THE USE OF FREIREAN METHODOLOGY IN LATIN AMERICA: EDUCATION OR PROPAGANDA?

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Introduction

There are numerous educational philosophies or approaches that advocate an education for liberation. However, it remains to be seen whether the resources that make these philosophies workable are readily available to those who need them most, for example, Latin American educators and citizens who utilize a Freirean approach. Also, if educators or social movements are working with limited resources, how do they choose what elements to apply? More importantly, this raises the question: should Freire’s teachings be utilized in developing countries with limited access to and understanding of his work? Can limited access to information regarding Freire’s methods actually lead to propaganda rather than to an education for liberation?

While coming across the works of Paulo Freire in my studies, I became increasingly interested in the Latin American continent, its people, its history and in particular, the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, MST), a social rights group that applies Freirean methodology. Latin America is also a continent whose peoples have suffered oppression under colonialist rule. The latifundista\(^1\) structure established under colonial rule stipulates that significant portions of land belong not to the people who work the earth but to the elite that own the estates. During and following the Conquest, land was taken from peasants and given to rich settlers. These peasants now seek land reform and equal rights to education and other social goods. They do so by employing various means such as education and mass mobilization. Mobilization can often lead to great and positive change, but it can also lead to conflict. Conflict involves propaganda more than education.

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\(^1\) Latifundista designates the owner of a large estate. The latifundista structure refers to the owner/worker relationship.
These three topics – Freire, propaganda and the MST – share a common concern for oppression. When does education become oppressive? Are social rights movements tools of oppression? Can a pedagogy for liberation such as Freire’s become oppressive? If so, what elements contribute to its becoming oppressive rather than liberatory?

Freire’s educational philosophy has revolutionary potential. The challenge, however, lies in the interpretation of its elements, their application in the classroom and in society, and especially the proper application of his method for teaching literacy. Freire’s reputation is widespread amongst Latin American citizens and educators. Educators in Latin America tend to be familiar only with Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Bartlett, 2005, 351). This poses a problem, as Freire’s later writings better explain and illustrate his philosophy, and explain more clearly elements such as the role of the teacher, dialogue and a problem-posing education. Ambiguities or misinterpretation of Freire’s philosophy can lead individuals and most often mass movements down a path riddled with propaganda, which is counter-productive to the people’s plight. It is then relevant to examine Freire’s philosophy and identify areas or elements that can easily become tools of propaganda.

To do this, I will provide an overview of Freire’s life, literacy method, and key elements in his philosophy. I will also highlight areas that have changed since the publication of Pedagogy of the Oppressed. These elements, more specifically dialogue and the teacher/student relationship are the aspects of Freire’s teachings that are most often applied in literacy campaigns in and outside formal classrooms. I will define education for liberation and education for transformation, as these tend to comprise the educational philosophy derived from Freire’s work. It is also the context in which most civil rights and mass movements function. I will then turn to propaganda, which will be examined in its historical context, defined and broken down. I
will identify ways in which to identify propaganda and then connect elements in Freire’s work that can be associated with propaganda by using case studies including the MST, third grade literacy teaching in Cuba, the Sandinista National Literacy Crusade in Nicaragua and the National Literacy Campaign in Chile.

My sources will largely be secondary. Authors such as Coben and McLaren have studied Freire’s work in depth and present clear and reliable explanations and critiques of his overall philosophy. Scott, who is referred to when touching on Habermas, served as President of the Canadian Association of Adult Education and was Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. One of the limitations in studying Freire is a certain lack of clarity and of examples for some of the suggested approaches, as will be discussed in the course of this paper. This necessitates some level of insight from external sources. While exploring the MST, I will rely on the participant observation study conducted by Bradford and Rocha, who provide an in-depth analysis and account of life with the MST. Worthman and Kaplan will provide an overview of their study of third grade literacy teaching in Cuba; Baracco examines the Sandinista National Literacy Crusade; and Kirkendall the National Literacy Campaign in Chile. The final element in this paper is propaganda. Freire’s emphasis on communication does leave room for misinterpretation as communication can easily become propaganda. Jowett and O’Donnell as well as Cranton provide a breakdown on how to identify and define propaganda.

