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El profesor Carlos Alberto Torres impartió una conferencia el pasado 10 de diciembre de 2018 en la Universitat de València con motivo del 70 aniversario de la Declaración Universal de los Derechos Humanos, que fue proclamada por la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas el 10 de diciembre de 1948. También sirvió como homenaje a Paulo Freire en el cincuenta aniversario de Pedagogía del Oprimido. La conferencia fue organizada por la Escola Europea de Pensament Lluís Vives (<http://www.escoladepensamentlluisvives.com/programa/carlos-alberto-torres>), con la colaboración del Departament de Sociologia i Antropologia Social, la Facultat de Ciències Socials y el Institut Universitari de Creativitat i Innovacions Educatives.

El texto inédito de esta conferencia se publica en formato artículo.

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The 'First' Freire: On Education for Democracy and Social Change.

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ABSTRACT

There is no question that Paulo Freire's contribution to education for social transformation has been phenomenal. This brief paper explores some of the earlier concepts developed by Freire in the seventies, what I have termed the First Freire, offering an unique perspective on his original thought.

KEYWORDS

Communityeducation, LatinAmerica, Paulo Freire, democraticcitizenship, pedagogy, educational policy.

RESUMEN

No hay duda de que la contribución de Paulo Freire a la educación para la transformación social ha sido fenomenal. Este breve artículo explora algunos de los conceptos anteriores desarrollados por Freire en los años setenta, lo que he denominado el primer Freire, que ofrece una perspectiva única sobre su pensamiento original.

El trabajo de Paulo Freire es ejemplar al vincular la teoría y la investigación, produciendo marcos para educar a los ciudadanos del mundo, lo que incluye crear comunidad y respeto mutuo, crear responsabilidad social, inculcar una apreciación de la diversidad, promover múltiples alfabetizaciones y enfoques de resolución de conflictos.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Educación comunitaria, Latinoamérica, Paulo Freire, ciudadanías democráticas, pedagogía , política educativa.

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The work of Paulo Freire is exemplary in linking theory and research, producing frameworks for educating global citizens, including building community and mutual respect, creating social responsibility, instilling an appreciation for diversity, promoting multiple literacies, and conflict solving approaches.

This chapter briefly explores some of the meanings of Freire's early writings, or what I will call, for a lack of a better term, the 'first Freire'.² That is to say the work of Paulo Freire in the sixties and seventies, well represented in his earlier books which had impacted the world of pedagogy and politics until today. One of the central concepts of Freire was to study in the context of the turbulent period of Latin American history the mutual contributions of democracy to education, and the question of social change. What follows will offer some insights into Freire's original analyses.

In *Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Freire summarizes his fundamental preoccupation with the Brazilian historical past. He writes:

In the analyses of the preceding chapters, we have been trying to find a response to the conditions of the Brazilian transition in the pedagogical field, a response in which I have taken into consideration the problems of economic development, of the people's participation in this development and of the critical insertion of the Brazilian people in the process of "fundamental democratization" that characterized us and cannot overlook the signs of our democratic experience, our historic and cultural roots, in contradiction to the the new position that the process demands of the Brazilian people.³

Freire immediately attempts to describe the contribution of Brazilian educators to the process: this would have to be

...about an education that attempts to pass from naïve to critical transitivity, broadening and deepening the ability to understand the challenges of the time, giving the Brazilian people the wherewithal to resist the emotional force of the transition itself. To arm it against the power of the irrationality of those who were easily caught in the position of transitive ingenuousness.⁴

He says that to succeed in developing, a "change of mentality" is necessary, one which is not concerned with reforming only the technical and economic aspects.

Evaluating the process wherein the psychosocial method was born, he mentions that, on one side, the people start to emerge, although they can still be easily trapped by irrationalism and, on the other, an anti-popular pole comes into being, that is to say, the oligarchy and the elite who hold fast to their positions and try at all costs to maintain them.

