

Paulo Freire's Influence on Participatory Action Research

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Paulo Freire is celebrated worldwide for having developed literacy methods based on the learner's universe and cultivating ways to promote social justice. Along his life trajectory, Freire contributed to shifting the paradigm of what counts as literacy – from basic reading and writing words to the development of socio-critical understandings of one's lived experiences. This chapter is focused on how Freire's work surpassed the limits of literacy education and extended its influence on the field of participatory research methodologies.

There are numerous parallels between adult literacy and Participatory Action Research (PAR) initiatives, to which Freirean roots are central. Together, both PAR and Freirean literacy aim to create local autonomy and capacity for collective democratic participation, by providing to working-class participants knowledge and organizing skills. While participatory and action research traditions existed before *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was written in 1968, Freire's work

articulated the epistemological grounding for PAR as a liberatory praxis.

Freirean-inspired PAR challenged the core premises of traditional models of action research. Brown and Tandon (1983) suggest that traditional action research tended to concentrate on problems and challenges of an individual or a group, whereas participatory research, with its humanistic and emancipatory emphasis, tended to focus on a broader societal analysis. Some view the origins of action research in the work of Kurt Lewin (1946), who was a pioneer in what some call the 'action turn' in social science (Ospina and Anderson, 2014). Lewin was the first to develop a grounding theory of action research and sought to make it a respectable form of research in the social sciences. While Lewin's approach was a challenge to theoretical and empirical sociology, it lacked the participatory and emancipatory dimensions of Freire's critical praxis (Herr and Anderson, 2015).

Although Freire's main focus of work was indeed on adult literacy, his approach was congruent with both critical inquiry and community organizing. His emphasis on problem-posing, bottom-up generative themes, conscientization – '*conscientização*' in Portuguese, or the critical awareness of the conditions which shape one's circumstances – among other concepts that will be discussed in this chapter, captured the imagination of teachers, community organizers, and critical researchers across the globe.

A GRAND TOUR OF FREIRE'S LIFE: FROM TEACHER TO THREAT

My social condition didn't allow me to have an education. Experience showed me once again the relationship between social class and knowledge. (Freire's words, cited in Gadotti, 1994: 5)

From a childhood of poverty to becoming a public enemy, from teaching under mango trees to lecturing in the world's leading universities, Freire's experiences are per se a journey towards intense *conscientização*, one that illustrates his epistemology and methods.

As an educator, Freire is often associated with a literacy method for working-class students. As a community organizer, Freire is perceived as a charismatic facilitator, using workers' lived experiences to promote emancipation from diverse forms of oppression (Freire and Torres, 1979). In some regions – especially in Latin America – Paulo Freire is still associated with the Marxist discourse that challenged the established order during the 1960s and 1970s. To critics, Paulo Freire represents an ideological threat that needs to be intentionally purged from schools and universities (for example, in Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's Government Plan, 2018).

Born in 1921, Paulo Reglus Neves Freire had a childhood marked by hunger, loss and academic failure. After losing his father, and amidst the international economic crisis of the early 1930s, Freire was forced to move

to Jaboatão dos Guararapes, a working-class community in the outskirts of the Brazilian city of Recife. It was during his time in Jaboatão that Freire witnessed for the first time the local workers' routine of hardships and developed a deep appreciation for their ways of knowing. In his words, 'My experience with them helped me to get used to a different way of thinking and expressing myself. This was the grammar of the people, the language of the people' (cited in Gadotti, 1994: 3). Relating to workers through a dialogical process grounded in their lived experiences became Freire's *modus operandi*. His formative period included five years as a Portuguese language teacher, and an attempt to work as a litigation lawyer, where he learned, in practice, how the justice system often operated to reproduce privileges and further marginalize the oppressed.