**Freire – biography**

Paulo Freire is a pioneering figure in education for liberation. He was born in 1921, in Recife, one of Brazil’s poorest regions (Bell, Gaventa & Peters, 1990, xvii). The area was dominated by slavery, estates, poverty and illiteracy. The dichotomy between those with power
and the powerless was reflected in every aspect of daily life. Freire’s father was an officer in the military who was laid off during the Depression. During this period Freire experienced hunger for the first time, an event that profoundly marked him. “I had the possibility to experience hunger. And I say I had the *possibility* because I think that experience was very useful to me” (Bell et al., 1990, xix). This experience allowed Freire, born of a middle-class family, to relate and develop solidarity with the poor children of the outskirts of town. It is at this time that Freire began rejecting a class-based society, for while he and the poor were engaged in solidarity because they were all going hungry, there was still a symbolic wall of class that divided them during play time (Macedo, 2003, 13).

Freire generally busied himself with books. This passion for reading was encouraged by his parents, who also supported his education. Freire briefly studied law at the University of Recife, which he abandoned. He then worked at a social service agency (Bell et al., 1990, xxii). It is here that he became interested in and developed ideas on literacy and popular education. In 1963, Freire was asked to head the National Literacy Program of the Brazilian Ministry of Education and culture (Bell et al., 1990, xxii-xxiii). Freire sought to develop his ideas from within the university system and government-sponsored programs. Democratic education movements grew in northeastern Brazil in the 1950s. These movements called for agrarian reform, that is, equal rights to land. In 1964, the National Literacy Program gained momentum and Freire’s methods were to be extended to reach 5 million illiterate people in Brazil, which meant an additional 5 million people would be granted the right to vote (Bell et al., 1990, xxvii). The 1964 military coup halted the program and Freire was forced to leave the country (Bell et al., 1990, xxvii). However, Freire was not idle; he helped develop agrarian reform based educational programs in Chile and later lectured in American universities (Bell et al., 1990,
xxix). In 1970, Freire published what is likely his most widely read book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He returned to Brazil in 1980, and in 1986, he became Secretary of Education in São Paulo (Wikipedia, Paulo Freire). This gave him the opportunity to continue the struggle against illiteracy and oppression in his native land until his death in 1997.

**Freire – Contemporaries**

Freire’s work has reached, or been influenced by, in his own words, “Sartre and Mounier, Erich Fromm and Louis Althusser, Ortega y Gasset and Mao, Martin Luther King and Che Guevara, Unamuno and Marcuse” (Freire, 2003, 30-31). His work is perhaps most often associated with that of Habermas, who is often acknowledged as the most important contemporary representative of critical theory (Morrow & Torres, 2002, 2). Freire and Habermas were born in very different regions of the world, Freire in Brazil and Habermas in Germany. Both men worked towards a critical pedagogy and transformative social change. Critical pedagogy shares many common elements with education for liberation or transformation. It rejects ‘banking education’ and encourages entering into the world, or ‘conscientization’ (these terms will be defined below). Criticism of industrial democracies in the West is a recurring theme for Habermas, who contends that the West equates humanity with economic efficiency. Habermas argues for another kind of rationality, namely, communicative action, which strives for agreement between others. Habermas, much like Freire, supported an "ideal speech situation" in which citizens are able to raise moral and political concerns, defended by this rationality. Both men stressed communicative action in politics and law, advocating a deliberative democracy. The result would be laws and government institutions that are open for discussion by the public. Bureaucratic organizations depend on reason and scientific knowledge, which constitute, for Habermas, an example of individualistic one-dimensional thought (Scott, 1998, 180). This is not
effective, as Habermas believes “humans communicate through interaction and seek consensus through the use of language” (Scott, 1998, 180). In free speech and in dialogue, everyone has the potential for rationality. “Knowledge, then, is constructed with shared meanings among people who put forth “validity claims” and try to persuade each other with their views backed up in various recognized ways” (Scott, 1998, 180).

Although Habermas and Freire share an interest in transformative and liberating education, they do not share similar points of view on how transformation and liberation should be brought about. As we shall see below, Habermas’ proposal of persuasion resembles propaganda, in contrast to Freire’s suggestion that true dialogue is not imposing but rather open. Freire believes education and dialogue should be not persuasion but rather an exchange between active thinkers. In this respect, Habermas’ communication is positioned as an attempt to persuade as opposed the sharing experience proposed by Freire.

