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RETROSPECTIVE

Freire at the Beach: remembering Paulo in the bright days of summer

ROGER BOSHIER

University of British Columbia, Vancouver

ABSTRACT *Paulo Freire's work in literacy and conscientisation brought new depth and meaning to emancipatory and participatory pedagogy. In recent years Freire was concerned he would not be around for the beginning of the twenty-first century. His death is a loss to adult education but all signs suggest there will be a continuing interest in his work. Many people had personal contact with Freire. Some acted like groupies trailing a rock star. Others had misgivings about his guru status. A few thought his work resembled that of Sylvia Ashton-Warner in New Zealand. Moreover, it was not easy to "know" Freire and, in one stream of thought, he was a chameleon that changed spots to suit the occasion and often took refuge in lofty generalisations. The notion that there was no "real" Freire, only a construct, is not welcomed by Marxist friends. Thus far there is little critique of his work. The author of this article more or less spent a summer with and interviewed Freire. In this article he asks—who was Freire? The answer consists of details concerning his biography, recollections of the summer of 1984, an interview in which he speaks in his own words and an analysis of what few people ever witnessed—a cultural circle in action.*

Introduction

Before a 1996 restructuring, the Adult Education Research Centre at the University of British Columbia was purposefully placed on the edge of the campus, away from the orthodoxy of the Faculty of Education and so far from the university "centre" that surveillance was rendered difficult. It was a crowded place and when summer instructors arrived they were usually set up in the office of an absent faculty member. Paulo Freire was booked to come in the summer of 1984. Like almost everyone else in adult education I had noticed him years earlier (Barnes & Boshier, 1976) and was struck by the way his work closely paralleled that of Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1959, 1965), the New Zealand teacher who had her Maori learners make their own materials (using local stories from their own lives) after tossing the "prescribed" reading primers out the window.

Paz Buttedahl had arranged Paulo's teaching in Vancouver and, lucky for me, he was plonked into an office across the hall, about seven feet from my door. For

summer weeks we sat in our respective offices with doors open. But, in significant ways, our offices were one and I had the chance to be with a remarkably ordinary bloke—not the guru.

These days his work is more cited than any other author in adult education. Even by 1984 he had been constructed as guru and Ira Shor, for reasons we did not fully appreciate at the time, would be sitting in the No. 1 seminar room where Freire taught his class and was always ready to pounce when Paulo had a few minutes to spare. The “talking book” tradition had begun.

Contrary to popular opinion, Freire did much to encourage his guru status. Moreover, as Weiler (1996) observed, he often dealt with difficult questions by invoking grand generalisations, motherhood statements or an “inspirational message of optimism and love” (p. 355). Paulo had several personas and it is thus no surprise to see others attempting to fold him and his ideas into the labyrinths of, for example, postmodernism (McLaren & Leonard, 1993; McLaren & Lankshear, 1994). Like political spin doctors, foreign admirers are also prone to dramatise various personas for Freire. Hence, McLaren and Giroux (1994) present Freire as “a proud yet humble warrior of the spirit ... engaging in a bohemian pedagogy of happiness ... with ... the wisdom of an ancient sage and the unfailing passion of a socialist revolutionary” (pp. xvi–xvii).

Everyone has a biography and comes from a cultural context which shapes their work. But, in Freire’s case, his life and experience were at the centre of his theoretical analysis. Not many people ever witnessed Paulo leading a literacy or cultural circle or actually engaged in dialogue or conscientisation. However, this does not diminish the importance of his work but magnifies the fact evidence for his ideas is found in his own life experience.

Because his life was central to his theorising it is important to know about it and, later in the paper, there is an interview with Freire that illuminates a couple of corners. Thus far there has been no sustained biography and no consistent meaning attached to the details of his life. For example, 1944 to 1959 are “lost years” (Weiler, 1996) and, until further work is done, scholars will have to almost depend upon Freire’s own accounts. There is no shortage of followers and adoring hagiography (e.g. Gadotti, 1994). As well, numerous scholars have interpreted his work for Spanish and English-speaking readers (e.g. Torres, 1978, 1994). There has also been some adroit analysis of the texts Freire produced (e.g. Taylor, 1993). But one of the most intriguing and thorough analyses is from Weiler (1996) who, deploying a critical and constructivist perspective, likened him to a chameleon that changed his spots depending on the occasion.

