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## POLIFONIA

Selected theses from the lectures of Paulo Freire

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The theses presented below were elaborated by Ângela Antunes Ciseski, Moacir Gadotti, Paulo Roberto Padilha e Sônia Couto, members of the Paulo Freire Institute. In this collection we have attempted to provide a synthesis that could serve both those who would like a comprehensive vision of Paulo Freire's work and those who are already familiar with his work and would like to deepen their understanding of it in an extended and more complex manner.

The first part is a collection of theses presented in expositions organized as part of the Paulo Freire Symposium, held in Vitória (Espírito Santo) on September 4-6, 1996, and hosted by IPF, Centro Comunitário Pedagógico do Espírito Santo (CECOPEs - the Community Pedagogic Center of Espírito Santo), and the Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (Federal University of Espírito Santo). This was the last major international symposium related to the ideas of Paulo Freire in which Freire himself was able to participate. The following individuals made presentations at this symposium (in order of appearance): Moacir Gadotti, Antônio Faundez, Luiz Eduardo Wanderle, Pedro Pontual, Pablo Gentili, Balduino Antonio Andreola, João Eudes Rodrigues Pinheiro, Rosa Maria Torres, Osmar Fávero, Ana Maria do Vale, José Eustáquio Romão and Célia Frazão Linhares. Paulo Freire gave the closing address.

The second part refers to ideas which emerged during a course on the Thinking of Paulo Freire, offered by Professor Moacir Gadotti for graduate students in the field of Pedagogy at the Universidade de São Paulo (University of São Paulo), during the second semester of 1996, using the book, "Paulo Freire: a biobibliography" (São Paulo, IPF/Cortex, 1996) as the text. In November 1996, Paulo Freire participated in the final classes of that course, having an opportunity to hear and debate the different points raised by the class.

### Part One -- Paulo Freire Symposium

What have a "Paulo Freire Symposium"? This question was debated during the opening of the Symposium. It was said that Paulo Freire represented a rupture in Brazilian pedagogic history. He broke radically with elitist education and committed himself to concrete and real men and women. In a context of massification, disarticulation between school and society, and exclusion, Paulo Freire is even more relevant today in his efforts to construct an educational project that is radically democratic and provocative. The "Paulo Freire Symposium" was not intended to pay homage to a pedagogue, an historical figure, whose legacy had past importance. It instead constituted a systematized moment of debate around the thinking and work of Paulo Freire which have left and continue to leave a significant mark on pedagogy, both in Brazil and globally.

In the text that follows, we list some of the principal theses presented by Symposium participants

**Moacir Gadotti:** "The political-pedagogical praxis of Paulo Freire in the context of Brazilian education"

- 1) Freirean constructivism surpasses research and thematic teaching (Piaget): the third stage of Freire's method -- the stage of problematization -- presupposes transformative action.
- 2) Success in the literacy process depends more on the capacity of the instructor to work side-by-side with the learner than on the actual techniques utilized.
- 3) One of the reasons that explains the expressive repercussions of the theory of knowledge put forth by Paulo Freire is that he gave the student dignity: the teacher is also a learner.
- 4) Freirean interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity are not merely pedagogic methods or teacher attitudes: they make demands on the very nature of the pedagogic act.
- 5) The themes developed by Paulo Freire in his last few works suggest the emergence of a pedagogy of sustainable development or an ecopedagogy.
- 6) The future of Freirean thinking is linked to the future of popular education, its re-conceptualization or "re-learning" in an era of post-modernism.
- 7) Paulo Freire's dream -- to unit people in a society of equals -- demands the de-bureaucratization of knowledge and a larger preoccupation with linkages and interpersonal relationships.
- 8) Conflict is the motor of history and dialogue is the fundamental weapon needed to overcome conflict.