More than a decade before publishing his seminal *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire was involved with literacy programs across Brazil, especially in the impoverished areas of the Northeast region. In these programs, Freire attempted to radically revise what he called 'school intellectualism' – top-down, teacher-centric pedagogies – in favor of an 'organic intellectualism', where the experiences and knowledge of students are legitimized (Díaz, n.d.). As a critic of standard primers and culturally neutral curricula, Freire considered popular culture a central element for teaching workers and their families. Popular genres such as *cordel* (traditional poetry books hung in public from a string), and other manifestations of Brazilian popular culture ought to form the basis of the education of local pupils. The first experiments with this 'barrio pedagogy' (Romero et al., 2009) happened in 1958, amidst the *mocambos* (small communities formed by runaway slaves in colonial times), and in 1962, in the rural village of Angicos, where hundreds of sugarcane workers participated in his literacy circles. Freire defined the Angicos experience in particular as a way to 'give the word to the people' (Gadotti, 1994): through the window

of literacy, rural workers would become conscious of their own realities and equipped to exercise their fundamental rights.

The Emergence of a Public Enemy of the Dictatorship

During the construction of Brazil's new capital, Brasília, Freire gained status as a national threat. In the early 1960s, Brazil faced extreme inequality, electoral marginalization and the political antagonisms that marked the decade. In the political arena, the country barred those who were illiterate from voting, thus excluding approximately 40% of the adult population from fully participating in civic life (IBGE, 1960). Arguing that workers should be not just taught to read but also to understand major societal forces, Freire was rapidly perceived as a threat, one that could contribute to making nearly 5 million illiterate Brazilians literate, politicized and able to participate in the electoral process. In April of 1964, while teaching construction workers in Brasília, Freire's National Literacy Program was disbanded by the newly established military government, which took power by force that year. The military coup started a period of political persecution that resembled a more brutal form of McCarthyism – a vehement crusade against alleged communists in the United States during the 1950s. As a result of his supposedly subversive positions, Freire was arrested and, as was the case with many other Brazilians, forced into exile. Freire's grave offense was to encourage political participation among the poor and working classes, mediated by an education practice that is culturally situated, reflective and transformative.

Exile and Return

The understanding of literacy as the door to political participation grew during Freire's years in exile. Throughout his 14 years outside of Brazil, Paulo Freire extended his

contributions and ideas to other countries, including Bolivia, Chile, Guinea-Bissau, India and the United States. Freire's work and presence were particularly influential in post-colonial or pre-independence African countries (Gadotti, 1994), where adult literacy was a gateway into critical reflection and *conscientização*. According to Holst (2006), Freire himself evolved during his exile years in Chile (1964–1969), shifting from a liberal developmentalist approach to social change to a more Marxist humanist approach. This is exemplified in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which was written while Freire lived and worked in Chile.

In 1975, during UNESCO's International Symposium for Literacy at Persepolis, delegates from more than 60 countries debated the challenges of educating children and adults around the globe. The final text of the Declaration of Persepolis was profoundly influenced by Freire, who was not only present but received UNESCO's most significant award that year. In the declaration, the relationship between literacy development and political participation is clarified:

Literacy creates the conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the contradictions of society in which man lives and of its aims; it also stimulates initiative and his participation in the creation of projects capable of acting upon the world, of transforming it, and of defining the aims of an authentic human development. (UNESCO, 1975)

Freire returned to Brazil in 1980, when the military government started a slow process of democratic transition. Influenced by his work and international recognition, students and faculty of the University of Campinas (São Paulo) pressured their president to make Freire a professor. For the next 10 years, Freire would teach subjects related to education and social movements in the Department of Social Sciences. In 1989, Freire was appointed Secretary of Education for the city of São Paulo, a position he occupied until 1991. During this time, he made substantial contributions to literacy and adult

education programs – including the establishment of São Paulo’s Literacy Movement (MOVA-SP) – and, as he used to say, worked hard to change the face of public schools.

THE FREIREAN CLASSROOM

The Freirean classroom is anything but neutral. For Freire, the main concern of education is its political contribution to social transformation. The Freirean educational endeavor is not centered on the specificities of the curriculum or teaching scripts, but on supporting students in their struggle to move away from a culture of silence – a fear of freedom and passive acceptance of one’s social, historic, economic and political conditions – into a culture of confidence and participation (Schugrensky, 2014). For this reason, Freire defined his approach to education as a cultural action that should, ultimately, lead students to a state of *conscientização*.