Fortunately, English-language translations of his work are now considerably more accessible than in the 1970s. The main books are *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Freire, 1972), *Education for critical consciousness* (Freire, 1973) and *The politics of education* (Freire, 1985). As well there is Freire and Macedo (1987) on literacy and the “talking book” that arose from the Vancouver summer (Shor & Freire, 1987). In December 1987, three years after the Vancouver summer, Freire visited the Highlander Centre in Tennessee to talk another book, this time with the inimitable Myles Horton (Bell, Gaventa & Peters, 1990; Horton, 1990). Later he “talked” another

book, this one on higher education (Escobar, Fernandez, Guevara-Niebla & Freire, 1994). Elias (1994) focused on the religious aspects of Freire's life and theorising. Prior to his death there were erudite elaborations of his theories concerning literacy and politics such as *Politics of liberation: Paths from Freire* (McLaren & Lankshear, 1994) and *Paulo Freire: A critical encounter* (McLaren & Leonard, 1993) and the somewhat autobiographical *Pedagogy of hope* (Freire, 1994). After his death his publisher brought out essays entitled *Pedagogy of the heart* (Freire, 1997).

Biography

Despite the volume of work about him and frequency with which he is cited, Weiler (1996) wonders if there ever was a "real" Paulo Freire. She provided persuasive evidence for the fact he would present one persona to this and another to that audience. Hence, given the amount of work that still needs to be done and the adulation and hyperbole around Freire, what can be said with any degree of certainty?

We are reasonably certain of the following. Paulo Freire was born into a middle-class Brazilian family in 1921 and claims to have learned to read and write under a mango tree in the yard of a house in Recife. (The first chapter of the posthumous *Pedagogy of the heart* is entitled "Under the shade of a mango tree".) His father was a low-ranked military officer who had status but little pay. For his first eight years, life was comfortable but, once depression struck, the family became destitute and young Paulo malnourished. By his own account he fell behind in his schoolwork and was subsequently labelled mentally retarded.

As well as these roots in the Third World, and experience of poverty, he was influenced by liberation theology (see Giroux, 1985). In 1942 Freire married Elza Maria Costa de Oliveira whom he credits for helping shape his ideas about education. Elza was with Freire in Vancouver in 1984 but died in 1987. Paulo suffered greatly from Elza's death but regained his zest for living upon marrying Anna Maria Araujo, a student of his who had written a dissertation on illiteracy in Brazil.

Freire's innovative and participatory approaches to literacy education began in the 1940s and continued until 1964 when he was arrested. The *El Globo* newspaper in Rio de Janeiro accused him of spreading foreign ideas. He spent 75 days in prison, was interrogated for 83 hours and, with 100 other popular leaders, sent into exile. The military government declared him an "international subversive, a traitor to Christ and to the people of Brazil besides being an absolute ignoramus and illiterate" (Moreira, 1973, p. 115).

Freire went to Chile to help with agrarian reform. From there, in a move that must have disturbed the generals, in 1969 he was appointed to Harvard University's Center for Studies in Development. In 1970 he took up a position in Geneva (Switzerland) as consultant to the World Council of Churches from where he developed literacy programs for Tanzania, Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique and made trips to Australia, New Zealand and other places.

He made a brief return to Chile after the Allende assassination in 1973 which provoked General Pinochet to declare him a subversive. On top of the jail sentence

in Brazil this was another stunning endorsement for Freire and adult education. Freire, the ignoramus, was onto something. Otherwise why would Pinochet, the dictator with tanks, guns, and water cannon be so concerned about this charming and mild-mannered Brazilian? Fortunately, unlike some of his friends, Freire did not join the ranks of the disappeared.

