

A DIALOGUE WITH PAULO FREIRE

Esther Pérez

I've met Paulo Freire for the first time in 1987, in a certain circumstance that perhaps it could be considered, as a typical "habanera" fashion way of meeting. It had been his first time to Cuba invited for a special event, to lecture a fantastic and exemplary class, but somehow we don't know if by mistake, or misunderstanding, nobody went to pick him up at the airport. A very kind taxi driver, took him to a hotel.

At that place Paulo did what many other intellectuals from his generation probably did, in similar occasions, and many of them certainly did it before him; he looked in the telephone book for the "Casa de las Américas" number, which is the place for lost writers, forgotten poets and frustrated writers. Roberto answered the phone and started yelling out in order to be heard in São Paulo, until to find out that Paulo was completely alone in the "Triton" Hotel, and was trying to get some help for his meeting.

Finally solved all the problems between invited and hosts, Roberto thought that this could be an excellent opportunity for me to interview Paulo for our magazine "Casa". The reason for the interview was clear: the magazine would get more prestige, and at the same time a journalistic hit. After all, we had been the first to know about Paulo Freire's "half illegal" arrival to our country. Why did I had to do it, requires further explanations: At that time the "Casa de las Américas" (The House of Americas) was trying to revitalize her focus on Popular Education, which was born during the 80's, I had been choused for this almost godly mission, above all because Frei Betto was its great inspiration, who finally changed my life, and who guided me to follow this path from that time until today.

Finally we end up Paulo Freire, Fernando Martínez and I, eating scrambled eggs and ham, that was during the "mercaditos" season, where we started to interview Paulo Freire, right on the table of the house with a tape recorder lended from a friend.

At the end, everything happened the way he liked, and certainly if he had planned it in advance it wouldn't be better. It was an interview where the form and the contents were related in a perfect manner, or better saying, where the form was a perfect metaphor of the content. I need to say this because Paulo Freire was unknown in Cuba, except by small groups that had had the privilege to be in touch with his books edited abroad, or to come upon him, or his works, or his followers, or his name in this or that occasional meeting. But of course he was known by a very small group, who were his critics in our country, that were in touch with him but who were unknown from the majority of us, because they weren't in our media.

I've met Paulo twice. The first one—very quickly--, in Brazil, during his seventieth birthday. It was a crowded meeting where the guests would go crossing the table one by one congratulating him as a sick martyr that submitted him to the homage. The second one happened in São Paulo, last year in December, and again like the first time the occasion had turned out to be possible, thanks to Frei Betto. He invited us, six cubans that had gone to São Paulo for an interchange with Brazilian centers related to popular education, to have lunch, and during the chat he asked us if we'd like to meet Paulo. So the next day, we went to Paulo's house, where as a matter of fact we had enough time to talk with him, obviously weakened, but very lucid, so we talked about his last book, his experience as Education Secretary for the City Hall of São Paulo during the Workers Party Administration, of the development of his ideas after his book *Pedagogy of Hope* and his next trip to Cuba--the second one—in May 1997, which he never made it.

He was the one, who mentioned, the "Habanera" interviews, and asked me to send him a second copy, because he had moved and lost it. He told me he was needing it because in that interview he mentioned for the first time some aspects of his work, that later he would start to deepen during the nineties. I've never sent it to him, because the opportunity didn't happened, and I was so convinced to see him again, that I preferred to keep it and give it to him personally, in La Habana a few months later and that would be a good excuse to meet again and above all to talk. He died two days before the date planned to his second visit to Cuba. His death represented a great lost for a country like Brazil, specially for the intelectual Brazil, but popular as well. This country lost in the same year, two wisdom men of our times,

Darcy Ribeiro and Paulo Freire. They've been founders of science, and representatives of the Latin American consciousness throughout the world. Paulo Freire and Darcy Ribeiro in a certain way were interlaced by many thoughts in many ways.

From that time until today I've been reading several times this interview from 1988, searching what did Paulo wanted to find in it, and I think I know what's all about. Starting with the idea, that education is political and rooted in his thoughts since the very beginning, with his book *Education for Critical Consciousness*, he reconsiders in the interview his engagement with different contemporary revolutionary processes (Guinea Bissau, Granada, Nicaragua...) and his political performance as an activist in the Workers Party in his country. From his point of view those things couldn't be separated, by the contrary they were part of the same block. The reflections, the thoughts, around dialogical pedagogy, they're all mixed, as they're mixed in our lives, with his approaches regarding politics and the revolutionary practices. In the interview, Paulo Freire appears completely, mature, as the one who thinks his pedagogical revolutionary practice, the way he liked to define himself, and in a complete manner.

But beyond the personal memories—from those who have been with him or read him we've met to interchange our souvenirs--, we need to say something about Paulo for those who haven't met him, for those who don't know him yet, for those who some day will know him reading the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* or *Letters to Guinea Bissau*.

How to answer the question, who after all was Paulo Freire, why did he deserved homages, memories, meetings ? First of all, he was a latin american revolutionary intellectual, a social thinker and not a school reformist, that some people want to reduce him. Since his first writings he already was that, since the "late" sixties ? that his critics defined his writings as idealistic, with such adjective that perhaps too generously he accepted and transformed it into some kind of introspection and self-critique. He was because he socialized his findings, and at the same time turned them as much important as the findings themselves. He's been an inspiration for many, for many reasons. I'd like to stand out the ones more mobilizing to me.

First of all, Paulo Freire recovered the intellectual condition and its specific functions, the importance to think *in* and *for* the revolutionary processes. And he was consequent with this choice in the middle of critics and misunderstanding aspects, with such a coherence that followed him during all his life. In order to happen a new society there had to be- he said and sustained with his life- a thought about itself, that *took part* in praxis. To start from practice and think about it in order to come back to a new transformed practice, was one of his main ideas. And education could be a privileged vehicle, that could gather more and more people around this practice and action as well as thought, that he defined and lived.