**Luís Eduardo Wanderley and Pedro Pontual:** "Paulo Freire's influence in the formation of popular education"

- 1) In addition to the initial categories defined by Paulo Freire, such as "oppressor-oppressed," today we encounter another category: the "excluded." It is necessary to change the content and methodology of popular education making it adequate to the task of working with this new reality of the "excluded."
- 2) According to Paulo Freire, it is important to recognize class struggle in order to have a better comprehension of the pedagogical process.
- 3) Popular education must consider the technological environment in which we are all inserted presently. We cannot ignore the factors responsible for the formation of the popular imagination. In relation to recent elections, for example, the media created "virtual candidates": without an agenda, without a history but with images that spoke for them. If popular education does not impact the media, it will be "out of the loop."
- 4) "Concertación," a new Spanish word that connotes the necessity of confronting our reality using "pacts": the necessity of developing consensus, alliances within the heart of popular movements. Paulo Freire's work can assist us in understanding this new time.
- 5) Paulo Freire's work can be viewed as embodying 6 (six) key ideas: 1) the expansion of the concept of the educative (expanding it beyond that which is strictly school-based); 2) the inherently political nature of education; 3) the recognition of the limits of education; 4) the

construction of a new politics of culture; 5) the principle of democratic administration; and 6) the pedagogy of questioning.

**Pablo Gentili:** "Paulo Freire's ideas and the process of democratization in education and in society"

- 1) Pedagogy of hope asserts itself in opposition to the pedagogy of exclusion promulgated by neoliberal Latin American governments.
- 2) According to Paulo Freire, the neoliberal diagnostic is ideologically framed: it creates a common sense, an imaginary social order that presupposes the existence of alternative responses, alternative orders (subjectivities). It represents itself as the natural way of understanding schooling.
- 3) Paulo Freire is contributing to the construction of other, alternative subjectivities which militate against the technicism found in the neoliberal proposal. Paulo Freire thinks about pedagogic technicism in a political manner.
- 4) The question is to know whether we are thinking about education for the conquered or for the conquerors: pedagogy of hope thinks about education for the conquered.
- 5) The construction of a pedagogy of hope is not a technical problem. It is an ideological problem that implies the construction of a democratic subjectivity.
- 6) Neoliberalism succeeds in making inequality a natural condition. Because of this Paulo Freire calls our attention to the necessity of observing the process of constructing democratic subjectivity, showing, on the contrary, that inequality is not natural. It is necessary to sharpen our capacity to tolerate the unexpected.
- 7) Paulo Freire considers the political nature of the pedagogic process to be necessary as educational problems are neither merely technical nor merely pedagogical: they are also political and economic. Neoliberalism attempts to redefine the political character of education, proposing a re-politicization that is favorable to the sectors of power. According to Paulo Freire, we must think about education from the perspective of the popular classes.
- 8) We should construct our philosophy of equality and make inequality an unnatural state, thinking in terms of diversity, which gives meaning to the pedagogy of hope.

**Balduino Antonio Andreola:** "The theoretical and philosophical presuppositions of Paulo Freire's thinking: the political pedagogic project of liberatory pedagogy"

- 1) The work of Paulo Freire is much more than an academic accomplishment: "the heart is at the center of knowledge."
- 2) In Paulo Freire's ideas, dialogue is an ontological demand. Dialogue of cultures is fundamental for human beings, for groups of people and for nations. Because of this Paulo Freire concerns himself with writing in a manner that uses the language of every day people more than the language of intellectuals.
- 3) Paulo Freire defends a new modernity: rationality with an affective component.

- 4) Some ideas are uncomfortable during a certain era but become accepted as time progresses. The thinking of Paulo Freire always makes people uncomfortable: because of this, his ideas are always current.
- 5) Ernani Fiori: "Paulo Freire never forgot the passion for his dreams."
- 6) The radical nature of Paulo Freire's ideas comes from the faith that he has in the capacity of human beings to overcome their difficulties and their limits. He is also committed to working side by side with others, defining collectively the projects to pursue.
- 7) The power that is available is not a power to be conquered, participated in or distributed: it is a power that exists to be reinvented. Paulo Freire defined the role of educators in this process of reinventing power: to reinvent education, reinvented politically. We are traveling down a one-way street, against the dominant culture but not against the currents of history. Power is delegated by those who have power.
- 8) Paulo Freire's work encompasses the aesthetic, the epistemological and the social. It is necessary to reinvent knowledge with beautiful features.

