire referred to this process of intervention as liberatory action. Indeed, liberation in the Freirean articulation requires more than a shift of consciousness or an inward change. Instead, he argued, liberation takes place in the action of human beings operating in the world to overcome oppression. There is nothing easy about this process, he warned his readers. Liberation is akin to a painful childbirth that never completely ends, as oppression continuously mutates and morphs into unprecedented forms in new epochs. Thus, liberation is not merely a psychological change where an individual comes to feel better about herself. Freirean liberation is a social dynamic that involves working with and engaging other people in a power-conscious process.

Social change in the context of liberation and emancipation, according to Freire, is possible—even in right-wing times like ours. Since the world has been constructed by human beings then it can be reconstructed by human beings. Nothing human-made is intractable and because this is so then hope exists. History can be made by individual human beings with radical love in their hearts and a vision of what could be. Human beings can become so much more than they are now, Freire always maintained in the spirit of this critical hope. In many ways Freire was critical pedagogy's prophet of hope. Oppression, he understood, always reduces the oppressed understanding of historical time to a hopeless present. We are all oppressed from time to time by this hopeless presentism that tells us time and again: "things will never change." Throughout history these hopeless moments have been followed by radical changes. Such a "long view" is, of course, hard to discern in the black hole of despair. Freire's historical hope was paralleled by a pedagogical hope shared between students and teachers. In this domain of possibility Freire brought the belief to his students that in the framework of his historical hope we can learn together in the here and now. As he put it, students and teachers

... can be curiously impatient together, produce something together, and resist together the obstacles that prevent the flowering of our joy... Hope is a natural, possible, and necessary impetus in the context

of our unfinishedness. Hope is an indispensable seasoning in our human, historical experience. Without it, instead of history we would have pure determinism. (1998, p. 69)

Undoubtedly, one of the most important dimensions of Freire's pedagogy involved the cultivation of a critical consciousness. Liberation and critical hope cannot be attained, he contended, until students and teachers address the nature of a naïve consciousness and the maneuvers involved in moving from a naïve to a critical consciousness. To make this complex move, Freire posited, individuals need to understand reality as a process rather than a "static entity." In this process-oriented mode teachers and students begin to understand historically how what is came to be. In this frame teachers and students can begin to imagine ways of seeing and being that release the future from the dictates of the past. They develop a consciousness that imagines a future that refuses to be "normalized and well-behaved." For the naïve thinker education involves molding oneself and others to this normalized past. For the critically conscious thinker education involves engaging in the continuous improvement and transformation of self and reality.

Again, this is no easy task. The oppressed, Freire frequently reminded his readers, have many times been so inundated by the ideologies of their oppressors that they have come to see the world and themselves through the oppressor's eyes. "I'm just a peasant, or a hillbilly, or a black kid from the ghetto, or a woman, or a man from the Third World, or a student with a low I.Q.; I have no business in higher education." Exposure to oppression often opens the eyes of the oppressed to its nature, but it can also, Freire cautioned, distort one's self-perceptions and interpersonal interactions. In such a context critical consciousness is elusive because the oppressed are blinded to the myths of dominant power—the ones that oppress them and keep them "in their place." Such myths—e.g., African Americans and other non-white peoples are not as intelligent as individuals from European backgrounds—must be confronted and exposed for what they are: vicious lies. Such confrontation and the plethora of insights that emerge in the process constitute what Freire labels "conscientization"—the act of coming to critical consciousness. In this movement from naivete to criticality individuals grasp the social, political, economic, and cultural contradictions that subvert learning. Teachers and students with a critical consciousness conceptually pull back from their lived reality so as to gain a new vantage point on who they are and how they came to be this way. With these insights in mind they return to the complex processes of living critically and engaging the world in the ways such a consciousness requires.

Thinking about critical consciousness, Freire talked about the in-

separability of learning and being (ontology). Learning from Freire's perspective is grounded in the learner's own being, her interaction with the world, her concerns, and her visions of what she can become. In this ontological context Freire made some important points. All teachers, of course, should honor the being and the experiences of the oppressed—but they should never take them simply as they are. For example, how have ideology and other forms of power shaped the identity and experiences of the oppressed? Identity is always in process, it is never finalized, and as such it should not be treated as something beyond the possibility of change. Here Freire makes a pedagogical argument that has often been missed by many of his followers. Understanding the student's being and experiences opens up the possibility for the teacher to initiate dialogues designed to synthesize his or her systematized knowing with the minimally systematized knowing of the learner.