Hence, the challenge of the Freirean literacy method is to decompose each word into phonetic (the ‘word’) and cultural layers (the ‘world’) (Freire, 1970). Considering that language is often used to create and reinforce power structures, Freire’s critical approach to literacy creates an integrative understanding of communication in use by society and for specific purposes. Predating Foucault (1980), who saw public discourses as ways to exert control over individuals, Freire taught Brazilian workers not only how to read words like *tijolo* (Portuguese for ‘brick’) but also to understand the reasons behind construction workers’ self-depreciation (e.g. as unproductive or inferior) as an internalization of their bosses’ discourses (Freire, 1973).

Freirean Epistemology

The dualism of discourse is central to critical pedagogy. Freire posits that all words carry an inherent tension between reflection and

action, two concepts that exist together in any discursive structure (Freire, 1970). To privilege reflection over action means alienating the word and depriving it of its power to transform. On the other hand, words that lead to action for action’s sake, without generating reflection, may impair dialogue and reinforce a separation between these two dimensions. The dialectic between thought and action – or *praxis* – is the essence of Freire’s epistemology. His theory of knowledge places idea and practice as an inextricable pair, where the act of learning exists for social transformation, not reproduction. In his words, ‘as we are conscientizing, we are unveiling reality, we are penetrating the phenomenological essence of the object that we are trying to analyze’ (Freire, 1980: 74, translated by Torres, 1992).

In this sense, Freire’s epistemology implies an intentional social construction of knowledge, not the deposit of packages of information onto a blank slate – a view criticized by Freire as a ‘banking model of education’ (Freire, 1970). As Freire writes, schools and individuals must abandon banking epistemologies and replace them with others that are appreciative of students’ ways of knowing. In other words, educators are encouraged to move away from a mechanistic method of instruction, where teachers are viewed as subjects of knowledge and students are positioned as automatons. For Freire, knowledge cannot be transferred, but, rather, needs to emerge from the restless pursuit of discovery ‘in the world, with the world and with each other’ (Freire, 1970: 72). This approach to knowledge as collective discovery is in direct opposition to positivist and intellectualist epistemologies that relied solely on objective experimentation and causal explanations but fundamentally lacked a problematizing stance towards social phenomena.

Dialogue is essential not only to Freire’s literacy method but to his project of education as a practice of freedom (Freire, 1967). It is through dialogical encounters that learning becomes intentional acts of cognition and

moves away from mere information transfer. In his dialogical approach, Freire calls for a problem-posing education, where teachers and students question existing knowledge and dominant discourses as part of the problematizing habits appropriate for democracy (Anderson, 2017; Shor, 2002). Instead of a directive model in which memorization and testing have central roles, teachers and students examine problems and issues derived from social life, as well as the learning process itself, in a reciprocally crafted dialogue. This process of intensive creation begins by a collective definition of a generative theme. By immersion in the people's thematic universe, educator and students become partners in the analysis of topics that correspond to the epoch's zeitgeist or, in Freire's words, 'limit-situations': ideas that carried the dialectic between deterministic and fatalist limits and the pursuit of freedom (Freire, 1996).

The passage from a hierarchical classroom to a dialogical cultural circle (Freire, 1973) is contingent upon perceiving students and teachers as participants in the learning process, educating each other mediated by the world (i.e. history, culture, society and nature). Freire's uptake on positionality, however, does not mean equality of roles. Teachers are invited to act as guides in a process in which students are the main agents of their learning and emancipation.

Freirean Literacy

Paulo Freire's method, the one which sparked his 16-year-long exile, combines literacy, semiotics, popular education and grassroots ethnographic research. Its *modus operandi*, although never restricted to predetermined, one-size-fits-all scripts, revolves around generative themes that are at the same time meaningful to the local community, representative of limit-situations and phonetically rich (Figure 4.1). To define a theme for collective analysis, educators start an Investigation Stage, in which they immerse themselves in the vocabulary universe of the community of learners through informal meetings, interviews and participant observation.

