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The Alternative Schools Network began in 1973 in Chicago, Illinois. It works to support alternative community schools by developing resources, by strengthening mutual support among alternative community schools, and by informing the public about what alternative schools are. It runs seven major programs. Truants Alternative Program, funded by the Illinois Office of Education, serves 100 truant young people. The Out of School Youth Project is similar; it serves 50 young people. Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) has volunteers in 24 different schools. The Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) Program hires 50 unemployed people to work as teacher aides in every network school. The Video Project works in ten schools where students make their own video tapes. Youth Creates Project provides funding for students to carry out small projects. Youth Services Alliances provides alternative education for out-of-school youth. Finally, the Alternative Schools Network publishes a monthly *newsletter received by more than 1,000 people. Their address is 1105 W. Lawrence, Room 210, Chicago, Illinois 60640, tel. (312) 728-4030.*

# Literacy in 30 Hours

## Paulo Freire's Process in North East Brazil

### 3. PAULO FREIRE'S VIEW OF LITERACY IN 1977

Since February 1970, Freire has worked with the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland. He is also chairman of the executive committee of the Institute of Cultural Action (IDAC) in Geneva. In the spring of 1975 the Minister of Education of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, Mario Cabral, invited Paulo Freire and the IDAC team to visit Guinea and to participate in the development of the national adult literacy program. In September 1973, Guinea-Bissau had won its independence from Portugal, after fifteen years of armed struggle that had included the murder in January 1973 of their leader, Amilcar Cabral, by agents of Portuguese colonialism. Freire and IDAC accepted Mario Cabral's invitation. In the spring of 1976 IDAC published a report of their work called *Guinea-Bissau, Re-Inventing Education*. (This report is available from IDAC, 27 chemin des Crêts, 1218 Grand Saconnex, Geneva, Switzerland.)

On June 4-5, 1977, Americans had a chance to talk with Paulo Freire about how his thinking had developed through his experience in Guinea-Bissau. The Alternative Schools Network in Chicago sponsored a conference called "Education for Change II." Over 1600 people attended, including Freire; Myles Horton from Highlander Research and Education Center in New Market, Tennessee; John Holt, George Dennison, Herb Kohl, Ron Jones, Herb Gintis, Eliot Wigginton, Yvonne Golden, and Luis Fuentes. In their discussions someone asked Freire to share exactly how his earlier thinking had been clarified by his African experience. What follows is a transcript of that discussion.

Comment: You said that some points had been clarified in your thinking by this African experience. Are there some that come to mind easily that you might share with us - points you either changed your mind about or had clarified?

Freire: I would not say that I have changed in the sense of renouncing or negating any aspects I referred to in my earlier work. As I am always inclined to learn from experience, being sensitive to the challenges to which I ought to respond, the experience in Africa has been for me an opportunity to re-consider what I had experienced before and to learn more. To the extent to which I believe that experiences cannot be transplanted because they ought to be re-invented, re-created, my work in Africa had much to teach me. In new learning the old points are seen from a new angle, the new experience illuminates the previous ones.

Along this line of thinking I would like to mention a first point which, though it has not been totally absent in my prior theo-

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retical work, now seems sufficiently clear to me. I am referring to the fact that in a liberating political perspective, we have to emphasize that it is not possible to leave out a critical "reading" of reality simultaneously with reading words. The reading of words, i.e., literacy in the linguistic sense, ought not always be the point of departure for "reading" and "re-reading" reality. "Reading" and "re-reading" necessarily involve "writing" and "re-writing" reality, which is to say experience that is transforming. This puts the question of "cultural action" as something much more far-reaching than literacy. Action could include or not include learning to read words. In fact, before a person learns to read words he already "reads" - well or badly, naively or not - his own world. By the way, this is also the point of departure for the investigations that a group of young Brazilian educators, which includes one of our daughters, Madalene, is doing in the area of children's literacy.

In the book I just finished writing, *Letters to Guinea-Bissau*, which will be published in 1978 in the United States by Seabury Press, I discuss this point extensively. From my considerations in this book one can see that the African experience has clarified my earlier experiences.

Another point that I insist on in the book mentioned above, more than in my earlier ones, is that of the relation between education and production. I do not want to say that before my African experience I did not recognize the obvious relation between education and production, but the challenges of the African context have taken me to where I am with this problem.