On the other hand, he found the basis regarding the conception of thinking education, which being specifically latin american,--and this because his educational analysis is from the school and the learning process that happen in Latin America and that he researched--, opened itself to the world as a gift to it from the continent. His dialogical pedagogy takes part of the intellectual contributions from the Latin American people to the human kind and Paulo had besides that the privelege to give his own contribution in other places like Africa for example.

He placed his reflections in a crucial place : the one of the necessary redefinition of politics in order to go beyond governability limits and transform itself into the place of confluence of the public and private, rational and affection, integrally human, the enourmous complexity that a liberating thought must have in order to be possible and attractive. This starting point—since his first books he talked about a liberating pedagogy—quite early in his case, for this same reason, source of critics during that period, has appeared during the years as one of the central necessities for reconsidering politics, as a problematic dilemma in which revolutions and also political practices of the left wing during the XXIst century will have to face in all its dimension. In his "Habenera" interview he mentioned this.

Besides that he built a popular pedagogy, this is, he made a class decision, that being genuine and deep, has always been reluctant to dogmas and sectarianism, and at the contrary open to all kind of proposals, consciuos of antagonism but intrinsically receptive to contribution to the different, including based on this contribution, disposed to curiosity, the risk and permanent change. He never considered his thoughts as absolute discoveries. He used to say that the considerations of the bourgeois pedagogy should

be “eaten”, metabolized, incorporated in our own pedagogical practice, because it was on those shoulders, and not on nothing, that we raised.

He knew that only the social and political practice is creative of complete people, that there's no value transmission, but its creation and recreation by each generation. This generation has to forge in its own practice and fight, equal and different, overcoming the anterior generations.

Talking about his life regarding his death, many have praised his coherence. And it's true : he was coherent with the veracities he was discovering, with the social and political processes in which he took part, even if sometimes he'd do it in the fraternal difference; with the popular educational movement, that proclaimed him as its intellectual inspiration, the one he always had an intensive and tender discussion. I'd like to stand out, nevertheless, another aspect of his coherence that I think is very important. I'm talking about the coherence he maintained between his intellectual positions and his life project.

Convinced about his popular option, he let himself to be deeply questioned by the latinamerican people never desisting to simple temptations or childishness. His quest was always multiple, sharp and deep.

Conscious about the necessity of the complete development of human beings so that we can be able to found politics on new basis, character was coined and action with exceptional care. Cultivated, he's been able to talk with everyone without “getting down to...”; famous, he would let himself get asked deeply by the new circumstances, that he would never avoid; quite known, real modesty made real part of his real personality. Simplicity—complex, problematic—has been an aspect of his personality that he cultivated because he knew it was essential for the new women and men that he knew indispensable and whom formation he brought concrete elements. Curiosity, humour and intellectual courage were all together in him.

He never feared change. By the contrary, he has always reclaimed it. He sustained that for a process of changes—individual, social—in order to be real, must always be unfinished, it has to continue being and never be definitive.

Is there anything else, that seems indispensable to say? Well, he wrote books. Many of them as a matter of fact were talked, this is, they've been the product of talks with some of his friends. He used to say that he was son of an oral culture, that he liked better to express himself talking, rather than writing. But it was obvious also that the challenging question, the contradiction, the unexpected idea or differently questioned turned to him an inspiring encouragement. Dialogue was undoubtedly the center of his educational conception.

Today I see Paulo as a surprised explorer with all the beautiful things that his *caminhada* (walk) was providing him. And as an intellectual he would study them, analysing, sistematizing, explaining, and communicating them. Lets hope that his life may be an exemple for all of us. An experience where we can feed ourselves. Lets hope that his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, may be published in Cuba. Lets hope he may not be forgotten. And thank you again Brazil.

#### DIALOGUE WITH PAULO FREIRE

Esther Pérez and Fernando Martínez

*Paulo Freire was born in 1921. Or like he used to say, “just a little bit after the victory of the October Revolution”. Still young, but already married to Elza, his companion along forty years, he was the Director of the Social Educational Service for the Industry in Recife. From his experience in this Institution Freire said : “ I started to be astonished and trying to understand the reason of the astonishment...learning, on the one hand, to dialogue with the working class, and on the other hand, to understand its structure of thinking, its speech, to understand what I would call the terrible meanness of the capitalist system”. Right there, not calling it like this yet, he started to do and to think about popular education.*

*In the beginning of the sixties, in Rio Grande do Norte (North east of Brazil ) Freire started to shape and to apply his literacy method, based on the comprehension of the popular language, the capacity of discovering and the discussion of political, economical, social and historical themes, relevant for those that were starting to read and write. A great number of educators engaged with the popular cause received and started to deepen in practice this pedagogical proposal.*

*In June 1964, just a little bit after the military coup d'etat in Brazil, the army jailed Paulo Freire. From prison he went to Chile and Europe, he would share his educational experiences working in many countries (Guinea Bissau, Angola, Cabo Verde, São Tomé e Príncipe, Granada, Nicaragua).*

*A few years later after the end of this painful and rich exile, Paulo Freire visited us for the Sociology Congress recently celebrated in Cuba. On this first occasion in our country, he accepted to do this interview that was also : a fraternal dialogue where a few fundamental points of his thought and most recent reflexions have been approached.*

Reporter: To start an interview with someone who said that there's no stupid question or definitive answer either, it's comforting.

Paulo Freire : Where did I say that ? Do you remember ?

R : During a Popular Educational Congress in Buenos Aires, where you demanded that someone took you to hear tangos.

P.F. : That's right, that's right.