In the Thematization Stage, themes that resulted from the initial investigation (e.g. words such as 'wages' and 'slums' or themes such as 'man transforming nature with his work') are then codified into images, photographs, artwork or any symbolic representation of social tensions or existential situations. The process of encoding enables students to visualize, examine and reflect upon their own perceptions of reality. These images are then de-codified by the cultural circle (i.e. the group of learners and educators, all acting as co-investigators) into multiple layers of meaning. In this stage, Freire (1970, 1973) explains that new generative themes

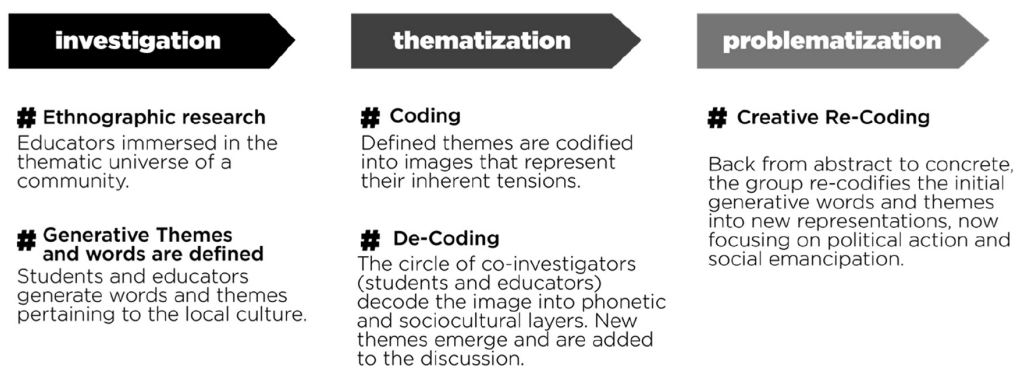


Figure 4.1 The three stages of Freire's approach to literacy

Source: Authors' elaboration.

may be discovered by the group. It is also in this stage that discovery cards are introduced, integrating contextualized meaning with phonetic breakdowns. The word 'tijolo' (brick, in Portuguese), for instance, is broken into its phonetic units *ti-jo-lo* while participants are encouraged to make connections between phonemes and other related words that may come to mind, such as 'lajota' (a brick of greater size) and 'lote' (a piece of land).

Finally, during the Problematization Stage, all co-investigators move from the abstractions of the previous dialogue to the concreteness of actions of emancipation. The theme is finally re-codified into a new representation that now embeds the circle's discoveries and critical consciousness. For Freire, the acquisition of literacy through the acknowledgment of praxis transforms the written word into an instrument of social and political activity.

FREIREAN RESEARCH

Scholars and educators have traced the connections between political participation and literacy. Rahnema (1976), for instance, advances a definition of literacy as critical consciousness, an 'ability to interpret social reality and the will to act for the betterment of the human situation' (p. 165). A co-author of UNESCO's Declaration of Persepolis (1975), Rahnema and other scholars pointed to a *latu sensu* understanding of literacy as the starting point for further meaningful political participation in the collective praxis of society.

For Freire, naming the world precedes changing its structures: the acquisition of language is crucial for any act of creation (Freire, 1970). In this sense, Freire needs to be appreciated not only as the creator of a literacy method: his notion of education as cultural action makes his pedagogy an effort at humanization and social transformation. In fact, several PAR principles have been extrapolated from Freire's work by numerous

commentators (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; de Schutter and Yopo, 1981; Fals Borda and Rahman, 1991; Torres, 1992, among others; see Table 4.1 for examples). As Flores-Kastanis et al. (2009) write, Freire is the very soul of PAR in Latin America, while Fals Borda is its fist.

Freire challenges educators and students to empower themselves to advance equality and collective improvement as they advance their own literacy and knowledge (Shor, 2002). The bridges between his critical pedagogy and PAR reside in his methods of co-investigation and his epistemological stance. The fundamental tenets of participatory research can be found in *Education as a Practice of Freedom*, published in 1967, and later revisited in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, written in 1968. In Freire's view, the act of knowing involves an action-reflection – or praxis – of untested feasibilities of what may lie beyond limit-situations. Recognizing a social situation as existential and borderline and dialogically imagining potential ways to move past it is contingent upon a model of education that is, simultaneously, teaching, learning and interpretive research. In this sense, Freire's thematic investigation and problem-posing pedagogy constitute the backbone of participatory action research methodologies.

As a matter of fact, Freire argues that the definition of a thematic that is truly meaningful to the participants of a cultural circle requires a thorough process of co-investigation. Thematic investigation is described by Freire as a process of discovering the numerous aspects of total reality, or the various facets of limit-situations (Freire, 1970). For this purpose, generative themes can be organized into an ecological arrangement, represented by concentric circles (Figure 4.2), moving from general to particular. Freire suggested these circles to represent universal social situations, their society-level counterparts and, finally, epochal subunits, or situations related to a particular society at a particular time.