2 The original version of this chapter was written in Spanish. The translation was done by Peter Lownds.

3 Paulo Freire, *Education as the Practice of Freedom*, op. cit., p. 80.

4 Ibid., p. 80.

Oscillating between the two, but with a great desire to rise and obtain privileges was the middle class, which saw in the people's coming to consciousness a threat to its peace and therefore assumed a reactionary attitude toward the process.

Freire believes that it is very important to analyze the relationship between Education and Society. It is his opinion that Education, even if it cannot be seen ingenuously as something miraculous that can transform Brazilian society, possesses an *instrumental force* that cannot be denied ⁵ (The italics is mine.)

What follows is a list of the most striking aspects, the most basic objectives that an "education for development" should attempt to achieve:

1. "to provide students with the necessary instruments to resist the deracinating powers of an industrial civilization..."⁶ Here [Freire's] reflection pauses, apparently to examine the meaning of work, of the social organization of work and the risks that exist in an industrial society.
2. "an education that makes it possible for people to fearlessly discuss their problems..."⁷
3. "education that is situated in dialogue..."⁸ He emphasizes the constant revision and the constant critical analysis of his discoveries.
4. "...that makes it susceptible to a kind of rebelliousness..."⁹ He appears to reiterate the individual's effort to affirm his/her ethics in the face of all this, a bit of the feeling of the importance of freedom that was born of the Gospel which we would locate as the source of this reflection. This popular rebelliousness, usually very naïve and emotional, must be transformed into "engineering"...
5. An education that "...is identified with scientific methods and processes"¹⁰
6. Education should orient people in their lives. It should "...help people reflect about their ontological vocation as subjects"¹¹
7. Freedom, democracy and critical participation are key ideas that initially constituted the core of Freire's pedagogy. Thus, he rejects the school for a more flexible circle: the culture circle; he rejects the role of teacher as "factotum" in favor of an animator or coordinator of the pedagogical experiences inside the circle; he rejects prescribed curricula a priori for a program created in and with the people. As a result, the essential dimension of all this pedagogical process is dialogue.

5 Ibid., p. 82.

6 Ibid., p. 82

7 Ibid., p. 84

8 Ibid., p. 85

9 Ibid., p. 85

10 Ibid., p. 85

11 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogia del Oprimido* . op. cit., p. 52

...In this way Freire outlines the basic premises of what he will later call a "Political Pedagogy", conceived as a revelatory process, by means of the action and reflection in a situation of oppression, and as the acquisition of a conscious and creative ability [honed by] historical reality. This pedagogy based on dialogue and the unity of action and reflection is a response to the brainwashing ideology by which the dominant classes manipulate the consciousness of the oppressed, forcing them to internalize their values and inculcating a feeling of inferiority and impotence that ultimately favors the isolation and artificiality of the [political] positions they choose.¹²

Because of this, Freire modifies certain organizational details of his pedagogical layout, especially those relating to politics. From 1970 on, in his role as education consultant for the World Council of Churches, he abandons the idea of base education groups, relatively isolated from their context, and began to think of a form of pedagogical militancy connected organically to revolutionary movements and political parties.

Thus, the theme of rebellion becomes an important aspect of the analysis:

We understand rebellion as a symptom of ascension, as an introduction to plenitude. For this very reason, our sympathy can never be rooted in its preponderantly passionate manifestations. On the contrary, our sympathy adds up to a profound sense of responsibility that always leads us to fight for the immediate promotion of critical candor, of the rebellion in insertion.¹³

Advancing the analysis, he sets forth the dimensions of the problem he had to undertake in his pedagogical work:

Thus, our great challenge, within the new Brazilian way of life, was not just to overcome the alarming rate of illiteracy. For just overcoming illiteracy, purely mechanical illiteracy, would not lead to the rebellion of the people.