R. : I was wondering what were you going to demand arriving in La Habana.

P.F. : I've come with so little time to spend right now, that I haven't even figured what could be my demands. I only came to know people and make friends. I think all of you can realize what does it mean for me, a Brazilian, a man of ideas—even conserving some naive interpretations—that decided to fight in favour of the popular classes, arrive in Cuba for the first time. I believe that you understand the emotion I feel to step on a land where not even one child doesn't have school, where nobody didn't eat today. As both of you are from the generation that was almost born with the revolution, perhaps you don't understand the emotion that I feel, someone like me who was born a very long time ago, a little bit after the October Revolution. To compare for example, this reality with the people of my country that didn't eat

today, that didn't eat yesterday, that didn't eat before yesterday, and that won't eat tomorrow; the quantity of children that died today, that are dying right now, and to know that I'm in a country where nobody dies of hunger, where there's a solidarity in the historical possibility, where there's not such a richness that harms you or a poverty, miserable conditions that humiliate you. For me it's a great emotion. I must tell you that the only thing that makes me suffer today in La Habana is the fact that Elsa can't be here with me, she was my wife, my beloved wife, my children's teacher, my grandchildren's grandmother. She was my educator and she loved Cuba. But there's no time to cry, we must sing the happiness to be in Cuba. Cuban's friendship is incredible. It's the friendship that comes from happiness, from felicity. I felt very moved yesterday hearing Fidel, that was talking as a politician and educator. His speech was full of pedagogy, of hope, of reality. I think I've come in a good time, nevertheless I ask myself what's the bad time to come to Cuba. This time doesn't exist.

R: I think although, this is a specifically good time to come, for more than one reason. First of all because at the moment in Cuba there's a great interest regarding christian's position about religion and popular education throughout Latin America. Besides that we're living in a period of self reflection of our society, which obviously is related to education. I don't know if you are aware that during the last Congress of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) Cuban Communist Party and the last Young Chatholic Meeting (UJC) this has been a motive under discussion. After the Literacy Campaign that has been the greatest fact of the revolution...

P.F: That's right ! And for me the Cuban Literacy Campaign, followed by Nicaragua several years later, can be considered in the history of education as two of the most important facts in this century.

R: After the Campaign Cuba has been able to broaden its education; this is, as you were saying, to turn possible school for every child, that any adult who wanted to study may have access to education. We have strongly stimulated adult literacy. Although, cuban education is undergoing a self reflective moment.

P.F.: In other words, it's beeing rethought. Look, yesterday during Fidel's speech I was realizing all the rectification aspect. I think that it's extraordinarily important the aspect of humbleness that a revolution must have. At the same moment that a revolution doesn't recognize probable mistakes, this revolution gets lost , because it thinks itself as it were made by saints. Precisely because they're made by men and women, and not by angels, revolutions make mistakes. In my opinion, what's important is to recognize probable mistakes and rectify them. For me pushing towards rectification, is a vitality evidence. It's the necessary humbleness that a revolution must have. And I think this is the same for education: it's necessary to review the educational practice in order to find the one which is more applicable to the revolutionary process.

One of the greatest problem that a revolution has in its transition, in its first moments of existence, consists in the fact that History isn't mechanical; History is historically made. This means that change, transformations introduced by the revolution in its first moment--from the moment that we start to go out from the capitalist production system-- the suitable social relationships to the new production system, haven't been built from last night to today. The social production system is changed and the superstructure related to culture, even law, and above all mentality, understanding the world--understanding racism, for example or sex-; Ideology, finally, stays twenty years behind of the production system that has been changed, because it has been founded by the old production system, which is older than the new socialist production system.

If History were mechanical, I'd already have done a revolution in Brazil. Not I, of course, but I'd be helping the "Lulas"(Lula is a political activist in Brazil from the Workers Party -PT- since the eighties) to do a revolution. But it's not a mechanical process, it's historical.

One of the greatest problems that a revolution has in its transition, which sometimes is very long, is the following: the old education, of bourgeois nature, full of bourgeois ideology, obviously doesn't answer to the new necessities, to the society that has recently been created; the new society starts to be created, of course, during the popular mobilization process, of popular organization for the revolution. At

that moment starts the creation for a new society, but this one still doesn't have a definite profile unless theoretically. What happens, is that when revolution takes power, it has to face remaining residues from the old ideology, sometimes residues even inside of us revolutionaries, who have been marked, invaded, by the dominant ideology, that slyly stays in us. The result is that during the transition moment, education has almost nothing to do with revolution-I don't want to say that education has absolutely nothing to do, I don't want to look like I'm being very demanding-with the construction of the new society, new man and woman.

We must create a new school. And the problem is that the new education needs the new society, but this new society isn't still born. There's a moment of bewilderment. The dialectic educator, dynamic, revolutionary, has to face the difficulties that his own pedagogical project, more revolutionary than the average people think it should be, creates him. In this transition process-I've studied it, not in the books, but personally with my own practice...

R: In Guinea-Bissau, for example.

P.F.: In Guinea-Bissau, in Grenada. In that last country I've talked during six hours with Maurice Bishop and later I've read Fidel's reflection about the mistakes that were made. And also in Angola, São Tomé, in Chile before that, in a different process. And in Nicaragua. I've been walking on those lands, happily invited by the revolutions, big ones or average ones; what's important is the revolutionary impetus. That's why I've spent my time thinking about these problems. And these things always happen. There's nothing to be surprised of the fact that universities are the last fortresses to convert themselves into revolution. They're charged from the previous ideology, they maintain the anterior ideology. And the worst is that sometimes even revolutionaries maintain the anterior ideology.

There are fantastic contradictions, for example between school and the revolution in a transition process. At the same time that school dreams to push students towards a deeper formation, it repeats the characteristics procedures adapted to the pedagogy of the dominant class. It's because deep in ourselves we keep in a contradictory way, the ideological marks from the social class in we were born. You see, you have to be a good marxist to understand these things. You don't need to be very wise, a great reader, but to have a good sensibility regarding the importance of the charge, of the strength, of the ideology weight. Ideology has a material dimension, and not just ideas. It has weight, it has strength.