Table 4.1 Freire's key concepts and their influence on PAR methodologies

<i>Freire's original principle</i>	<i>How it translates to PAR</i>
Conscientização: Developing critical consciousness. A reflective and critical process that leads individuals to a state of 'full humanity' and emancipation (Freire, 1970).	An expected result of PAR is the systematic consciousness-raising in its participants (Gajardo, 1982) through reflecting and engaging in creating alternative political, social and economic models (Lykes and Mallona, 2001).
Culture of silence: The 'state of being' of marginalized individuals who accept detrimental images of themselves and lack the ability or confidence to critically analyze their realities. May develop a fear of freedom (Freire, 1970).	Acquiring a voice means gaining power. PAR is equated with acquiring the tools to activate one's 'right to speak' (Lykes and Mallona, 2001).
Thematic research: Situated de-codification and creative re-codification of existential situations. Communities' needs are used as primary materials for the educational practice (Shor, 2002).	Through a highly inductive process (Torres, 1992), PAR researchers gain access to the socio-historical and cultural universe of participants by understanding vernacular representations and local 'ways of knowing' (Lykes and Mallona, 2001).
Praxis: Reflection and action – or thought and practice – are fused and directed at the structures to be transformed. The learning process is not neutral but geared towards acquiring knowledge and tools for interventions into reality (Freire, 1970).	PAR carries social and political intentionality and inquiry and action are integrated (Gajardo, 1982). The purpose of research is to make positive change in society by developing local knowledge through reflection and participation (Ospina et al., 2008). Mere awareness of reality is not enough (Schugurensky, 2014).
Banking education: The anti-dialogical model of education that views learning as the depositing of knowledge onto students as blank slates. Implies a mechanistic transfer of information and a disregard for non-canonical forms of knowledge (Freire, 1970).	PAR advocates for socially constructed knowledge and rejects a 'heroic' understanding of the researcher (i.e. the researcher-subject who discovers the reality of participants-objects). Although concerned with validity, PAR moves away from positivist research orientations where objectivity and generalizability reign (Ospina et al., 2008). In PAR, the 'other' is construed as a co-producer of knowledge (Brandão, 1999).
Dialogical epistemology: Education is an inquiry process in which learning occurs through culturally situated and participatory dialogue. Teachers as learners and learners as teachers in a reciprocal process. Teachers as inquiry guides, dedicated to students' humanization (Freire, 1970, 1996).	Researcher and participants' positionalities are interchangeable and may be organized horizontally (Herr and Anderson, 2015). Reciprocal collaboration and mutual inquiry happen between members of an 'insider/outsider team' (Ospina et al., 2008).

Source: Authors' elaboration.

As recounted by Torres (1992) and Holst (2006), Freire worked several years for the Institute of Training and Research in Agrarian Reform (ICIRA) in Santiago de Chile, during the late 1960s, where he researched the thematic universe of rural communities. Chilean sociologist Marcela Gajardo (1982), a close collaborator of Freire at ICIRA, maintains that research and education indeed constitute *sine qua non* conditions for meaningful participatory research projects. As Gajardo explains, PAR assumes knowledge as an instrument of social change and, above all,

encourages the participation of members of peripheral sectors of society.

Mirroring Freire's approach to pedagogy, PAR proposes a radical epistemological shift. For Freirean-inspired PAR researchers, awareness of reality is not enough (Schugurensky, 2014), and the full circle of the research-education and education-research continuums is only achieved through praxis. Indeed, PAR researchers often seek to move from knowing-to-explain (i.e. knowledge as a tool to explain the world) to knowing-to-change (i.e. knowledge as a