I would like to touch on a third aspect, also not absent in my earlier works, but which appears in my book about Guinea-Bissau in a perhaps clearer way. I refer to the urgent necessity which a society in a revolutionary transformation has of democratizing the culture, of deepening and extending the levels of knowledge of rural and urban workers and of not empowering the elite groups. Such an attempt cannot be realized if it is not recognized first, that the people *know* because they work; second, if it is not taken into consideration that people already know because they work. From the levels of knowledge that people already have it is possible to go beyond those levels. The question, then, is not one of taking a "pre-fabricated" knowledge to the popular masses, but, as Mao Tse-tung once said to Malraux, "to develop for them in an organized way what we receive from them in a disorganized way." What is required is systematizing the knowledge that people already have, which will allow them to go beyond it.

To realize this goal it is necessary that educators be clear about their political choice and be consistent with it in practice. It is necessary to be militantly engaged, learning also from the people, as Amilcar Cabral always was. Without the feeling of true mili-

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tancy we can become specialists with the illusion that as long as we are specialists we are neutral.

Comment: As soon as I systematize my knowledge about gardening I'm going to come out with the same results that other gardeners already possess because crops don't grow differently if you're a communist or you're a Republican. The corn comes up. Botany, astronomy - I don't see that kind of knowledge originates in a revolutionary attitude.

Freire: For me, in the process of knowing how to cultivate potatoes there is something which goes beyond the agricultural aspects of cultivating potatoes. What is this something which goes beyond?

Comment: It is who cultivates the potatoes -

Freire: Yes, who - for whom, how. In the question how to cultivate, which is a methodological one, we have different aspects. We have not only, for example, the methods of planting, but also the question which has to do with the role of those who plant potatoes in the process of producing, for what we plant potatoes, in favor of whom. And something more. It is very important for the peasants, for example, to think about the very process of work - what does working mean? This is what we don't see in a capitalist society. On the contrary, there was a myth some years ago about the needs the working class would have in a very modernized capitalist society. It was thought, some years ago, that the more the capitalist society developed its modernization process, the more the working class would need to be deeply creative. This myth is finished. I read a fantastic book by an American in which he demythicized completely that idea.

Comment: It's called *Labor and Monopoly Capital* by Harry Braverman.

Freire: Yes, the degradation of work in the twentieth century [the sub-title of the book]. Some enterprises in the United States train workers in two hours today - two hours. What they don't do is to discuss with the workers the nature of work. This is what a socialist society has to do. If a socialist society does not do that, it is following the capitalist one, and it is a contradiction. This is why I talked about militance. I said some time ago in Guinea-Bissau: "You don't need expertise; you need militancy. Afterwards you get the expertise through the militancy." This is what we are seeing in Guinea.

Freire (later): Sometimes we risk - all of us - we risk falling into despair or cynicism because we work one year, two years, three years, four, five, six years as educators teaching this or that. Sometimes we ask ourselves what we did, what kind of contribution we made in order to transform, and we did a little bit. Then some of us despair, many of us become cynics and say: "We did something - now it is time for the new generation. Now my task is to make money because I have children." And so on. Okay. This is a real and concrete problem. We all have been touched by this temptation. I think that one of the first things we have to develop in ourselves is the critical understanding, which is so obvious but we have to think of it, that education is not the lever of the revolution. Now, it does not mean, nevertheless, that education does not take part in the process of revolution - the very success of the revolution is in itself an educational effort. The greatest educator of the people is revolution in itself. But revolution also cannot be transplanted. One of the most difficult tasks we have is to know, in each context, what historically can be done. It is not proper for me, for example, to tell you what you can or should do. Your task is to define your historical possibility. It is to discover the free spaces which are at your disposal for your action as educators, knowing that your action is not neutral, knowing that educators are politicians. The question is to know what politics we are following, what our choice is and to be consistent with it.

We have talked a lot in these days about the alternative schools. I think that you know that the alternative schools in the U.S. will not transform the U.S. I am sure that you know that. But it does not mean, nevertheless, that I am saying that alternative schools don't have anything to do. No, I think that they have. It depends on the political quality of those who are engaged in this kind of school. It depends on how they use the possibilities, for what, in favor of whom the alternative schools are working. But it is necessary to know that your radical transformation cannot be done through the alternative schools, through the free schools, much less through the educational system of the country, of the society. Because it would be very angelical to ask the ruling class, not only here but everywhere, to put into practice a kind of education which unveils the contradictions. It would be completely naive. How is it possible, for example, for the ruling class in a capitalist society to develop the kind of education in which the working class, for example, is taught about how the factors of production are being combined in the capitalist system? How is it possible for us to think of that? It is impossible. On the contrary, bourgeois education has to make a camouflage completely, totally, constantly, in order for this combination of the factors of production not to be unveiled. I think we have to be clear on this point.