So I think that one of the great challenges of the revolutionary educators is to achieve the transition between the school that was useful to the dominant class before the revolution, and the school that is useful to the popular classes, to society right now; and this transition happens during the revolutionary process itself, overcoming the most strong marks of the old tradition. For me a revolutionary school, has to be a school of happiness, but not an irresponsible school. It's like work and life at home. I need to be happy when I wake up, because I'm going to work, and come back happy, because I'm going home. If I don't manage this with my companion, if I don't manage this at work, it's because there's something wrong. School as well has to be a place and a time of satisfaction. The act of knowledge that school must provide, must create, must stimulate, it can't be just an act of sadness or pain only. And of course that to grasp knowledge is painful, but there's something in the intimacy, in the internal movement of knowing, that produces happiness, the one of being able to know. This is what school must create; create a serious discipline, rigorous, without forgetting satisfaction. And these things don't happen immediately. These things are constantly being made. That's why I feel very happy when you tell me that one of the central themes of the PCC Congress (Cuban Communist Party) was precisely about pedagogy, this is, the educational practice in Cuba, and how far is it possible from the revolutionary point of view to turn it more dynamic, more creative. I have no doubt at all that school is important, school is fundamental; there's no need to surpass, or to suppress school. But we must transform it into a space-time of happiness, satisfaction and knowledge, and, therefore, of discipline. It can't be a space of irresponsibility. But it can't be a place, specially in a revolution, of authoritarianism either. We must find the correct paths of the students creativity, of boys and girls, a path of liberty. People make revolution precisely because there's no liberty.

R.: For me the experiences you're doing in Brazil consist precisely in creating freedom spaces, in a context where there's nothing. This undoubtedly requires from you an enormous creativity. I was reading for example about Betto's experiences, when he says, in his own words, "to endow the word" to people that don't even have it...

P.F.: That's right, extraordinary...

R.: Starting to show them that they have a mouth.

P.F.: I've been absolutely astonished to hear Betto in the book that we "talked" together. And amazed with Betto's creativity, which is extraordinary. An educator with no creation capacity can't work. On the other hand I've got frightened with the necessity to do that. In certain levels of domination men and women see themselves so demised that they almost become objects, like Marx said, they almost transform themselves into things.

R.: I think it would be very interesting to try to link these experiences of yours, with our reality, which is radically different. I was asking myself the following question: What is popular education? To confuse it with adult education it's an enormous reduction, isn't it true? It's a completely different conception of school, of teaching, of learning. Is it the case to endow people with something the bourgeois class always counted and counts, this is, a pedagogy, a university, a school? So, how to link those things, with the reality of a revolution in power, with the necessity to extend education by any means to the complete population? It seems to me that your life experience turns you a specially capable person to answer that question, because you started in Brazil with the literacy experience, but you realized that literacy was a period. And afterwards through the misfortune of the exile, you had the opportunity to participate of education projects in many places in the world in different conditions. Your experience in Guinea-Bissau, Grenada, Angola, Nicaragua, must have given you an idea of the problems that a revolution faces in the education field, when the popular classes are in power.

P.F.: It's a difficult period that demands from the educators an enormous creative capacity; and it demands a virtue that I saw in Amilcar Cabral. To me, in this century, there are three revolutionaries that have impressed me.

I will quote the three of them, even if I'll be unfair with others, and I know that there are a lot of revolutionaries. But I'd stay with two dead ones and one alive that fill me of hope, faith, humanism, not in the bourgeois meaning of the word. The two dead ones are Amilcar and Che. And the alive one is Fidel. To those three symbols I use to call them "pedagogues of the revolution", and I establish a difference between the pedagogue of the revolution and the revolutionary pedagogue. I make a fantastic effort to become a revolutionary pedagogue, and I don't know if I am one already, but I fight in order to become one. The pedagogue of the revolution, it's what you have here, it's Fidel. Amilcar was one also. I'm writing an essay about him with the following title: "Amilcar Cabral, pedagogue of the revolution". Che Guevara also was a pedagogue of the revolution.

I consider that the revolutionary pedagogues, that are as much responsible as the pedagogues of the revolution, that can't betray the revolution, like said Fidel last night, in a smaller dimension they have to assume with absolute responsibility their task, which is not easy at all. This task is developed during the first years of transition. And I'm not talking about the first ten years, or twenty years; I think that the time of a revolution can't be measured in a decade. The fact that the Cuban revolution has almost thirty years, it doesn't mean that it's finished: it'll never be finished. This is what I ask: that it'll never be done, because a revolution that is done fails; when it's not being done, it isn't no longer. The revolution has to be like Fidel was saying yesterday. This understanding of the revolution is substantially pedagogical. But it has to be embodied pedagogically in coherent methods. That's where revision is—not in the pejorative sense that this word has—the recreation, that the educational practice has to be always suffering.