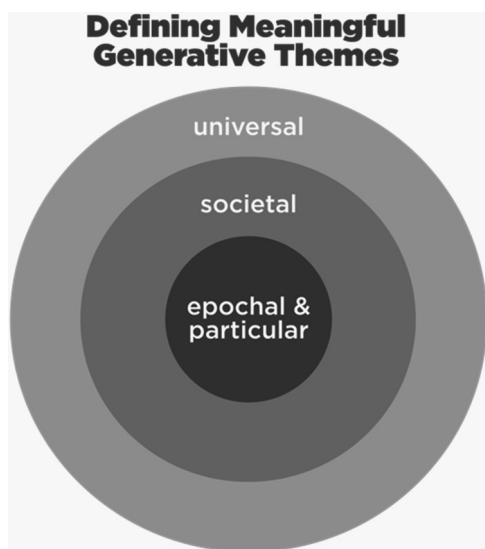


Figure 4.2 The three layers where generative themes are placed (Freire, 1970)

tool of social transformation). In this sense, PAR breaks with traditional ethnographic practices which, although diving into the worlds of others, remains aloof from their social struggles and existential conditions. As seen in Freire's work, researcher and researched assume horizontal positions: both see themselves as agents of the investigation and part of the field to be studied, while collectively learning and organizing for action. The 'other', in this paradigm, is not merely the object of discovery but an engaged actor of the research process, a co-producer of knowledge and conscientization (Brandão, 1999: 12).

A summary of how Freire's principles translate into participatory action research practices can be found in Table 4.1.

FREIRE'S LEGACY IN LATIN AMERICA

Participatory action research has deep roots in the global South. Not surprisingly, the first international symposium on PAR took place

in Colombia in 1977, after which PAR was adopted as a research methodology within numerous international organizations, including the International Labour Organization (ILO).

In many Latin American countries, those who embraced various forms of dialogical inquiry in the 1970s and 1980s were doing so within the context of (or in the aftermath of) brutal military dictatorships (Batallán 1997; Perez-Gomez et al., 2009). This might partly explain why Latin American emancipatory projects follow internal logics that are different from the critical theories developed in the global North. In fact, Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda's *Ciencia propia y colonialismo intelectual* ('Our Own Science and Intellectual Colonialism', 1970) called for the development of the emancipatory 'epistemologies of the South' (de Sousa Santos, 2018), or local epistemologies unbound from the intellectual colonialism of the global North.

Although Fals Borda is typically credited for the development of PAR in Latin America, Freire's legacy influenced popular education and participatory research projects in the continent. One significant example is CREFAL (Regional Cooperation Center for Adult Education in Latin America and the Caribbean), which has produced Freirean literacy and PAR projects and related publications over the last decades (de Schutter and Yopo, 1981). Likewise, the Citizen Schools of Porto Alegre (Brazil) were a pioneering social experiment that transformed a public school system (Gandin and Apple, 2002) from the perspective of the school community. Through action research, teachers, students, administrators and community leaders collected local themes and interests to be utilized as generative themes. Ultimately, each school formed a democratic council that discussed local and system-wide curricula by problematizing the notions of 'peripheral' and 'mainstream' knowledge.

The emergence of intellectuals like Freire and Fals Borda and the development of PAR in Latin America is part of the fervor that swept the region in the wake of the Cuban revolution. Paulo Freire's relationship with the Cuban revolution, however, was intense and complex. Throughout *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire critiques Marxist revolutionaries who enter poor communities with answers instead of questions. His insistence on thematic research and generative themes was intended to counter a tendency on the Latin American left to promote top-to-bottom party ideals rather than recognizing popular themes and local needs. Freire also believed that a true revolution could only be successful if the oppressed expelled the internalized oppressor through the process of *conscientização* (Freire, 1970). Otherwise, they would likely reproduce practices, values and behaviors of the oppressor in different situations and scales. In Freire's own words, 'the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors' (p. 45).

Democratic Teacher Workshops

Initiated by Rodrigo Vera in Argentina and Chile in the late 1970s, the *Talleres de Educadores Democráticos* (Democratic Teacher Workshops) were teacher professional development and inquiry groups directly inspired by Freire's (1970) generative themes and thematic research.

Vera's workshops were ultimately focused on the democratization – or in some cases, the re-democratization – of everyday culture and society. In the late 1970s, Argentinian researchers organized their *talleres* under the watchful eye of a military junta that ultimately disappeared 30,000 citizens. The democratization of teaching and schooling was the starting point of a larger project of democratizing the state, the family, the military, the economy, and other social institutions (Assael and Guzman, 1996; Vera and Argumedo, 1978). Many of those who led

the *talleres* were trained as ethnographers and guided the groups to engage in participatory research to study the everyday lives of teachers in classrooms, particularly in multicultural contexts (Batallan, 1997; Batallán et al., 2017).