**The Freirean model of education for liberation**

Freire’s educational philosophy is one of emancipation and liberation. Liberation is a dynamic activity, “the partial conquest of those engaged in dialogical education” (Freire, 1973, viii). One does not deposit liberation. “Liberation is praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire, 2004, 105). During this process of liberation there is transformation. “Education for transformation […] is intentionally towards a vision of society that is socially responsible, for those work situations that promote humanization and freedom for creativity” (Scott, 1998, 186). In order to determine if change is transformative there must be a structural change, that is, a shift in people’s beliefs and values and in what is considered knowledge (Scott, 1998, 179). The transformation must be deeply rooted or it will be fleeting. Transformative learning is “something that individuals and people do to bring about a
process of change […]. The aim of change is to catalyze a fundamental shift in people’s beliefs and values and must include a social vision about the future based on a value system that includes the struggle for freedom, democracy or equity, and authenticity” (Scott, 1998, 178). In education for liberation and education for change, one must start by finding out about the learner’s view of the world (Kane, 2001, 40). One must begin by examining the learner’s knowledge.

The role of knowledge

Ignorance and knowledge can never be absolute. “Knowledge begins with the awareness of knowing little” (Freire, 1973, 119). One can not know everything or know nothing (Freire, 1973, 119). When people know this, they are prepared to know more (Freire, 1973, 119).

Knowledge […] necessitates the curious presence of Subjects confronted with the world. It requires their transforming action on reality. It demands a constant searching. It implies invention and re-invention. It claims from each person a critical reflection on the very act of knowing. It must be a reflection which recognizes the knowing process, and in this recognition becomes aware of the ‘raison d’être’ behind the knowing and the conditioning to which that process is subject. (Freire, 1973, 101)

Learning requires active, not passive, seeking. Learners are active historical beings in perpetual change. Consequently, they influence that change and the path that lies before them. Knowledge is created and recreated because it is not absolute. Human beings seek knowledge as they engage in permanent acts of discovery (Freire, 1973, 119). Knowledge is a constant succession. It is transformative and as such, it is the path to liberation.

Freire’s literacy teaching method

For Freire, liberation begins with literacy, which empowers a people by allowing them to better ‘read the world’. In doing so, they can make better choices. Awareness also leads to
action. When Freire began the literacy campaign in Brazil, the goal was to give people the right to vote. By becoming literate, people would take political action.

Freire’s literacy program consists of five phases and various elements such as dialogue and conscientization. First, the coordinator, or teacher (the terms are used interchangeably), begins by researching the vocabulary of the people during informal encounters. Then, he selects words with the most meaning and emotional content and expressions linked to the life experiences of that group (Freire, 2005, 44). Second, he selects from that list ‘generative’ words that are phonetically rich, that correspond to the phonetic difficulties of the language, and that are specific to that culture. Thirdly, the words are codified in accordance with local life situations such as work or family conditions. “Discussion of these codifications will lead the groups toward a more critical consciousness at the same time that they begin to learn to read and write” (Freire, 2005, 45). The codified words are then sorted in accordance to the situation to which they refer and according to phonetic difficulty. The fourth stage is establishing agendas, which will serve as guidelines as opposed to rigid schedules (Freire, 2005, 45). Fifth, the teacher prepares cards with the phonetic breakdown that arises from the list of generative words. Here it becomes important for coordinators to develop a new attitude rooted in dialogue as opposed to a pedagogy rooted in narration, which will be explained in greater detail at a later point (Freire, 2005, 45).

Once the preparation work is complete, the coordinator begins with the first codified situation and a dialogue ensues (Freire, 2005, 46). When the group and teacher have exhausted the analysis – also referred to as *decoding* – the generative word is revealed. This process encourages participants to visualize as opposed to memorize the word, and helps develop a semantic link to the word (Freire, 2005, 46). Next, the word alone is presented (either projected

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2 The masculine form will be used throughout the paper to represent both men and women, since this was Freire’s practice.
That same word is presented a second time but now it is broken down into syllables, or ‘pieces’. “Once the ‘pieces’ are recognized, the coordinator presents visually the phonemic families which compose the word, first in isolation and then together, to arrive at the recognition of vowels” (Freire, 2005, 46). For example, the word *tijolo* (brick) is related to construction work and discussed by the group. Then it becomes “ti-jo-lo” and the group recognizes the phonetic family: ta-te-ti-to-tu, ja-je-ji-jo-ju and la-le-li-lo-lu (Freire, 2005, 46). This information is captured on what Freire calls the “discovery card” (see Appendix). After working with the syllables on the discovery card, groups begin to create new words by using various syllable combinations (Freire, 2005, 47). This often leads the group to write more complex words composed of three-letter syllables (ex. tra) (Freire, 2005, 47). The group then works on phrases, work which is always followed by a discussion.