Because the educational practice can't be either: in order to be, it has to be being. I must change, I must walk as an educator and as a politician. So, the methods, the techniques, they must serve the contents. First related to the contents, secondly related to the objectives. And during these periods of revolutionary transition, which are the most

difficult ones, precisely because we carry a burden from the anterior period, from the experiences where we've been formed and deformed, we must develop, stimulate, encourage an incessant curiosity. Questioning is fundamental. I have a recent book, written with an exiled Chilean called *Learning to Question*.<sup>4</sup>

One of my actual preoccupations is that our education is being an education of the answer, giving answers, and not asking questions. We get into class, whether the students are children or young people, we start to answer their questions. And the worst is that sometimes we don't even know those who made the fundamental questions that have been the result of the answers we are giving. We're giving answers to old questions and we don't know who asked them. It's like we were starting a speech but in reality we are giving answers. I propose the opposite: a pedagogy of the question. I have no doubt that man and woman, starting to become not only animals, to become this kind of animal that we are, they did this by questioning. They were socially born by questioning. When we still didn't speak, using the language that we have today, our body was already asking. From the moment they've made themselves human, man and woman extended their arms into an instrument that was useful to continue to achieve the world, as well with this instrument to manage their stability and their food. At this moment whether they talked or not, they already asked themselves and asked each other. So, to develop a pedagogy that doesn't ask, but only answer questions that haven't been made, seems to me that hurts a historical nature, not metaphysic, of man and woman. That's why I defend so much a pedagogy, that being conceptual, at the same time is also dialogical, understanding that dialogue exists among different and equals.

4. P. Freire and Faúndez, *Learning to Question*, Paz e Terra, Rio de Janeiro, 1985. The book is a dialogue between the authors, in Geneva in August 1984.

R.: It seems to me that it's a profoundly respectful pedagogy, a pedagogy that has a profound respect for those traditionally considered ignorants, that have no knowledge "that are not worth", that have knowledge "that don't have to learn".

PF.: Exactly, exactly. You make me remember my talks with Betto, when he makes reference to a woman that was feeling insecure, because she thought she didn't know anything. He asked her who would be able to survive lost in the jungle: a doctor that went to the university and doesn't know how to cook, or her, who knows how to kill a chicken. This affirmation of yours takes me to a fundamental question of popular education and a fundamental reflection of political and philosophical aspect. It's about the aspect of the common sense and rigorous knowledge, in other words, the relationship between popular wisdom and the scientific or academic knowledge.

You were talking about my respect for this knowledge of experience that the people has, and I insist in this respect. Besides that I insist that popular education has there its starting point, but never its final objective. I never said that the popular progressive educators (and in Cuba I'd say the revolutionary popular educators, because progressive is the way how a revolutionary educator has to be in a country that still is bourgeois; I consider myself in Brazil a popular progressive educator, and I have the cheek to say that if I lived in Cuba, I would be a revolutionary educator; if I were Cuban, and even though being



brazilian, because I am also cuban, for the love that I have for this revolution, to this people, to this courage, that historically was possible and you turned it possible). But continuing to answer your question, I am absolutely convinced that the progressive educator and revolutionary one can't fit in the common sense and be satisfied with this by respect to the popular masses, but he can't forget as well that this common sense exists. You can not deny its level of knowledge. Besides that, you must know that the scientific knowledge once was also naive, and today it's still naive.

Scientific knowledge, Science, it's not a beforehand, but it's historically made, it has a historical process. That means that the scientific knowledge, rigorous, exact, of today, won't necessary be the one of tomorrow. What we knew about the moon twenty years ago has been outmoded by what we know now.

When I affirm that is from the popular wisdom, from the comprehension of the world that popular children have, their family, their neighborhood, that must start popular education, I'm not saying that we must stop there, but to start from there and then overcome the naive perceptions and their weaknesses.

R.: This is what you called in your first writings "conscientization".

P.F.: That's right. But probably in my first writings, calling that conscientization, I made an idealistic mistake, that you can find very easily in my first book. It's the following: I gave so much importance to the conscientization process that it was if bringing to conscience people about the immoral reality, about the expropriating reality; you would be already proceeding to change that reality. This is idealism.

R.: That's what we find in *Education for Critical Consciousness*.

P.F.: Exactly. That's where you can find the source of the idealistic moments that have marked the beginning of my maturity. I am a late writer. I've talked a lot, I'm a man of my culture. Brazilian culture is still an oral culture. That's why I talked a lot before writing. And I still talk a lot. I'm much more an oral producer than a writer. But I like what I write, I like it also. When I write, I do it like if I were talking. My reading is my listening.

But the aspect in question—and this is very important in the *curriculum* theory, for example—is that we must know how does the people know, we must know the knowledge that the people has. We must know how does the people feels, how does he think, how does he speak.

The popular language has a syntax, a structure of thinking, semantics, has a significance of the meanings that can't be, the same as ours, from the university. And we have to know this. We must live all these differences in the schools of popular children. Imagine for example a popular brazilian child, that writes a little work in his school in the first grade and uses a syntax of concordance strictly popular, he writes "A gente chegamos", (us arrived) and the teacher says it's wrong, it's a "mistake". For me this is absurd. It's like if tomorrow we had a popular revolution in Brazil and my granddaughter arrived to my house and would say: "Look grandfather, I don't understand anything". I wrote 'A gente chegou'(we arrived) and the teacher corrected me and said "it's wrong", the correct sentence is 'A gente chegamos'"(us arrived). And she would say to me: "Look grandfather, you say 'A gente chegou'. And my mother, my brothers, my neighbors,---and the neighbors are from the 'class'--, my friends say 'A gente chegou'. I don't understand anything. 5

It's been four hundred and eighty years that we do this against the brazilian people. This creates problems that are not strictly linguistics, but of personality, of thinking structure. If you ask me: "Paulo, do you think it's fair, that the popular masses don't learn the syntax called scholar?", I would answer you: they don't need to learn it, but like an instrument of fight. The popular brazilian masses, the popular children,

have to learn the dominant syntax to be able to fight better against the dominant class. Not because the dominant syntax is more beautiful, not because it's better and more correct, because I would tell you a little bit emphatically that for me the popular language, as well as there or here, is very rich, precisely because of the use of the metaphors, of the symbolism. The popular language is much more poetic, because it needs to enlarge the vocabulary and it does this through the metaphors. I don't want to look like a populist, what I want is to defend the right that the people has to be respected in his syntax and in his thinking structure. And secondly, to defend the right that the people has to learn, and to apprehend the dominant syntax in order to be able to work better against the dominant class.