Paulo did not return to his native Brazil until 1980, made the trip to Vancouver in 1984 and subsequently worked as the Secretary of Education in Sao Paulo (see Torres, 1994). In the winter of 1989 he supported his friend Luis Inacio Lulada Silva, a trade unionist in the Workers' Party, in the first popular elections held in Brazil in 29 years. Luis came close to winning and, had he done so, Freire would have been Minister of Education, the post he held before being exiled in 1964. Would he have needed the aggravation of being Minister of Education at 68 years of age?

Summer of 1984

In Vancouver he encountered the material facts of being a sessional instructor in the summer. He came face-to-face with the cantankerous photocopier machine, the UBC marking system and parking enforcement. When a uniformed parking attendant came into the building Freire feared it was the police and visibly shrank. He was here to teach ADED508, Section 951. Everyone in the office helped and there were memorable dinners with Paulo but, because I was across the hall, I had more opportunities to cajole the photocopier to accept Freire's stuff without chewing it into pieces. Our day-to-day lives were far removed from the esoterica of social theory, the grind of Latino poverty or his rock star status. In the mornings, we engaged in silly talk:

"Professor Freire, you're here early ... are we having the revolution today?"

"No ... I have to teach at 9.a.m." Paulo would say, resplendent in a red tartan shirt.

"Well, how about lunch then. Can we have the revolution *after* lunch?"

"O.K.," he'd say with a grin, "but first show me how to use the photocopier. We can't have a revolution without the *class* handouts."

Elza was with Freire in Vancouver, and Weiler (1996), Taylor (1993), Torres (1994) and others claim she had a crucial influence on his pedagogy. At the age of 21 Freire had tutored Elza when she was a nursery school teacher studying for an exam. Taylor (1993) felt it was Elza who encouraged Paulo to teach and got him into the Catholic Action Movement. In the summer of 1984 Paulo and Elza accepted invitations to dinner, went out to the Canadian Gulf Islands and conducted numerous seminars and meetings. At one point his summer class nearly collapsed because of demands from elsewhere in the community and university. Several students treated him like any other summer instructor and raised awkward questions about the absence of gender in his analysis of what were mostly class relations. But

many members of the excessively large class treated him as guru and were subdued by the magnitude of his presence (Butterwick, 1998). In other places where he taught, some people dropped the class because of the guru factor (Harris, 1998). But most of those involved agree that Paulo appeared to practise what he preached. In person he was a gentle soul, quite unlike most representations of an educational revolutionary.

He was deeply in love with Elza, very attentive and frequently brought her into discussions or sought her opinion. These observations, coupled with his own words in his recent *Pedagogy of hope* and other semi-biographical accounts (e.g. Freire, 1997), clearly show how love, passion and relationships were the centre of his life and thus his theorising. Some feminists blanch when they learn that Paulo married not one, but two of his students but, as Simon (1995) has theorised, faculty-student relationships are complex and cannot all be dismissed by simple-minded metanarratives or totalising discourses such as "abuse of power" or "patriarchy". The intimacy of faculty-student relations "is often the locus of a complex circuit of signification and eros that conditions the work of teaching and learning" (1995, p. 95) and, in Freire's case, brought deep fulfilment and satisfaction not once, but twice.

Freire's biography dominated his work and his public theorising, as presented in lectures, seminars, texts and talking books, is deeply conflated with his travels and private life. In this regard Weiler feels "the acknowledgment of the importance of these relationships makes striking his own lack of theoretical concern with the intersection of the public and private or of the way in which these relationships were also supports for his public life or sources for his thoughts" (1996, p. 357).

Paulo at the Beach

In 1984 Freire had returned from exile and was anxious to get on with his life. At that time, there were only a few hints concerning later questions about intersections between his private, public and scholarly life. After so many years away, he and Elza were anxious to get home. It took considerable effort to persuade him to leave Brazil, even temporarily. Although not enchanted by the lassitude in suburban Vancouver streets, like most visitors, he liked the look of the mountains, the beach and vast ocean beyond. When not being dragged away by senior administrators (who behaved like fawning groupies) he could be enticed to the beach.