The problem for us transcended the conquest of illiteracy and had more to do with the need to conquer our democratic inexperience as well. Or to attempt the two things at once.¹⁴

Faced with this, the leitmotiv of the democratic mentality that moved within the dynamic of social change will be the *critique*. Evaluating the education of his time, Freire says:

12 Rosiska Darcy de Oliveira and Pierre Dominice, "Illich-Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Oppression of Pedagogy. The Pedagogical Debate," originally appeared as Document #8, Geneva, Institute of Cultural Action (IDAC), December 1974, published in Spanish in La Revista Cuadernos de Pedagogía, Nos. 7/8, July, August, 1975, Barcelona, Spain, pp. 13-15.

13 Paulo Freire, Educación como práctica de la Libertad, op. cit., p. 87.

14 Ibid., p. 90

There is nothing in our education that that develops in our students a taste for study, for substantiation, for revising the 'discoveries' that would develop transitive critical consciousness. On the contrary, their tenuous relationship to reality intensifies our students' ingenuous consciousness.¹⁵

He synthesizes everything said until now in a paragraph in which he refers to his culture: We are increasingly convinced that our fondness for hollow words, rhetoric, the emphasis on elegantly worded speeches has its root in our democratic inexperience. All this oratorical filigree, almost always lacking in depth, reveals a mental attitude in which the permeability that characterizes critical consciousness is totally absent. This is precisely because critique is the fundamental note of the democratic mentality.

It returns permanently to the verbiage-laden, deflective, ponderous pedagogical culture. Freire writes, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, that

...The more we analyze the dominant educator-*educando*¹⁶ relationships at any level in today's school (or outside it), the more we are convinced that such relations present a special and determinant character; one which presents relations of a fundamentally narrative, discursive and disquisitive nature... that refer to reality as something spiritless, static, divided and well-behaved which, in default, speaks or writes about something completely alien to the existential experience of the *educandos*. Actually, it becomes the supreme uneasiness of this kind of education, its unmanageable anguish.¹⁷

When Freire, in one of his first texts, cited Fernando de Acevedo to say that the *intransitive consciousness* of the vegetative communities was "... bounded and turned in upon itself,"¹⁸ he was suggesting the path upward through the techniques of reduction and codification used in his methodology, implying the reduction of the existential elements, conscious or unconscious, of such a community and the thematic and dialectic codification of such elements so that, when presented anew to the group by a coordinator, they would provoke the unfolding of such a consciousness. His evaluation enters a tangle of culturally verifiable ideological processes, which was tying them to a group of clearly delimited prejudices.

Thus the *critique*, as it was initially understood, resulted solely from the pedagogical work, supported by propitious historical conditions. This critique pointed out that a person could understand his or her position inside its context. Gradually, Freire went about radicalizing this option until conscientization came to have as much to do with commitment as with recognition.

15 Ibid., p. 90

16 An *educando*, in Brazilian Portuguese, is a person in the act of educating himself or herself with or without the help of an educator.

17 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, PL translation.

18 Paulo Freire, *Educação e atualidade brasileira*, Recife, Brasil, 1959.

With respect to these initial arrangements of Freire's, a group of questions arises which need to be explained: the question of the transitivity (or not) of the consciousness; so that we can then approach the difference between 'ingenuously' and 'critically' transitive consciousnesses.

It would seem that all consciousness is transitive because history passes through it and because it has the capacity to be reflective and reflexive, to think of itself as consciousness in respect to history and in respect to itself. Thus, an intransitive consciousness could not exist since it would negate the very foundation of a conscious being.

Now it remains to determine in what way one is "conscious." Freire establishes two forms: the *ingenuous* – grasping reality without visualizing the causes that engender it—is ingenuous transitivity, which he refers to as *magic, mythical or fanatic consciousness*.

The other form is the *critical*—which grasps not only the challenges of history but also understands itself as being in a state of transit, thereby questioning its very reality.

Thus, the central problem for Freire will be to determine what kind of consciousness do the People express. He says that the people of Brazil before it became a Republic¹⁹ had an ingenuous transitive consciousness and were therefore easy prey for irrationalism.²⁰ Soon an advance toward a greater criticality was verified.