5. In popular Brazilian Portuguese the subject "a gente" takes the meaning of "us".

And I think that this has a relationship with the revolutionary school, with the school in Cuba. A revolutionary pedagogy in Cuba—and I'm not making reference to what is being done in Cuba, but what I think it has to be done in any society that makes a revolution—it has to be a pedagogy that being alive, dynamic, provoke, challenge the children, the teenagers, the youths in the universities to achieve creativity, the risk. How is it possible to do a revolutionary pedagogy that is not founded in risk? Without taking risks it's impossible to create, it's impossible to innovate, renew, revive, live. And therefore dialogue is risky, because the dialogical position that we take in front of the students unveils the flanks, it opens space to the teacher. It may be that the teacher becomes investigated by the student and the teacher doesn't know. And we need to have the courage to simply say: "Even if I am different of you as a teacher, I don't know this". And it's accepting the fact that we don't know that we can start to know.

R.: Coming back. At the beginning, so, you conceived conscientization as the step of the naïve conscience to the critical conscience. Afterwards you introduced the concept which—I don't know if it exists in English—the "politicity of education."

P.F.: That's right. And if the word doesn't exist it should be created. The politicity of education would reinforce the understanding of conscientization.

R.: What's the politicity of education?

P.F.: Today I've been talking a lot about that with the psychologists. Look, in a simple conception: if those who are sitting here around this table get out of here with our imagination, we place ourselves in front of a class and we start to analyse the teaching practice that is being developed—let's imagine a teacher of the first, second, or third grade—and we start to ask ourselves about what happens in class, immediately we

catch certain elements that make part of the practice we are taking distance in order to know it better. We find out that there's no educational practice without the teacher; we find out that there's no educational practice without teaching; that there's no educational practice without students; that there's no educational practice without object and a certain content. Many things are missing but let's stay just with those.

From the moment that we prove that all educational practice is a way of teaching; that the teacher teaches something that he must know, and therefore he must have known it before teaching and he must recognize it when teaching it, we understand that all educational practice is cognizant, that supposes an act of knowledge, that there's no educational practice without being a certain theory of knowledge in practice. But we ask ourselves: what should I know in the educational practice? And this question takes us directly to the *curriculum*, to the question of the programmatic organization of the contents in education, in the field of biology, sociology, language, and social studies. There's a whole group of contents, of programs, that are related, and the best is to achieve a certain interdisciplinarity.

But at the moment we ask ourselves what to know, when we place ourselves in front of the contents, of the programs, we immediately ask: in favour of who do we know this? In favour of what?

And when we ask ourselves what do I do as a teacher ? Who do I work for ? In favour of what do I work for ? We immediately must ask ourselves, against who do I work ? Against what do I work ? And the answer to this question goes through the political quality of the one who asks it, through the political commitment of the one who does it. At this moment we find out what I call the politicity of education, the quality that education has to be political. This is, there has never been, and there will never be a neutral education. Education is a practice that corresponds to a class, either on power or against power. This is politicity. If you read again my first book you won't find this. And there was one of my weaknesses, one of my naïveties. My happiness is that I am able to recognize my weaknesses. That's why I don't think it's fair people make me critics only in one book, when I've written more than fourteen.

On one hand, people must say that they are making critics to the first book, but this doesn't mean that they are making critics to Paulo Freire's thought. On the other hand, if this is their purpose, they must read all my work, all my interviews, all I have done, because otherwise, it's not fair. Recently, a young woman who lived a long time the revolution of Nicaragua and spent four hours with me in Brazil, published an interview with an introduction where she made critics to the critics about Paulo Freire. And she published a very beautiful book where she shows the mistake of many people.

R.: Is it Rosa Maria?

P.F.: Yes, Rosa Maria Torres. Do you have the book? You don't ? Now that I've come here I'm going to send you all my books and the bad and good critics of my books.<sup>6</sup>

R.: Excellent. I have two more things I would like to clarify. The first one: Would you say that popular education in its practice and in its theory is an attempt to do a pedagogy of the popular classes against one of the bourgeois class?

P.F.: Exactly, exactly. My answer is already in your question. To Rosa Maria when she asked me that in a different way, I told her that for me popular education is something that is developed inside the effort of mobilization and organization of the popular classes in order to take power; its purpose is the systematization of a new education including working methodologies different from the bourgeois ones.

But now you could ask me another question that I say in advance: "Paulo, do you think that everything that the bourgeois class has done is wrong?" The answer is "no". Something different would be wrong, narrow. I never forget Amílcar Cabral's affirmations about culture. He used to say to his companions of fight in Guinea-Bissau—and I'm not quoting him literally—"the main purpose is not the absolute negation of the foreign cultures, but the acceptance of adaptable things in our society."

6. He makes reference to the book of the equatorial educator Rosa Maria Torres, *Popular Education. A meeting with Paulo Freire*, Bibliotecas Universitárias, Centro Editor de América Latina, Buenos Aires 1988. An extensive fragment of this book has been recently published by our editorial, as part of the volume *Palabras desde Brasil*, Editorial Caminos, La Habana, 1996, pp. 7-46 [N. del E.]

R.: Martí said that in a beautiful way. He said : "Implant in our republics the world; but the trunk has to be from our republics".

P.F.: Exactly! So, look, you can't deny the importance of the movements of the new school that appeared step by step with the development of the industrial revolution and that can not be reduced to only one experience of the new school. There are several expressions of new schools in the general wide movement, where we can find since the wonderful madness of a Ferrer, Spanish, anarchist, that influenced extraordinarily education in New York, and also in Brazil at the beginning of the last century. Ferrer was murdered by the Spanish government in 1910. These experiences, I repeat, go from Ferrer until intermediate positions like the one from Montessori, based in the idea of liberty. Or the exaggeration from the Hamburg school, with its comrade teachers, that were all the same as their students, where almost

irresponsibility was present, but at the same time it was something beautiful. I don't agree with that, do you see, I don't agree with that, but what I want to say is that you can't do a narrow and general critic. For me this wouldn't be scientific, I don't accept it, I think it's ideological. I don't mean that science doesn't have ideology, because it has, but I want more science than ideology, respecting the value and strength of ideology when we are talking about the proletarian ideology.