#### **Rosa Maria Torres e Osmar Fávero: "Paulo Freire and literacy"**

##### **Rosa Maria Torres**

- 1) Paulo Freire's POLISSEMIA: Paulo Freire is a citizen of the world. His work has the capacity to generate many additional fields of inquiry. His speeches and his writings generate different interpretations in different places.
- 2) Paulo Freire did not develop new techniques for literacy, he was not only concerned with the development of adults' writing skills. Among all the other themes, he was most preoccupied with the relations between the teacher and the student and with critical consciousness.
- 3) In order to set priorities for working with pre-school children, it is necessary to have adult education for parents and families, so that they will be able to collaborate with teachers. From there, one can also see the importance of Paulo Freire. Pre-school education and adult education should be "interchanged."
- 4) Illiteracy is "not eradicable" because the illiterate is not a curse; illiteracy is a social condition. One cannot eradicate illiteracy without eradicating poverty first.

##### **Osmar Fávero**

- 1) Paulo Freire was the first Brazilian educator to speak about illiteracy as a social problem. For Paulo Freire, illiteracy is a social problem whose resolution requires a profound process of social mobilization. Such a charge has not yet been answered by any platform at the federal level of government.
- 2) The Second National Congress of Adult Education (Rio de Janeiro, 1958) was the moment which gave rise to the popular movements in Brazil.

- 3) In a closed society, man has a magical consciousness. In a society in transition, the conscience is a transitive-ingenuous one. Moving from a state of transitive ingenuity to that of critical consciousness generates conscientization: an educative process, a movement of praxis, a reflective practice. From there arises a new movement: politicization. This does not mean that education focuses on political themes. Politicization means engagement with groups that are struggling for social transformation.
- 4) Angicos opposed the experience of ISEB and of the campaign "De pé no chão também se aprende a ler" ("We learn to read with our feet on the ground"). It was the first systematized experience with literacy. A Commission for Popular Culture was created. The idea of a "generative word" emerged, which made possible the act of reflection on reality while also attending to the necessary linguistic components of literacy.
- 5) The reflections of ISEB have their origins in the formation of the popular movements. Álvaro Vieira Pinto, the great representative of ISEB, who was concerned with the kind of people that would be created in the country and with the development of ingenuous and critical consciousness in these people, had a great influence on Paulo Freire.

**Ana Maria do Vale and José Eustáquio Romão: "Paulo Freire and the Public Popular School"**

- 1) The decentralization and democratization of public spaces requires a role for schooling in the process of conscientization and citizenship. Democratic decentralization implies autonomy: the school's capacity for decision-making. Without this capacity, one merely decentralizes tasks.
- 2) Paulo Freire taught us that the role of schooling is fundamental in society but that it cannot be seen as the principal means for resolving social problems. But still, we must attempt to overcome a bourgeois public school.
- 3) According to Paulo Freire, no one walks without also learning how to walk.
- 4) The Public Popular School implemented by Paulo Freire as Municipal Secretariat of Education broke with the tradition that viewed the elite as the only ones competent to govern.
- 5) Paulo Freire exercised two basic functions in the Municipality of São Paulo: one symbolic, the other real. In his symbolic function, Paulo Freire considered that schools should be the channel through which popular culture could be expressed scientifically, that the public school should serve as the space in which reflection about social determinations could be organized and that this school should have an insurrectional function; that is, it should provide a space for the political organization of the popular classes and be an instrument in the counter-hegemonic struggle. In his real function, Paulo Freire demonstrated the necessity of diminishing the distance between "the rock and the windowpane," he tried to meet the expectations of 37,000 teachers and taught them how to link theory and practice and practice and theory, proposing an administration that was truly democratic, even at the level of the Municipal Secretariat of Education.
- 6) Paulo Freire did not leave the Municipal Secretariat of Education because he had failed but because his task — both symbolic and real -- was complete: "He left without leaving."