Although the *talleres* were not widely disseminated outside of Latin America, these groups predate the development of professional learning communities and communities of practice in the United States, which have little, if any, Freirean influence. Even within Latin America, as Freirean and participatory discourses have become more popular, traditional forms of teacher development are often promoted under a Freirean banner (Flores-Kastanis et al., 2009). On the other hand, there are still authentic attempts to carry on a Freirean ethos of participation in teacher professional development. For instance, Suarez (2017), who was mentored by early members of the *talleres*, developed an approach based on teacher narratives that still retains elements of Freirean pedagogy.

FREIRE'S LEGACY IN THE GLOBAL NORTH

Paulo Freire is among a relatively small number of scholars from the global South to have had a major impact on the global North. As noted in previous sections, Freire's focus on reading the word *and* the world produced new critical approaches to pedagogy, elevating the knowledge of the oppressed to the status of counter-narratives to the dominant social discourses of meritocracy, white supremacy, patriarchy and heteronormativity.

In the United States, Freirean-inspired PAR has had a notable influence on research, pedagogy and community organizing. Saul Alinsky (1946), perhaps most famously known for the organizing principles laid out in *Reveille for Radicals*, is usually credited with the growth of community organizing

in the United States. Freire's and Alinsky's approaches to community organizing often come into conflict as Alinsky-trained organizers, relying on power analysis, move from campaign to campaign with relatively little community-based data-gathering. Furthermore, Alinsky-trained leaders would often focus on developing the organization as a whole, as opposed to Freirean-inspired methods that emphasize individual liberation through empowerment and critical conscientization (Martinson and Su, 2012). In actuality, while US community organizers insisted on challenging traditional notions of expertise and seeking leaders indigenous to the community, Freire's praxis was relentless about the role of inquiry as a foundational step to any form of collaboration or liberatory action.

The influence of Freire on Alinsky-style community organization led to new conceptions of community-based leadership. Gonzalez et al. (2007) describe a situation in which a team of PAR researchers were invited by community organizers to work with them on documenting air quality and the many cases of asthma in communities along the 710 freeway in Los Angeles, California. The data revealed that the community's conceptualization of health problems (which also included domestic violence, physical infrastructure and school crowdedness) was broader than the organizers' campaign (environmental health issues, particularly from air toxics). This created prolonged discussions on project scope, which finally ended up closer to what was originally envisioned by community organizers. If the mismatch between community prioritization (a necessary component of Freire's conscientization process) and the organizers mandate is large enough, the sustainability of the PAR process can be harmed.

Feminists' and post-structuralists' critiques of Freire's work have generated important debates about understandings and applications of critical pedagogy. Ellsworth (1989), for instance, argues that most of Freire's white

and male US followers produced an 'official' critical pedagogy that was more theoretical than praxis based. Miller (2017) and other post-structuralists emphasized the limitations of any approach to research or pedagogy that engaged in essentialist language, such as 'empowerment' and 'liberation', and argued for a continual deconstruction of these new 'critical' master narratives.

In the United States, Freire's work has influenced critical pedagogies within public school systems as well as within third spaces – hybrid spaces that facilitate constant negotiation of meaning, identities and representations (Bhabha, 2004) – such as after-school programs, non-profit organizations and community centers. These programs often use PAR or YPAR (Youth-PAR) but have a strong pedagogical and organizing component (Cammarota and Fine, 2008). Perhaps the best known Freirean inspired programs in US public schools are ethnic studies courses focused on the development of critical consciousness in low-income youth of color. Cabrera et al. (2014) found that not only did these programs empower youth with a strong sense of self-worth and of social justice, but also students' academic achievement levels in all subjects increased as a result.

Finally, some Freirean approaches to PAR in the global North have evolved in ways unique to particular fields of practice. For instance, Wallerstein et al. (2017) describe how PAR has become popular in the area of public health because of its ability to not only raise critical consciousness around unequal access to healthcare, but also change behaviors related to health issues. Current debates in international health organizations – where the term community-based participatory research (CBPR) is typically used instead of PAR – revolve around what constitutes 'authentic' community participation and 'whether development should focus on a bottom-up people-centered approach versus top-down economic policies' (Wallerstein et al., 2017: 2).

