

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION PAULO FREIRE (1921-2021): BIRTH CENTENARY SPECIAL ISSUE

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This final issue for 2021 serves as a tribute to the subaltern and decolonising pedagogical politics of Paulo Freire who was born a century ago. *Postcolonial Directions in Education* celebrates the stature of this significant Brazilian as a humanist, leading pedagogue and decolonising figure, arguably the most influential educator since John Dewey, and a colossal figure from the majority world.

Conferences marking this commemorative year of Freire's birth centenary were held in several countries. One of these meetings featured both co-editors of this journal. Peter Mayo, the UNESCO Chair in Global Adult Education, coordinated the Paulo Freire Birth Centenary Fest held from 6 – 8 December 2021, and Anne Hickling-Hudson participated in the conference as one of the 24 invited speakers. Both have worked closely with Freire's thought, and have sought to apply his transformative approach to pedagogy and discuss it in their writing.

For these conferences in honour of Freire, occurring during an ever alarming spread of Covid-19 and its variants, use was made of the electronic platforms that

have become familiar to many for gatherings, meetings and teaching. This provided the advantage of reaching people in different parts of the world, although we can never lose sight of the fact that many are bypassed through the use of these devices. They reside especially, but not only, in the majority world, and not simply the geographical majority world. They feature prominently among those addressed by Freire and his collaborators in his practice of popular education, in his educational administration while he was Secretary of Education in his native country, Brazil, in his writings translated into many different languages, and importantly also in the free consultations that he gave in countries and regions seeking self-determination and postcolonial development, including Tanzania, Nicaragua, Grenada, Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde, and São Tome e Principe.

For all his possible human errors and controversial positions, which he frequently owned up to in self-reflective pieces, Freire did not waver from his lifelong commitment to working alongside those he described as 'the oppressed'. Similarly, Franz Fanon called them the 'wretched of the earth' and Danilo Dolci referred to them as 'the poor Christs' (*I poveri Cristi*, in Italian). This orientation characterises many of the articles published throughout the first ten years of this journal and will, we are sure, continue in the foreseeable future. Freire continues to serve as a person to think with, for those who travel along these paths, though of course he is not the only such philosopher, as he himself would be the first to point out.

Freire is an iconic figure in scholarship and activism, the two being often intertwined. His impact is seen in a variety of disciplines ranging from education and sociology to philosophy and anthropology. His presence is felt in areas such as Health Sciences, Communications, Youth Studies, Community Development, Labour Studies and Gerontology. He is the target of affirmation, re-

appropriation or outright criticism in Women's Studies. As Carlos Alberto Torres, a contributor to this issue, has put it so succinctly and eloquently: We can be for or against but never without Freire.

Freire's enduring influence can be gauged from the huge corpus of writing around his work. Hardly a year passes without a book or academic papers and other articles published about him. This issue of *Postcolonial Directions in Education* constitutes one of the latest examples. It follows closely on the publication in English of Walter Kohan's intellectual biography of Paulo Freire previously published in Spanish and Portuguese –Peter Mayo reviews the English version of Kohan's book in this issue.

Detractors, as any world figure is bound to have, maliciously rail against the existence of a 'Freire Industry', as others of similar mean spirit would say about Antonio Gramsci. And yet it is amazing that these philosopher educators continue to inspire and stimulate the critical social justice oriented imagination despite the kind of vilification that Freire, for one, is now receiving in his homeland at the hands of the current right-wing regime. Like its forerunner, the interim government, this regime has been striving hard to dislodge him from the accolade of being declared 'Patron of Brazilian Education'. The vicious attempt by Jair Bolsonaro and his ilk to revile Freire has prompted widespread condemnation worldwide.

We have assembled a good mix of people who either published with Freire (in an editorial capacity, or co-writing a talking book or interview) such as Henry Giroux, Ira Shor and Carlos Alberto Torres, or had Freire collaborate with them writing forewords to their work (again Giroux), or who draw on Freire to discuss issues teased out in their work as is the case with Antonia Darder. Other contributors to this issue directly engage Freire's thought in the struggles with which they contend,

such as Inês Barbosa and João Teixeira Lopes with regard to mobilisations in Portugal, Inny Accioly regarding the quest for dignity in these pandemic times and Tal Dor regarding the ever-burning question of Palestine.

In recent correspondence between the co-editors of this journal, Anne Hickling-Hudson wrote to Peter Mayo: 'I am so lucky to have spent two weeks working as a facilitator with Paulo Freire and his teaching team in the second year of the Grenada Revolution. I knew little about him at the time, 1980, and had no idea what a watershed that two-week seminar would be, for me. It caused me to rethink every aspect of pedagogy and communication, and to start the journey of developing more philosophical clarity about what we as progressive teachers are doing, and why. I believe Freire must have had that impact, also, on the 50 Grenadian teachers in the seminar. There was never any rhetoric with Paulo. Never any didacticism. His style was gentle dialogue, listening, and sharing ideas. This is always more likely to lead to persuasion. He came across as eager to listen and learn in our collaborative journey of seeking the postcolonial transformation of education.'

The closest Peter ever got to meeting Paulo Freire was at a book signing session at the Pedagogy of the Oppressed conference in Omaha, Nebraska a year before Paulo died. He had heard him speak at the opening plenary that day and would subsequently become good friends with his widow, Nita, and would meet his daughter Cristina in Paris in June 2019. Cristina would tell him that Paulo mentioned Peter's name among family or close circles. Peter worked closely with persons who were, in turn, close to Freire, such as Carlos Alerto Torres, his teacher when Peter was a Master's student at the University of Alberta in Canada, and later Peter McLaren and Ira Shor. This was before Peter wrote his four books on Freire, the most prominent being his comparative work on Freire and Gramsci which was first published by Zed Books and

subsequently in Catalan, Portuguese (in Brazil), German, Italian (in Sardinia), Spanish, Turkish and Japanese translation. He 'knew' Freire through reading and engaging with his ideas.

The collaboration of all of us in this issue of the journal, we think, makes for a fitting tribute to Paulo Freire in his Birth Centenary year.