But coming back to your question, I'll tell you more than before. I think that if we start towards popular education without the purpose to build a pedagogy of the popular classes, soon or later we are going to have to face it, because she appears in our practice. From that moment either you give up or you continue. Nevertheless this doesn't mean that the creation of a popular pedagogy denies the progresses achieved by the bourgeois pedagogy.

R.: But on the other hand, I don't think that including the pedagogy we could call bourgeois, because it has been created inside the bourgeois domination, may be in its totality considered as bourgeois. This is, popular education can't make reference to popular knowledge, that we were talking, as it unique source, but it also has to make reference to protest against bourgeois societies where this education has been generated.

P.F.: Exactly. If it doesn't do that it's not dialectic and runs the risk to loose itself; I completely agree with you in the affirmation part of your question. Questions almost always bring a part of an affirmation, and I agree with you. Now in our society, as ours, the brazilian society, popular education today has to be guided to mobilize, to orientate. Popular education has to be placed in the center, inside the popular movements, the social movements. Therefore, from my point of view, the necessity for the revolutionary parties to forget their traditionalism. The left wing parties at the end of this century, need to revitalize themselves near the social popular movements, or they'll become bureaucratic.

One of my efforts near the Workers Party, where I struggle, is my work as a seed in a popular university. I run this formation center, from which I had the honour to be named president. Because after all I've been named. Once arrived a commission of union leaders and they said I was president. And I told them: "you are naming me, nobody has elected me". But I accepted. What this Institute has done in its six months of life, including at the level of Latin America, at the level of workers formation, it's something that brings us happy.

R.: Paulo, what's the name of the Institute ?

P.F.: It's called Cajamar Institute, which is the municipality where it's located. I am the Council's president. Lula is member of the Council. And Monday two weeks ago during all the day everybody together was discussing the programs of the center, and I got responsible with it;

because the Institute started a little bit after Elza's death, who was my love, was and is my life, my lover, my children's mother, my grandchildren's grandmother, the infrastructure of the family. I am just superstructure. Can you imagine what happens to a superstructure when the infrastructure is missing. I feel a little bit lost, but I live and fight to continue life. This is the choice I've made. But as I was saying, the Institute was created a little bit after Elza's death and at that moment it was difficult for me. Now I have assumed the task to talk at least once in all the courses organized for the technical formation of the working classes. It's really exciting to talk with a working leader that has been through many experiences and afterwards he says: "Before I had the intuition that this was the path; now I know it." There's a group of intellectuals, academicians, in Brazil, that have chosen to struggle with the working class and they don't feel as owners of the revolutionary wisdom. Because this is something that the intellectuals have had to learn: the humility of not beeing the owners of the revolutionary wisdom. We also must learn with the working class, with workers, with the countrymen. A dose of humility doesn't harm anyone.

R.: I can see that this politicized education, and generally as popular education means today an advancement of the popular masses in capitalist Latin America, different from the expansion of the enrolments of the sixties, facing the mechanisms of the technology of the last decades that were all property of the bourgeois class. I see also that what is coming from this is a very strong understanding that it's from the political area that will be decided the fundamental dilemmas, definitely. But this understanding doesn't simply consist to "greet" the politicians, but to take part of the political movement. And as you said before this requests political changes in the party.

P.F. : Exactly. This is one of my preoccupations. In a book that has been recently published in Argentina and Brazil, written with a Chilean philosopher, in a certain moment we discuss this aspect.<sup>7</sup> I am convinced that these last years of the XX<sup>th</sup> century will be decisive regarding the preservation of the left wing parties. I don't intend to do premonitions, from my point of view the left parties have to renew themselves getting away from their traditionalism. If you ask me for further elaboration about these ideas, maybe I can't make them. But I foresee, I almost guess by the sense of smell, that we, men and women, that share the left positions, we should ask ourselves a great number of questions. I don't say necessarily in Cuba, but also in Cuba. But in countries like Brazil, we must quote less Marx and live him much more. We must change the speech. We must learn the popular syntax. We must lose the fear of sensibility. We must redo and give life again to Guevara, when he used to speak about the feelings of love that stimulated the revolutionary. This is, we must be less dogmatic and more radical. We must overcome the sectarisms that don't create, that castrate. We must learn the virtue of tolerance. And tolerance is not only a spiritual virtue, but also a revolutionary one, that means the capacity to live together with those who are different in order to fight against the antagonists.

This is tolerance. And in Latin America we are all the time fighting against the different and leaving the antagonist sleep in peace. And the left wing parties that don't learn that are destined to historically die. We must open ourselves.

I think that in the rest of this century, the revolutionary parties must learn to trust a little bit more in the role of popular education. And this, independently that they never can, idealistically, think that education is the lever of revolution. But they must agree that even not being the lever, it's important. I never forget a conversation I had three years ago in Canada with the General Secretary of the Communist Party and the responsible for the educational sector of that country. We talked a lot about that. About how the revolutionary parties become shy when they don't believe in last analysis in the popular masses. Look, the Cuban Revolution is almost the result of a mystic belief in popular masses, not a naive belief, but enormous. A belief that was also grounded in a certain suspicion. I'm talking about a suspicion that wasn't from the masses, but from the oppressors that live inside the masses. I remember, I remember—I talked about this in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* quoting Guevara, and Fidel—that would repeat a warning that Guevara was doing to a young man from a country of Central America, and he said: "Look, you must not rely on the peasant that comes to you. You must not rely on the peasant's shadow." When Guevara said that he wasn't contradicting himself. I remember a very strong critique to me published in the United States that would say that I was the contradictory. And I wasn't: as well as Guevara wasn't, when he would say: "Young man, you must not rely on the peasant that comes running towards you to join your project". What Guevara was trying to say is that you must not rely on the oppressor that lives inside the oppressed. Because revolution can not be achieved if these risks are not warned.

