

EDITORIAL

The Influence of Paulo Freire

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This issue of JET is mainly devoted to the educational thought of Paulo Freire, whose *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* opened a new chapter in the history of educational thought, especially in those countries where mass education had never been successfully implemented, where a peasant underclass was still a very large factor in the society's production, and where the country was run either by a coterie of large landowners, generals, and businessmen, or was a dictatorship under the sway of a Christian heresy. Even where Freire's notions hardly had any actual toehold, because the conditions which he was trying to overcome did not obtain, his work has had a tremendous moral appeal.

Freire was a visiting scholar for a year in the History and Philosophy Department at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) during my term as department head. He was charismatic and charming and always drew crowds of students and faculty whenever he appeared. I can remember one of his impromptu sessions with students and staff. Instead of taking up space in our seminar room he gathered us on the carpet out in the secretarial area whose very large windows overlooked, across Bloor Street, Varsity Stadium.

I supposed later that even this act had a message, namely that our support staff were the "oppressed" in our midst, though at the time it did not occur to me. We all sat on the floor, perhaps 75 to 100 of us, awed by this bearded prophet of education for the underprivileged, the workers, the peasants, and as we supposed in Toronto, the recent immigrants and political emigres, the aboriginal peoples, the drunkards and homeless, perhaps even the

unknowing working classes. (In survey after survey nobody identified with the working class in Toronto – we were all middle class.) He talked for a while and then invited questions. It was in answer to questions that his appeal reached its maximum effect, as he was straightforward, without pretense. His answers were always commonsense. He treated his questioner seriously and answered with equal seriousness and authority. He had some of the appeal that I suppose Gandhi must have had.

Some years later I discovered to my delight as the incoming Editor, that he was one of the continuing members of the editorial board of the journal *Interchange*, then the official quarterly educational review journal of OISE. This arrangement lasted from 1975 until his death in 1997 even after *Interchange* became a sister journal of JET at the University of Calgary. I do not know if he ever influenced anyone to publish with us and I do not recall his ever reviewing a single paper. But his name on our masthead was a great advertisement for the journal. Even Torsten Husén, the great Swedish educator, our second most famous continuing board member, did not have his universal international fame or clout.

The 20th century can probably be characterized as the century of *democratic* educational thought. And Freire is one of the greatest of the century's democratic educational thinkers. Among the others – Whitehead, Russell, Neill, and Dewey – only Dewey has anything like his nearly universal international stature.

The notion of *mass* education was largely a development of the 19th century, although the 20th century made it a real thing. But mass education following upon the industrial revolution was not very democratic. It tended to be either mere minimal education in reading, writing, and arithmetic for the population at large, or else for an elite, rather aristocratic education derived from classical models common in the public schools of Britain, the state schools of the United States, or the various national schools in Germany, France, Italy, and the Scandinavian countries, as well as most of the rest of Europe, after they found their democratic (and sometimes their united) forms. Thus it is thinkers like Dewey and Freire who made democratic mass education both important and palatable to the century and one supposes to the 21st that is now upon us. The practical experiments of the Society

of Friends in developing something like a modern curriculum in the mid-19th century contributed much to the possibility of such an education as Dewey and Freire imagined. For their key notion, as for Dewey and Freire, is that an education must relate to the actual lives of those wishing to learn, for otherwise there will be no natural motivation and no continuing relevance so that learning can go on and on indefinitely, once begun. Thus a classical, highly structured, abstract education for the working classes, modeled on the best education for the former rulers, was considered wholly beside the point – although it seems to have worked very well in the Soviet Union and the countries influenced by it.

Joldersma's paper makes the highly original suggestion that there is considerable tension between the notions of freedom and justice in Freire's educational thought and that this tension is never really reconciled by Freire. Peter Roberts suggests that this is not really true of Freire and gives powerful reasons for thinking so. Ali Abdi looks for central concerns by Freire and Dewey around the notion of identity. These are three of the great notions associated with democratic education in our time: freedom, justice, and the development of authentic personal identity.

Although this issue of JET has much discussion of Freire and Dewey, it also presents a pioneering paper which tries to place education in the East and the West in perspective, from the vantage point of classical educational thought. In particular Jeong-Kyu Lee tries what has never been tried in this manner before, to compare and contrast the educational thought of Aristotle and Confucius, the major influences on educational activity and thought in the West and East for over 2500 years in each case. What kind of thinkers can have educational influence over 2500 years? And are there any points of contact? Lee argues that the modern influence of the West is largely transmitted to the East through the practical thought of Aristotle in modern technological form, excluding his ethics and politics. And that the East remains largely Confucian in these matters. I do not know if he is right in this. But I do know that this is perhaps the central confluence of the 21st century. How East and West play out the century will determine the future of the world. And most

of us, as Keynes once noticed, live by the thought of some long dead academic scribbler.

Ian Winchester, Editor