Thus, Freire argues that the teacher presents the student with knowledge that may change the learner's identity. Freire here emphasizes the directive status of the teacher. Thus, Freire contends that the authority of the teacher is based on the knowledge and insight she brings to class. Freirean authority exists not simply because she is the teacher but because of what she has to offer the students. There is a vast difference between this critical type of authority that respects the being and experiences of students and authoritarianism. Authoritarianism views student subjectivity as irrelevant, as it attempts to make deposits of information in student mind banks. What the information means to them and how they might use it is irrelevant in authoritarian pedagogy. Here the student's role is to demonstrate that she learned the information and can give it back to the teacher in the same form it was provided to her. The ontological dimension of the student's being is not applicable in banking pedagogy.

In this pedagogical context Freire injects his concept of literacy. The ability to use the printed word is essential to Freire's effort to reshape the world. As students become literate they are empowered to change themselves and to take action in the world. In this empowered literate state learners employ generative themes around which they can organize insurgent action. As they read the word and the world students read their reality and write their lives. Such reading by itself, Freire warned, is of little use if not accompanied by transformative action for justice and equality. His ideas on literacy struck a positive nerve with many people, as in the first decade of the 21st century one can find Freire literacy programs around the world. Many people were fascinated by the way Freire positioned literacy as a way of life where one used their reading and writing skills as tools to care for other people. This critical

notion of literacy as a way of life and the larger concept of education as a political act must not be lost in efforts to implement Freire's work. Ever since his initial work appeared there has existed a tendency for teachers to tame Freirean pedagogy in ways that move to two extremities of a critical pedagogy curriculum.

On one end some teachers attempt to depoliticize his work in ways that make it simply an amalgam of student-directed classroom projects. On the other end of the continuum some teachers have emphasized the political dimensions but ignored the rigorous scholarly work that he proposed. These latter efforts have resulted in a social activism devoid of analytic and theoretical sophistication. Academic work that cultivates the intellect and demands sophisticated analysis is deemed irrelevant in these anti-intellectual articulations of Freire's ideas. With these problems in mind the struggle to implement a Freirean critical pedagogy should never seek some form of "purity" of Freirean intent. Indeed, as previously mentioned Paulo insisted that we critique him and improve upon his ideas. Living up to many of his pedagogical principles without sanctifying and canonizing him and his work is a conceptual tightrope that those of us who admired him must always walk. The walk is always worth it. Few have embodied an intellectually-informed impassioned spirit as intensely as Freire did in his pedagogy.

Where Now?

An Evolving Criticality in a Freirean Pedagogy for the Future?

Without Paulo we are faced with the task of devising the next stages of critical pedagogy in the rearranged, refurbished global world of the last years of the first decade of the 21st century. With this in mind, I want to think about what direction a critical pedagogy of the future might take. This question has been particularly important to Shirley and myself as we have worked to construct the Paulo and Nita Freire Project for the International Studies of Critical Pedagogy at McGill University.

To begin our task we have drawn on the widely appreciated notion that critical theory questions the assumption that societies such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the nations in the European Union, for example, are unproblematically democratic and free. Over the twentieth century, especially after the early 1960s, individuals in these societies were acculturated to feel less uncomfortable with relations of social regulation and subordination rather than with equality and independence. Given the social and technological changes of the last half of the century that led to new forms of information production

and access, critical theorists argued that questions of self-direction and democratic egalitarianism should be reassessed.

In this context critical researchers informed by developments in social theory over the last four decades (e.g., critical feminism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, indigenous studies) came to understand that individuals' views of themselves and the world were even more influenced by social and historical forces than previously believed. Given the changing social, political economic, and informational conditions of the early 21st century media-saturated Western culture, critical theorists have needed new ways of researching and analyzing the construction of identity/selfhood. Thus, one begins to understand the need for an evolving notion of criticality—a critical social theory—in light of these changing conditions.