The University of British Columbia sits on the end of a peninsula and is surrounded by rainforest and beach. Paulo was no surfer and we also had doubts about his ability to use our axe. He was quite tentative in the way he walked on the sand. But when his time in Vancouver was near its end, we left our cramped offices and went to a Japanese garden near the beach to record an interview. Paulo and I sat on a grassy bank, we wired him for sound and talked on tape. By this time I had the same sense as Weiler (1996). Paulo's private and public life were one and the same thing. There were other interviews and we filmed cutaways and fillers on Jericho beach. Paulo, over here, do this, do that. ... He always obliged. But, in the interview presented here (Boshier, 1984), I was mostly interested in the way his

biography formed his ideas and was (and still am) exceedingly uncertain about whether conscientisation involves changes in perception, cognition or both. Here is the interview¹ (very slightly edited) published for the first time.

RB: Paulo, why did you have to go into exile?

PF: Well, first of all, it's good to underline this is a good question ... because many people think education is something neutral. At that time I was participating in the national program for adult literacy. As an educator I was not doing anything neutral. Education has its politicity. And the political approach I had was different from the approach of the people who made the *coup d'état*.

This is the reason I was considered a subversive because by trying to teach the people to read and to write words ... I invited the people to "read" the words.

Reading the words and reading the reality. And really, "reading" the reality is not so good for those with power.

RB: So what happened to you? Did you get arrested?

PF: Yes, I got arrested. I spent 75 days in prison with lots of other Brazilians—intellectuals, peasants. Finally I was expelled from the university [where] I taught, and then I had to leave the country.

Generally, I say that I never *left* the country. I *was left* because I did not leave because I wanted to. But it was necessary for me to leave in order to survive.

RB: Was it these circumstances that led to your decision to write *Pedagogy of the oppressed* and how did that fit into all of this?

PF: No, no ... I did not decide because of that. Nevertheless, my experience led me to understand things better than before. I wrote *Pedagogy* in exile really. Of course, when I wrote *Pedagogy*, I was thinking of my former experience and about the new experience in Chile for example. Every time I write some book I always write about what I am doing. My books are much more reports of what I do than abstractions.

RB: Paulo, after you left Chile, where did you go then?

PF: I came to the United States—Cambridge—I taught at Harvard University. I spent one year at Cambridge. I had received an invitation also from the World Council of Churches. I received the two invitations almost simultaneously. I discussed it with both. I had to make a kind of compromise between the two invitations. Instead of staying for two years in Harvard, I asked to stay something like one year. Instead of starting when the World Council asked me, I started later. Then it was possible for me to spend one year in the States and it was very important for me, I thought.

After that I went to Geneva where I lived and worked for the office of World Council. From Geneva, I had the chance to work around the world. I learned a lot because of that, of course. Then when it was possible to go back to Brazil, I left the World Council and four years ago, I went back.

RB: Did the Brazilian authorities ever let you know when it would be OK for you to return?

PF: Oh look, in 1978 things began to change in Brazil—in the political area. The

very rich on the one hand needed to do something ... to solve some political problems. On the other hand, there were pressures coming from the masses of the people, from the intellectuals—demanding that the government give amnesty to the Brazilians in exile. The movement grew and became stronger and, at some moment, the government did that. And it was possible for all the Brazilians to go back to Brazil. Some of them had difficulties rearranging their lives. I did not have any kinds of problems fortunately. I got two invitations from two very good universities in Sao Paulo—the Catholic University and the State University where I've been teaching since June 1980.

RB: How had Brazil changed in the years that you were away?

PF: Yes, of course, history in Brazil could not wait for me—or wait for other Brazilians. The facts went on. Brazil changed a lot. Above all, in the urban centres during the period they named the “economic miracle,” Brazil had lots of transformations, becoming much more modernised from a capitalist point of view. Nevertheless, in my point of view, the mass of the people did not get anything better. On the contrary, more and more people were hungry.