When Freire refers to the industrial society and to the necessity of an education for development it appears to us that there is a qualitative jump in his reflection. His earliest thinking was directed at the humble Brazilian peasant who was at the beginning of his transformation and now focuses on people imprisoned by the industrial society. The question would be whether this coincides with a historically similar jump of Brazilian society or if Freire is here incorporating a distinctly Eurocentric *problematique* that does not encompass the historical experience.

When Freire made his position on work and alienation in an industrial society explicit, he was beginning to read Marx and to get in touch with the idea of a critical theory of society.

In footnote 14 on page 90 of *Education as the Practice of Freedom*, he mentions Eric Fromm's book, *Marx and his Concept of Man* in which the author comments on, and also includes, the philosophical economic manuscripts of 1844, fruit of the first investigations undertaken by

19 This occurred on November 16, 1889: "Until the fall of the monarchy or, more precisely, until the abolition of slavery in 1888," writes historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda in *Raizes do Brasil*, 1936, "the entire structure of colonial society was rural... From that moment Brazilian life shifted from one pole to another, the transition to urbanization which only after 1888 plays a decisive role."

20 Here the irrational represents the group of blind forces that go against the grain of historical reason. Freirian analysis is nourished by the dichotomy between rational development (adequate to the idea of reason that must be preserved in a society which bases its ascension on superior kinds of cohabitation) and irrational development (adequate to the idea of the centrifugal forces that control—according to Freire, starting with a kind of "emotionality"—societal development, thereby reversing this process of ascension, dichotomizing it, divesting it of the elements that give it value and universality, reducing social space to the political will of a single social sector). It would be interesting to discuss Freire's analysis of rationality at greater length. Rationality is a theme that has occupied many social scientists, like Marx or Weber (*Economics and Society*), Godelier (*Economic Rationality and Irrationality*), or Lukacs (*The Assault on Reason*).

Karl Marx with the intention of beginning a study of the objective world of economics from a philosophical perspective. Marx, motivated by his preoccupation with the miserable existence of the English working class, attempts to demonstrate how these people—whom Hegel had identified as 'historical beings' because of their mediating relationship with nature through human toil and were trying to construct their social reality as an immanent expression of the idea they externalized, expressed exactly the opposite: that the fruits of their labor, rather than belonging to them and, as such, reconstituted in their search for totality, were snatched from their hands by the mechanism of "private property" which not only stole the fruits of their labor but alienated them from their ability to work and their *raison d'être* as well, converting them into a "labor force" that could be bought and sold like merchandise in the market.

As merchandise, they produced and reproduced the system of merchandise-production or, more precisely, the capitalist mode of production.

The negation of the negation of humans again in possession of himself /herself and the fruits of his/her labor was hindered by the private appropriation of goods which left him/her "exteriorized," lost in the world of things, distracted, alienated.

Erich Fromm utilized the concepts of alienation and distraction as synonyms, as did Freire to attempt to describe the atmosphere of deracination born of assembly-line piecework, the typical social organization of labor in the industrial society. These concepts had a stricter connotation in historical materialism, which we do not intend to examine in depth here. In synthesis, we want to say that the alienation of labor in the opulent society that Freire initially points out does not represent the strict Marxist conceptualization of alienated labor (especially the young Marx of the Manuscripts).

We can obviously reject the possibility of identifying such concepts in the theoretical universe of the mature Marx who wrote *Das Kapital*. Later, Freire's understanding of Marxism enabled him to manage such conceptual apparatus with more technique.

Again we note, continuing to reflect about Freire's initial work, how in the passage where he refers to the importance of an attitude of rebellion, a kind of radical Christian thinking is once again present which asks that the personal experience of human freedom be taken to its greatest profundity, to its ontological radicalism; to being permanently both *of* and *in* the world but with this spirit that emanates from heavenly bliss. The profound humanism that floods it, this "subjective" humanism is rooted in its understanding of freedom.

Freedom is man's richest dimension and the one that relates him to God. Those who can live this dialectic of immanence and transcendence assume the limits of their finitude as the framework of their infinitude and lead their lives in rebellion against it as the most authentic way of being human beings.

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