

Paulo Freire: 100 years of education as the practice of freedom

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Paulo Freire: 100 años de la educación como práctica para la libertad

The year of 2021 will be marked in Brazil and in much of the world by the multiple experienced crises: the health crisis caused by COVID-19; the socio-environmental crisis caused by deforestation, pollution, and climate change; the political crisis permanently threatening democracy; and the economic crisis increasing inequality, unemployment, and poverty.

It was a very hard year for the Brazilian population, though it continued to struggle for a more righteous and democratic world through collective actions, public demonstrations, discussion forums, striving for political impact, and uniting in acts of solidarity. Among these various activities, we can mention those around the birth centenary of the educator Paulo Freire.

Due to attacks from conservative groups, celebrating the centenary of Paulo Freire became a political act against the setback of the rights of the poorer population and all forms of exclusion and marginalization of sectors of society. These activities not only silenced the attacks on his person and his legacy but also noticeably increased the interest in his life and work. This increase was not restricted to education, it can be perceived by the articles in newspapers and magazines of high circulation, the exhibitions in broad cultural circuits, and the artistic works and events in Brazil and in other countries.

In this context of expansive interest in Paulo Freire's life and work, I offer one of many possible scripts for reading his books.

Paulo Freire was born in 1921 in Recife, and was exiled at the end of 1964, as a result of that year military coup. Freire was preparing a national literacy program for Jango Goulart's government when he was persecuted, arrested, and accused of being a traitor. During these early years of his life he built the foundations of his thought: he defined himself as a Christian, experienced

poverty, had good schooling, participated in his first experiences in education, was a militant in the popular culture movement and catholic pastoral care, and made his first experiments in literacy of young people and adults, uniting education and politics. The book that best portrays this period is *Education: the practice of freedom*¹.

In the exile, he settled in Santiago de Chile, after quickly passing through Bolivia. In the four years he stayed in the city, he welcomed his family, worked with small farmers and supported literacy programs of the Ministry of Education of the Frei government. There he wrote his most famous book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*², published in 1970 in the United States, Argentina, and Uruguay. The book recovers previous ideas, incorporating Marxist literature and offering a very rich material for political-pedagogical work with popular sectors.

He left Santiago to teach at Harvard University for a year. In 1970, he moved to Geneva to work at the World Council of Churches. In the 10 years he stayed there, he made 150 international trips, when he and his thinking became widely known after the many translations of *Pedagogy of the oppressed*². The last five years of his stay in Geneva, Freire was devoted primarily to working with African governments recently freed from Portuguese rule. His most important work of this period is *Pedagogy in process: the Letters to Guinea-Bissau*³.

Returning to Brazil in 1980, he taught at PUC-SP and Unicamp; in 1989, he took over the department of education of Luiza Erundina's government in São Paulo. He passed away in 1997. Two works from this period stand out: *Pedagogy of hope: reliving pedagogy of the oppressed*⁴ and *Pedagogy of autonomy: knowledge necessary for educational practice*⁵. The first retraces the path that led him to write his best known book and comments on its impact; the second, as its name implies, is a book

aimed at teachers, discussing his pedagogical thinking, but is also extremely useful for social interventions in other fields of knowledge.

Finally, I recommend that the reading of the aforementioned books be preceded by a biography that historically situates his works in the various stages of his life and in the historical context in which they occurred. For this, I suggest the book: *O educador – um perfil de Paulo Freire*⁶ (The educator – a profile of Paulo Freire [free translation]).

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