In this context it is important to note that a social theory as used in this context is a map or a guide to the social sphere. A social theory should not determine how we see the world but should help us devise questions and strategies for exploring it. A critical social theory is concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system. Critical theory and, of course, critical pedagogy—in the spirit of an evolving criticality—is never static as it is always evolving, changing in light of both new theoretical insights and new problems, social circumstances, and educational contexts, a reality that resonates with Paulo's request to reinvent him and his work in new social conditions.

The list of concepts making up this description of an evolving critical theory/critical pedagogy indicates a criticality informed by a variety of discourses emerging after the work of the Frankfurt School of Social Theory in post-World War I Germany. Indeed, some of the theoretical discourses while referring to themselves as critical directly call into question some of the work of Frankfurt School founders Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse. Thus, diverse theoretical traditions have informed our understanding of criticality and have demanded understanding of diverse forms of oppression including class, race, gender, sexual, cultural, religious, colonial, and ability-related concerns. In this context critical theorists/critical pedagogues become detectives of new theoretical insights, perpetually searching for new and interconnected ways of understanding power and oppression and the ways they shape everyday life and human experience.

Thus, criticality and critical pedagogy and the knowledge production they support are always evolving, always encountering new ways

to engage dominant forms of power, to provide more evocative and compelling insights into the political and educational domains. The forms of social change this evolving criticality supports always position it in some places as an outsider, an awkward detective always interested in uncovering social structures, discourses, ideologies, ontologies, and epistemologies that prop up both the status quo and a variety of forms of privilege. In the epistemological domain White, male, class, elitist, heterosexist, imperial, and colonial privilege often operates by asserting the power to claim objectivity and neutrality. Indeed the owners of such privilege often own the “franchise” on reason and rationality. An evolving criticality possesses a variety of tools to expose such power politics. In this context it asserts that critical theory and critical pedagogy are well-served by drawing upon numerous discourses and including diverse groups of marginalized peoples and their allies in the non-hierarchical aggregation of critical analysts.

Obviously, an evolving criticality does not promiscuously choose theories to add to the bricolage of critical theories/pedagogies. It is highly suspicious of theories that fail to understand the workings of power, that fail to critique the blinders of Eurocentrism, that cultivate an elitism of insiders and outsiders, and that fail to discern a global system of inequity supported by diverse forms of hegemony and violence. It is uninterested in any theory—no matter how fashionable—that does not directly address the needs of victims of oppression and the suffering they must endure.

Indeed, the very origins of criticality—the tradition that lays the groundwork for critical pedagogy and is concerned with power’s oppression of human beings and its regulation of the social order—are grounded on this concern with human suffering. Herbert Marcuse, one of the founders of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, and Paulo Freire were profoundly moved by the suffering they respectively witnessed in post-WWI Germany and Brazil. Though our notion of a critical pedagogy is one that continues to develop and operates to sophisticate its understandings of the world and the educational act, this evolving criticality in education should never lose sight of its central concern with human suffering. One does not have to go too far to find suffering.

In the North American context suffering is often well hidden but a trip to inner cities, specific rural areas, or Aboriginal reserves will reveal its existence. Outside of North America we can go to almost any region of the world and see tragic expressions of human misery. This articulation of critical pedagogy asserts that such suffering is a humanly constructed phenomenon and does not have to exist. Steps can be taken in numerous domains—education in particular—to eradicate such suffering if the

people of the planet and their leaders had the collective will to do so. In recent years, however, globalized political economic systems with their de-emphasis of progressive forms of education have exacerbated poverty and its attendant suffering. An evolving criticality develops new ways to deal with such developments and new modes of education to subvert their effects.

Thus, central to our evolving notion of criticality is an understanding that critical pedagogy can never rest with the discourses that have informed it so far. Indeed, critical pedagogy cannot become a North American White male appropriation of a South American phenomenon that holds minimal relevance for peoples in poor areas of the world, marginalized individuals in the “developed” world, and indigenous peoples all around the planet. In our re-invention of Freire in this evolving context, we must learn to listen to African, Asian, Latin American, and indigenous voices. While taking nothing away from Freire or his critical theoretical ancestors, other peoples around the world have developed pedagogies of the oppressed. The critical pedagogical future rests not only in our own commitment to social action and theoretical innovation but also in our willingness to learn from diverse others with powerful and unique insights into human possibility, social justice, and an ever-evolving emancipatory pedagogy.

References

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