Freire's Influence in Learning Technology Design

Freire's influence on PAR also extends to participatory uses of technology and the development of critical literacies. Blikstein (2008) comments extensively on the Freirean roots of the Maker Movement, a constructionist approach to STEM learning (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). His 'Travels in Troy with Freire' (2008) describes participatory workshops with youth from slums in São Paulo, Brazil, where physical computing technologies were intensely repurposed and acted as culturally situated agents of emancipation.

Acquiring critical stances towards neighborhoods is often documented as a door to civic engagement and participation. Headrick Taylor (2017) developed the concept of locative literacies to describe critical spatial epistemologies, or 'literacies for reading and writing the city' (p. 534). Headrick Taylor and Pinkard (2017) remark that engaging youth in creating idiosyncratic representations of their communities lead to the development of civic literacies, the knowledge necessary to actively participate in society. In a similar spirit, Akom et al.'s (2016) work proposes the advancement of digital forms of YPAR that combine reflection and action, thus echoing Freire's notion of praxis.

Freire's influence is also extensively documented by the Participatory Design (PD) research community. DiSalvo et al. (2017) define PD as a process related with the political aspects of everyday life, 'a way of doing design that broadens a conversation about who gets to take part in designing' (p. 29). PD pioneers such as Ehn (2017) recount how encounters with Freire in the early 1970s inspired the whole field and its subsequent participatory design experiments with children and adults. Among the main concerns of PD is creating local knowledge and design capacities within the local community, as a means to ensure autonomy, curiosity and

independence from researchers, just as Freire (1996) would have argued.

LIBERATING FREIRE IN BRAZIL

Sadly, Paulo Freire's contributions and legacy remain under attack in his home country. Starting with the 2018 presidential campaign, President Jair Bolsonaro and several candidates to congress and senate publicly and fervently opposed Freire's methods and proposed to demote him as national patron of education (Uribe, 2019). In an extremely short government plan – lacking any concrete goals or implementation plans – the threat of Marxist indoctrination is mentioned twice and the plan to wipe out Freire's influence is unequivocal. The following excerpt was taken from Bolsonaro's government plan:

In addition to changes in Education management, we need to review and modernize the content. This includes literacy, *purging the ideology of Paulo Freire*, changing Curricular Standards.... One of the greatest evils today is strong indoctrination. (Jair Bolsonaro's Government Plan, 2018: 46; translated from the original, in Portuguese; emphasis added)

The anti-Freire discourse often attributes to critical pedagogy the alleged failure of the country's public education system. Founded in 2004, the *Escola sem Partido* movement ('School without a Party') posits that Freire's teachings violate students' rights by utilizing the classroom as a platform for political activism. Similarly, President Jair Bolsonaro, along with a group of ministers, has vowed to 'end all activism in Brazil' (*Folha de São Paulo*, 2018). Echoing the president's call to arms, conservative congress members encouraged students across Brazil to video record their teachers should they advance any form of indoctrination or political activism in the classroom.

The contemporary reaction to Freire in Brazil should not come as a surprise. As

Dávila (2003) explains, since the 1930s, Brazilian conservative sectors charged progressive educators as ‘communists’ and called for immediate changes in literacy programs’ leadership. In 1976, after returning from UNESCO’s Symposium in Persepolis, Freire wrote a prophetic admonishment of those who oppose education as cultural action and conscientization:

Those who defend the neutrality of adult literacy programmes are right in accusing us of political acts.... But they also falsify the truth in denying the political aspect of their own efforts to mask reality. (Freire, 1976: 71)

CONCLUSION

Paulo Freire saw critical literacy as a necessary first step towards transcending the limitations that the oppressed found themselves immersed in. In this sense, Freire’s work was more than literacy; it was at once a form of participatory research that unveiled the causes of oppression and a form of community organizing that represented a collective attempt to bring about changes in the immediate constraints identified by the community. Half a century after publishing his first books, Freire’s ideas continue to invite educators, researchers and community organizers to walk the same path towards social justice and emancipation.

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