**Principal elements of Freire’s methodology**

According to Freire, “changing individuals structurally (their self power and self-concept when they learned to read) has massive connotations for changes in society. It is socially a collective phenomenon, as well as a collective unconscious shift and a cognitive change within the egos of individuals” (Scott, 1998, 185). For Freire, pedagogies of liberation and transformation are rooted in love. After love, the driving factors in libertarian education are the reconciliation of dialogue and conscientization, which will be further explained below. To understand Freire’s view of education, one must begin with an analysis of banking education and the resulting support of a problem-posing education, conscientization, dialogue and the role of the teacher.

**Banking and problem-posing education**
For Freire (2004), a banking education system mirrors an oppressive society (100). It attempts to conceal facts and mythologize the reasons for men’s existence in the world. Much like propaganda it does not present true reality but ideals, or what men wish to see. It resists dialogue. It inhibits creativity and domesticates, or conditions as one does a pet. Finally, it fails to see humans as historical beings (Coben, 1998, 78). In banking education, students are objects of assistance in a narrative, rather than a dialogical education (Cobden, 1998, 78). Narration leads to memorization and turns students into receptacles (Freire, 2004, 100).

Banking education is most often defined as the act of depositing information in the empty minds of learners. In doing so, it does not free the oppressed; rather, it de-humanizes (Kane, 2001, 39). Banking education also assumes there is a dichotomy between individuals and the world: “a person is merely in the world, not with the world or with others; the individual is spectator, not re-creator” (Freire, 2004, 103). By rejecting people’s ability to change, banking educators are undermining the ability of the people (Freire, 1973, 118). Consequently, people do not become conscious beings. They possess consciousness, which can be defined as an empty mind, a shell that is open for deposits from the external world (Freire, 2004, 103). In banking education, teaching is the act of depositing or extending knowledge. The term extension connotes the action of taking, transferring or depositing knowledge in someone (Freire, 1973, 99). “In this sense, the person who extends, extends something (direct object of the verbal action) to or towards someone (indirect object of the verbal action) who receives the content of the object of the verbal action” (Freire, 1973, 93). The basic objective of an extension agent working with peasants is to exchange the latter’s knowledge for the agent’s “knowledge” (Freire, 1973, 98). Educational extension is then parallel to domestication. Extension agents see knowledge as the
depositing of information into ‘empty consciousness’. Those who practice extension do not share with others the conditions for knowing.

In contrast to ‘banking education’, ‘problem-posing education’ “… enables teachers and students to become Subjects of the educational process by overcoming authoritarianism …; it also enables people to overcome their false perception of reality” (Freire, 2004, 110). According to Coben (1998), a problem-posing education de-mythologizes and therefore allows humanity to seek and see truth (78). Here, dialogue is indispensable to unveiling reality. Students become critical thinkers as the roles of teacher and student cease being hierarchical (Coben, 1998, 78). A problem-posing education is based in creativity that stimulates reflection and action and responds to the vocation of humans to inquire and transform (Coben, 1998, 78). In problem-posing education, “the oppressed learn to develop the necessary critical tools that will enable them to read their world so they can apprehend the global quality of their reality and choose what world they want for themselves” (Scott, 1998, 185). ‘Problematizing’ is the antithesis of problem-solving, which is technocratic, or managed by ‘experts’ (Freire, 1973, ix). According to Freire, the technocratic method distorts the human experience – it analyses a problem into component parts. Problems have a specific set of answers. To problematize in his sense is to involve an entire population in the task of codifying total reality into symbols which can generate critical consciousness and empower them to alter their relations with nature and social forces (Freire, 1973, ix). You cannot learn if you are ‘filled’ with information whose meaning you are not aware, or if you are not challenged to understand it (Freire, 1973, 101). Through problematization, educators ‘re-enter’ into the object in question by ‘entering into’ the educatees, thus creating a continuous learning cycle (Freire, 1973, 153). “The process of problematization is basically someone’s reflection on a content which results from an act, or reflection on the act
itself in order to act better together with others within the framework of reality” (Freire, 1973, 154). For Freire, one can only know if one problematizes the reality in which one finds him or herself. “In sum: banking theory and practice, as immobilizing and fixating forces, fail to acknowledge men and women as historical beings; problem-posing theory and practice take the people’s historicity as their starting point” (Freire, 2004, 109). It is then important for the subject to become conscious of reality.