RB: Well, if the mass of the people remained more or less the same, did your ideas about conscientisation change while you were in Switzerland?

PF: Yes, I think that's interesting ... from some points of view, we had some very good things in 1964 before the *coup d'état*. But in fact when we look more deeply we perceive that during these twenty years of repression, of military government, the Brazilian people learned a lot. Now we are having, for example, meetings with 1,700,000 people in the streets demanding real elections, for example, for the presidency. The government is denying constantly. In Brazil we are now experiencing this dramatic challenge and historical moment in which, on the one hand, most of the nation demands the right to elect the president of the republic. On the other hand, the government, the people in government, in power are denying this right to the people—imposing a false election to the people. Then I think that it is beautiful. I don't believe that we have the possibility to go back to more repressive moments. I think that the question is how to get some tactics to confront difficult situations.

RB: If you were writing *Pedagogy of the oppressed* knowing what you know now, what would be different?

PF: I really don't know. No ... When I reread *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, I accept what I said. I wrote the book in 1968. Of course, I think it has some moments in which I could be more clear, for example, more explicit. And I have tried to be, in the other essays, books and some interviews. But I agree with the soul of the book.

RB: When somebody is going through the process of conscientisation, and they come to reconstruct their “reality,” are they changing the way they perceive the world or just placing a different meaning on their perceptions?

PF: Look—the process of conscientisation is not just a psychological one. It implies an act of knowing, a critical act of knowing, and a critical act of reknowing reality. But, above all, it comes up when people become committed to practis-

ing some kind of transformation, some kind of political process—political action. It is very dialectical, to the extent that you are with others engaged in the process of struggle, fighting for rights. The real transformation which can begin to come up because of the struggle also begins to change you. We don't first transform ourselves in order afterwards to transform reality because simultaneously we transform reality and begin to think differently about reality. We begin to change ourselves. In a simple way, this is *conscientization*.

RB: What would Paulo Freire be doing ten years from now?

PF: I will have got more old (laughs). Because of things I learned in these ten or fifteen years, it makes me want to learn more. For example, I should not be too sure about my certainties.

RB: About your what?

PF: My certainties ... Another thing, because of that, I should be more humble concerning what I think I know. To be tolerant. To try to understand others, the difference, the equals, and to try to live with them. There are lots of things like this which are not exclusively due to age ... But when we speak about age and we say, "oh my age gives me experience." It's not age, it is what you did in living. If someone gets old doing a little bit, I think that he knows a little bit. But when we get old doing things and not just thinking, we know how to think better. Then we know why, we know more.

Reflection

This 1984 interview should be read in conjunction with the one Torres did five years later (Torres, 1994). By 1989 Freire was greatly challenged by his job as Secretary of Education in Sao Paulo and readily admitted it was no simple task to implement concepts from *Pedagogy of the oppressed*.

Freire's closing statement in the present interview nicely captures his notion of praxis (reflection followed by action). Although plenty of scholars publish their reflections, not many have Freire's appetite for action and only a few do jail time for uncongenial beliefs. But one of the most interesting parts of this interview was the answer pertaining to conscientisation. It is not an easy task to compare conscientisation with, say, "consciousness-raising" in various women's movements or "cultural revitalisation" practised by indigenous people. My attempts to probe the meaning of conscientisation in conversations with Freire usually stalled because his conceptualisation does not rest on or recognise the pillars of Western psychology—sensation, motivation, learning, perception and cognition. At the conceptual level, conscientisation was (and still is) difficult to explain and it was no surprise to find it dropped from the lexicon he used in later years.

It appears that conscientisation is more a matter of attaching new meanings to familiar events than literally seeing (or perceiving) things differently from before. Conscientisation involves cognitive and affective change. It does not require changes to perception. The objective or material reality has not changed after the popular educators have gone back to the city. The smelter is still there. The river is still

polluted. But the meanings that villagers attach to the material facts of daily life may have changed because of the "cultural circle".