**Célia Frazão Linhares:** "Critical Pedagogic Thinking in Brasil: the presence of Paulo Freire"

- 1) Paulo Freire's thinking represents an affirmation of the many voices in the face of those who want there to be one voice only.
- 2) Paulo Freire's work goes beyond mere words because it returns to its real owners: the oppressed, those that always dreamed. His work transforms the weakness of the oppressed into a force, such that the force of the oppressor is transformed into weakness.
- 3) Paulo Freire seemed to have understood from very early on that the universities, with their academicism, and their internal battle for power and control of knowledge, revealed themselves, with frequency, to be rigid spaces where creative thinking would encounter serious problems.
- 4) We live these days with, on the one hand, celebrations, honoraria, and parties held in honor of Paulo Freire's work; and on the other, a strangulation of his work, where people feign adherence to his ideas, even though it is well-known that in the university curriculum and in the very formation of our professors, there is no space for such pedagogy.

Finally, the Symposium was concluded with a speech by Paulo Freire which, among other things, affirmed the following ideas:

- 1) One of the things that pleases us in our life is to know that people exist. I am discussed, recreated, distorted and remembered. The tragedy would be to pass through life without being supported and criticized.
- 2) We need to be aware of the anesthetic qualities of the neoliberal ideology: it is fatalistic, it uses a fatalistic discourse. But there is no reality that is in charge of itself. Neoliberalism acts as if globalization was a definitive reality rather than a historical category.
- 3) I am a profoundly intuitive person. Above all, my strength is not to remain acting on my intuitions, but to submit them to rigorous scrutiny.
- 4) Everything connected with democratic activity in schools requires that we go beyond content. We cannot deceive the curiosity of the students.
- 5) I was a young boy on the boundaries between the popular and middle classes.
- 6) Teachers have no reason to hide their political opinions.

**Part Two**

**The Thinking of Paulo Freire**

For the first time, a course was offered on the thinking of Paulo Freire at the University of São Paulo. This course was an elective for those in the School of Education, majoring in Pedagogy. Professor Maocir Gadotti proposed this course in 1994 but was only able to offer it in the second semester of 1996. In the course, lectures and discussions were held about Paulo Freire's work -- using the book, *Paulo Freire, a biobibliography* -- which was published in 1996. Below, we present a few of the theses that emerged during the course:

- 1) It is possible to be an author and not merely a compiler: students participate in the construction of knowledge. Schools can be creators, they can produce their own political-pedagogic project.
- 2) Reading the world: learning can be extracted from one's own daily routine.
- 3) Culture is an important dimension in the process of social transformation.
- 4) Dialogue is fundamental in cultural creation: dialogue of cultures.
- 5) One can look at chaos and begin to see utopia: do not lose hope in front of difficulties. The educator must be a prophet.
- 6) Culture synthesis: popular culture and scientific and erudite culture are not juxtaposed but articulate with one another.
- 7) Aesthetic beauty is fundamental: hold students accountable for respecting themselves.
- 8) Create experiences and relationships, rather than merely passing on content.
- 9) All illiterates have important knowledge which should be exchanged and shared: Socrates in Freire.
- 10) Critical Freirean constructivism is easy to understand and difficult to practice and thus demands changes not only in individuals but also in society.
- 11) Simplicity is a virtue that is learned only with considerable experience: it is a product of wisdom.
- 12) 13) Paulo Freire always revisits the same theses, re-reading them in new contexts with the same humanistic perspective: he views the world through the lens of human and individual liberation.
- 14) Sugar-coated developmentalism camouflages differences and impedes the provision of assistance which is necessary for the popular classes. The same dynamic within a State or Nation can be seen between States: the supposed "help" from one country to another hides the underlying developmentalist current. International assistance should be a two-way street.
- 15) Even critical thinking has historical components: what today is considered critical, may tomorrow be considered naive.
- 16) The origins of Paulo Freire's thinking can be found between two revolutions: that of 1930 and that of 1964, and thus has a sense of "prohibited fruit."
- 17) Affirmation of the subject in history, against individualism: the role of autonomy.
- 18) In order to be universal, one's thinking must be local, must be "glocal" (global + local).
- 19) "Pedagogy of the oppressed" was born in the utopic struggles of the 1960's which have not yet been realized, and therein lies the continuity with today: what was announced has not yet been achieved.
- 20) To teach is to insert oneself in history: it is not only to be present in the classroom but in the political imagination as well.
- 21) Illiteracy is a project of the elites: it is not social determinism.
- 22) Don't eliminate schools (Illich) but reinvent them.
- 23) Oppression is a form of insanity.
- 24) Pedagogy of the oppressed is as much a critique of traditional pedagogy (centered in the teacher) as of the Escola Nova (which negated the political character of education). Because of this, it is incorrect to call Paulo Freire a popular "escolanovista".