Fidel's speech was entirely political and pedagogical, a speech of hope and critique, of valiantness, of sufferance. It's something extraordinary. I would tell you that it was one of the most important things from these last years. He draw the attention to all these things and told how did he learn. And when he was saying "I", he ment "us". He told how did he learn to deal with betrayal; how did he learn to work better. And he was saying that nothing will be able to stop us, because one betrayal helps us to defend ourselves from the next one.

I think this capacity is extraordinary. It's the capacity that Guevara had, who talks from his memories and his diaries, to arrive at the Sierra Maestra as a doctor and talk with the simple peasants and learn with them.

7. He makes reference to the book with Faúndez, *Por una pedagogía de la Pregunta, op.cit*

And he said something beautiful: he said that it was talking with the peasants when he was in the Sierra Maestra that he formed himself radically in the conviction of the rightness of the revolution, of the necessity of the agrarian reform of the country. Look, Guevara didn't climb innocently the Sierra Maestra. Nevertheless, he had the valiantness, the courage, the humility to say how much he learned from the common sense of the peasant. I think that this is what counts: this humility, this scientific approach, never just science for science; this radical attitude, never sectarian; this valiantness, never panache. This is what the revolutionary parties must learn.

It's no longer possible to continue to possess the truth and dictate it to the popular masses in the name of Marx or Lenin. It's impossible to read *Qué Hacer* (What to do) without understanding the time of Lenin. He said this himself. To intend to understand Lenin without his context is to dichotomize the text from the context. And this is not dialectic. To finish, I'm very hopeful that all of us be learning. I don't intend to give classes to the leaders of the parties, I don't mean that. I don't talk to the right wing parties. I obviously have nothing to tell them. My talk is to the different companions from the left wing that are in different positions—and they are all my companions; different, but companions—to tell them that we need to be tolerant. This is a speech I make much more in Latin America than in Cuba. It's not to Cuba that I talk emphatically, but to us, the others.

R.: I still have another question. A few minutes ago you were saying that transition can not be measured not even by decades. Coming back to that subject I remember an important problem. The revolutionary power in our countries can not be distant to a dangerous idea, which is the civilization process.

P.F.: Exactly, exactly.

R.: This idea of the civilization process supposes that our countries are, so, delayed. We must now that we are in power to civilize our countries. This is full of real necessity and real danger.

P.F.: Exactly.

R.: There's still one problem missing. The revolution in our countries, that are relatively weak, need to unite: to be all in one in order to be able to survive and to go on. Unity is full of benefit and advantages. And also danger: authoritarianism, unity that becomes unanimity, where necessity becomes virtue. Do you think that popular education can help this?

P.F.: What you said is "macanudo". Do you know this word? It's from Chile. (The word "macanudo" in Chile means something very good).

R.: In Argentina, and in Cuba also.

P.F.: I learned this word in Chile and when I speak "portuñol" (a mixture of Spanish and Portuguese) it always comes up to my mind. Look, I think these questions you ask me, they are not questions they are affirmations. They are extremely important for the parties, for the revolutionaries, for the revolutionary educators.

First of all, I also fear consensus. I defend unity in diversity: a diversity of differences, not of antagonists. Probably the antagonistic will say that I'm not democratic, and from his point of view, I'm obviously not. Once again, I fear consensus, even though I accepted it in critical situations. I don't mean that I accepted it, but that I consider it necessary in moments of crisis. But when the crisis is gone, the discussion must continue. And there's an illusion sometimes of an apparent consensus, which is the illusion of the authoritarian, that thinks that there are no divergences, when in reality there are. And divergences are legitimate, they are necessary for the development of the revolutionary process.

I repeat I don't want to give classes of revolution to those that have made the revolution. It wouldn't be humble, and I am humble. It's at the theoretical level that I'm convinced that no substantive divergence is important for the very same development of the growing process. And I have no doubt at all that this has to do with education. It has to do as much as it's a stimulating interrogative education and not one of peace, as much as it develops a critical view, curious, that don't get satisfied easily, that inquires, that provoke questions, that constantly look for it and may even create difficult situations, because this provokes curiosity and I think this is fundamental.

R.: Coming back at the beginning: as far as I know this is the first interview with Paulo Freire published in Cuba. What would you like to specially appear in it ?

P.F.: Now I would like to emphasise something that is very important to me, and has to do with the fact of not fearing my feelings and hiding them. I would like to thank you, the cubans, for the historical testimony that you give, for the possibility and everything you represent for the revolution; what you all represent for hope. There's nothing of a false speech in this: I know I won't see the same thing in my country, but I'm seeing it here. It's a dialectic contradiction: I won't see it but I'm already seeing it.

The fact for example that a brazilian can come to Cuba without having to face the police; the fact to be able to talk about Cuba in Brazil; the fact that a professor as I may write all these things I told you here in my country; all this doesn't mean that my country has already done the revolution. Not at all, it's a country full of shame, full of horrible things, of human rights violation, of popular classes exploitation. But there's at least today the possibility to talk, to say. And we have to fill the political blanks that exist in Brazil today. I'm not a man from the so called new republic. I'm a man from the Workers Party; that has a different dream. But I was saying that I can't hide my feelings of happiness, because, look, it's outrageous, that a man like me be now for the first time in Cuba