Let us go through this example. There is a group of *campesinos* (peasants) in the village hall. There is no source of potable water close to the village. Here is a drawing of Marianna carrying the water from the river three miles away. It looks like her head aches and her back is sore. Although only 30 years of age, she looks 50. Life is hard. But the village needs water. Everybody agrees that this is what is happening because Marianna does this most days. That is a water jar on her head and she is coming along the path from the river. The other women are carrying water and recognise Marianna in the picture. Thus far, there is no disagreement concerning the concrete reality of carrying water. It is a painful and tiresome "reality".

It is in the cognitive realm, in the broader socio-political meanings attached to Marianna's behaviour, that differences appear. Having agreed that Marianna "is" carrying water, now the question is why? Why does she have to ruin her health carrying water three miles over a rough path? Participants are invited to respond. Aida speaks first. She blames the gods—"they didn't send the rains this year". Jorge agrees—"it is the fault of the sun god and the water spirits". Alejandro disagrees—"it is because we never dug the well in the village—the pipes are rusting behind the old house". Other interpretations are more oriented to politics and action. "Marianna and all the other women are breaking their backs because the local stream, less than a mile away, is polluted—the aluminium company has ruined our water", says a man leaning on the side wall. At the back, women grumble about the fact it is they, the women, who carry the water.

Changing Consciousness

At the centre of Freire's approach to education and power is that magical can be distinguished from critical consciousness. Magical consciousness attributes causality to superior and largely unassailable powers ("you can't do anything", "it will be decided in Washington", "the situation is hopeless") and appears to be roughly akin to Rotter's (1966) notion of external locus of control. But in Freire's conceptualisation, it is a collectively rather than individually held phenomenon. Magical explanations for socio-political phenomena are debilitating and naive. "Naive consciousness simply apprehends facts and attributes to them a superior power by which it is controlled and to which it must therefore submit. Magical consciousness is controlled by fatalism, which leads men [*sic*] to fold their arms; resigned to the impossibility of resisting the power of facts" (Freire, 1973, p. 44).

Conscientisation is not a passive process whereby the neutral facilitator unearths the underlying perspectives or wisdom of the noble peasants. Freire's approach is no Latin parallel of client-centred therapy (Rogers, 1951) where a friendly facilitator nods approvingly as peasants unburden their brains of polluted thoughts placed there by predatory oppressors. On the contrary, conscientisation involves a process of moving people from naive and magical "perceptions of reality ... [to one] ... that is predominantly critical". "This meant that we must take the people at the point of

emergence and, by helping them move from naive to critical transitivity, facilitate their intervention in the historical process" (Freire, 1973, p. 45).

Freire has no time for primers, opting instead for generative words extracted from participants. A typical literacy program involves these phases:

Phase One: Research the vocabulary nested in the life experience of the group one is working with. Select the words most weighted with existential meaning and thus the greatest emotional content.

Phase Two: Select the generative-words from the local vocabulary using the following criteria.

- a. Phonemic richness.
- b. Phonetic difficulty.
- c. Pragmatic tone.

Phase Three: Codify and invite interpretations of typical situations in the daily lives of the people involved. These should represent a challenge and be amenable to multiple interpretations. They are to be decoded by groups, with the collaboration of the co-ordinator.

Phase Four: Elaborate a loose agenda for action.

Phase Five: Prepare cards with the breakdown of phonetic families which correspond to the generative words.

The co-ordinator uses whatever devices are available—filmstrips, charts, models, collage, drawings, photographs—to display everyday situations. If a situation (e.g. Marianna carrying water) is photographed and a slide projected on a wall it will be accompanied by the first generative word which graphically represents the oral expression attached to the situation portrayed ("hard labour", "exploitation"). Participants debate implications that spring from the situation portrayed. Only after participants have exhausted their discussion of the situation does the co-ordinator draw attention to the word, which is to be visualised, not memorised. After this the word is presented alone and separated into syllables or, as illiterates are apt to say, pieces. Then the co-ordinator presents the phonemic families which compose the word, first in isolation, then together. In Ashton-Warner's (1959, 1965) situation, the word would be incorporated into the legend to illustrate a drawing (e.g. "Henry and Rangi pull a sick sheep out of the river").