- 25) The theory of emancipatory communication brings Habermas into contact with Freire. The political theory of social transformation calls Gramsci's ideas into the fore.
- 26) Paulo Freire lived a tension between the Greek (being and reason) and the Semite (goods and desires).
- 27) Illich gives schooling a negative connotation; Freire gives it a critical, positive orientation.
- 28) Paulo Freire placed the oppressed on the historical stage through his political engagement and his theory as a contra-narrative to the discourse of the powerful and privileged.
- 29) Paulo Freire's work obligates us to review our social, sexist and racist preconceptions.
- 30) It is also necessary to work with those who are not poor and not oppressed in order to create a counter-dialogue to those who have more at stake in the current social order.
- 31) The concept of "social classes" is not sufficient to understand the complexity of human beings. It is necessary to also bring in dimensions of gender, sexuality, race, age, religion, and the formation of each individual.
- 32) Learning is profoundly facilitated if new knowledge is assimilated and related to the prior knowledge and experiences of the students (Piaget and Freire).
- 33) The educational act consists of explaining human and social conflicts in order to challenge people and groups to find ways to overcome such conflict.
- 34) Utopia is a true reality of human duty. This means that to be an educational realist, the teacher must believe in utopia: utopia represents an impulse that allows oneself to go beyond historical facts. It becomes a challenge and a stimulus.
- 35) The phenomenological-hermeneutical pedagogy of Paulo Freire offers a base for ethics and for religious education (Liberation Theology).
- 36) Pedagogical reforms for "the masses" fail because they are done for them and not by them: the masses end up being objects and not subjects of the changes.
- 37) A multicultural school can be a laboratory for a multicultural society, a truly democratic society.
- 38) The space for informal socialization offers possibilities for encounters and experiences that bring solidarity, for a complete human being (with rights to emotional roots).
- 40) Liberation education is the opposite of bureaucratic education.
- 41) The teaching of sciences can be emancipatory and a part of citizenship formation: it depends on the themes and the methodologies selected. The themes should start with the daily lives of students.
- 42) Education can not do everything, but it can do something important.
- 43) Habermas and Freire: human nature was invented by human history. "Curiosity" (strangeness, fear) and "interest," for Habermas, were used to construct human nature and, above all, knowledge. Human beings (differentiated from other living beings), used reflection as a way to act on determinations (+liberty) and transform nature. Without curiosity, there would be no science, knowledge or common sense. There must be naive curiosity and epistemological curiosity.
- 44) Material conditions of the pedagogic space condition teaching and learning.
- 45) An authoritarian structure cannot function democratically.
- 46) Freirean ecopedagogy signifies a "taste for the world." "I want to be remembered as someone who loved plants, animals, human beings, the world," said Paulo Freire

- 48) The king of necessity places obstacles in front of the king of liberty.
- 49) Paulo Freire and theater: the first moment (pre-1964): theater used in the traditional sense with the stage and the balcony put to didactic use; the second moment: theater of conscientization or theater of the oppressed -- theater as a technique for the formation of consciousness.
- 50) <sup>51</sup> Communication transforms human beings into subjects: The oppressed have a "right to their voice." A human being is only human through communication. Communication is only effective when it is egalitarian: to the contrary, there is no communication, there are only communicators.