In her monograph *Literacy in 30 hours: Paulo Freire's process in North East Brazil*, Brown (1978) claims there is no "verbatim record" of Freire's circles. Nevertheless she reproduced 10 drawings Freire had made by an artist friend. They show everyday situations that help people distinguish natural from human-made culture and were used to stimulate dialogue. Co-ordinators conducted discussions around the 10 situations portrayed—without using any kind of text or written representa-

tion. Being unable to read does not prevent a person from engaging with complex ideas. As Brown noted "being given a chance to express their real knowledge ... and not [being] demeaned by their inability to read, they were able to recover their eagerness for learning to read" (1978, p. 20). Another source that has concrete detail concerning dialogue is Taylor (1993).

Freire claimed that the major problem with this process is not in the procedure itself but creation of "a new attitude—that of dialogue, so absent in our upbringing and education. The coordinator must be converted to dialogue in order to carry out education rather than domestication" (1973, p. 52). Nevertheless, in this process, the co-ordinator has a more directing role than is sometimes imagined. When it comes time to move people from naive to critical consciousness there is an unequal power relationship that can lead to coercion and other contradictions. The co-ordinator is in an advantaged situation and can reinforce some responses more energetically than others. However, what happens if the participants do not identify with the liberatory potential of generating their own themes?

In Brazil, Freire's participatory methodologies were extremely successful. By the time of his arrest in 1964, there were allegedly more than 20,000 "cultural circles" in operation, each involving a group of about 30 people. These people were being prepared to reach out to 20 million others within a period of three months. Each circle was equipped with a Polish-made projector imported by the Ministry of Education. After the coup, some of these were shown on television as "subversive tools". Here was a case of where an educational method (dialogue), techniques (group discussion), and a device (filmstrip projector), as well as a teacher (Freire), were all subversive. Could there be a more ringing testament to the power and importance of participatory adult education?

The Process

In Freire's cultural circles people attempted to clarify and design actions to change oppressive situations. Topics came from the groups and concerned nationalism, foreign money transactions, the political evolution of Brazil, the meaning of illiteracy and "development" and the notion of democracy. Instead of a teacher, there was a co-ordinator; instead of lectures, they had dialogue; instead of pupils they had participants; instead of alienating syllabi they had codified learning units (Freire, 1973).

In May 1991 Paulo Freire resigned from his job as Secretary for Education in the municipality of Sao Paulo and returned to writing. Several of his previous books have been translated into many languages and this writer has seen bootleg copies of *Pedagogy of the oppressed* circulating in China. Freire was not happy with the English-language translation of *Pedagogy* and, in 1984, was wary of publishers who feasted on his fame.

Many people spent much more time with Freire than we of the Vancouver summer. But, we saw that the gentle man in the red shirt lived what he espoused. It was "soul" of what he said, that distinguished him.

In his last years he worried he would not make it into the twenty-first century.

With a new love in his life, Freire was not interested in dying. As globalisation and the tendency to commodify education deepens it will be useful to remember him. However, those committed to his ideas should also be wary of the canonisation of Freire. Paulo was a most congenial and thoughtful scholar, but even he agreed that his analysis was tentative and imperfect. While eating fish and chips at the beach he spoke of his hesitation about some aspects of his analysis and yearned for space and time to do more.

This is not a good time to elevate him to sainthood. Nor to suppress discourses that do not advance his canonisation. A more useful strategy would be to remember Freire's insistence on praxis—the linking of thought and action. As he told me in the Nitobe garden, age is not so important—"it is what you did in living".

Address for correspondence: Roger Boshier, Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia, 2125 Mail Mall, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada V6T 1Z4. E-mail: Roger.boshier@ubc.ca

Note

- 1 Audiotapes of this interview (along with audio and videotaped interviews with other illuminaries) are included in the UBC Guided Independent Study Adult Education 412 distance education course [<http://cstudies.ubc.ca/>]. Freire agreed to this and other interviews and consented to their publication.

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