**Conscientization/Conscientização**

Critical consciousness results in an intervention with the world (Freire, 2004, 101). Freire (2004) insists that consciousness and the world are simultaneous; one does not precede the other (107). “When consciousness appears there is reflection; there is intentionality towards the world. Humanity becomes essentially different from animals. We can now not only know but can know that we are knowing” (Davis, 1981, 57-58). Knowledge is then a social product acquired through social interaction. It is inviting consciousness to become active, to ‘enter into’ the world. “In ‘entering into’ their own world, people become aware of their manner of acquiring knowledge and realize the need of knowing even more” (Freire, 1973, 155). ‘Entering into’ the world is self awareness through a process of reflection. Authentic reflection considers people in their relations with the world (Freire, 2004, 107). Consciousness is then the aim of a problem-posing education. People progress towards a ‘raison d’être’ of reality when they are Subjects (Freire, 1973, 155). “Any attempt to manipulate people to adapt them to this reality […] means taking from them their opportunity and their right to transform the world” (Freire, 1973, 148). For education to be authentic, it must be liberating (Freire, 1973, 148). Education must be preoccupied with the *prise de conscience*, “which is a human characteristic, [that] results as we have seen, in a person’s coming face to face with the world and with concrete reality, which is presented as a process of
objectification” (Freire, 1973, 148). This can only occur when people take action (Freire, 1973, 148). Human contact is a fundamental need. It is therefore not surprising that the prise de conscience is a social and not an individual process. It is by interacting with the world that one becomes more aware of reality and as one becomes more aware, one takes action.

Diane Coben, the author of numerous books on adult education, and professor and reader in adult numeracy at King’s College in London, suggests conscientization is characterized by a

…depth in the interpretation of problems; by the substitution of causal principles for magical explanations; by the testing of one’s ‘findings’ and by openness to revision; by the attempt to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and to avoid preconceived notions when analyzing them; by refusing to transfer responsibility; by rejecting passive positions; by soundness of argumentation; by the practice of dialogue rather than polemics; by receptivity to the new for reasons beyond mere novelty and by the good sense not to reject the old just because it is old---by accepting what is valid in both old and new. (Coben, 1998, 74)

Coben goes on to suggest there are several stages associated with conscientization (Coben, 1998, 72). The lowest level is ‘semi-intransitive consciousness’. Here people (peasants, the poor, bonded laborers) are submerged in the historical process. People are solely concerned with survival and so “they confuse their perceptions of the objects and challenges of the environment, and fall prey to magical explanations because they cannot apprehend true causality” (Coben, 1998, 73). People do not look to transform their reality; they look towards those with power (Coben, 1998, 73). Semi-transitive consciousness is characterized by a ‘culture of silence’. People cannot articulate their views and therefore they are unable to act (Coben, 1998, 73).

The next stage is ‘naïve transitive’, which is characterized by “an over-simplification of problems; […] by a lack of interest in investigation, accompanied by an accentuated taste for fanciful explanations, by fragility of argument… by the practice of polemics rather than dialogue; by magical explanations” (Coben, 1998, 74). Herein lies the danger of people falling
into fanaticism. To avoid this, an education program must be rooted in dialogue. These levels of consciousness are naïve because people do not question what is happening or what they are doing. It is the internalization of the dominant ideology (Kane, 2001, 37). Ancient Egyptians believed in various gods, Greeks believed in myths, and today many believe in Christianity or science as the Almighty. Beliefs change, a gradual process that occurs with little questioning.

The final step is then critical consciousness where people take a step back to reflect (Kane, 2001, 37). “Conscientização represents the development of the awakening of critical awareness” (Cobden, 1998, 72). It is one element of many that will bring the subject to critical reflection, transformation and liberation.

**Dialogue**

Authentic thinking can only take place within the process of communication (Freire, 2004, 104). It is through dialogue that one seeks reality. Humanity needs communication in order to propagate knowledge. For Freire, dialogue is “the encounter between [humans], mediated by the world, in order to name the world” (Bartlett, 2005, 346). One cannot think alone. One needs the participation of another person. In communication, subjects are not depositories. Person A speaks with person B; A does not deposit information into B (Freire, 1973, 137). Some argue that it is necessary for the Subject to speak to and not with learners when attempting to ‘teach’ facts such as mathematics or science. Freire argues that these facts should engage students in dialogue and be made to relate to peasants’ lives. They must also be open to questions and interpretation. “The best student in physics or mathematics, at school or university, is not one who memorizes formulae but one who is aware of the reason for them” (Freire, 1973, 125).

Dialogue “presents problems and criticizes, and in criticizing, gives human beings their place within their own reality as the true transforming Subjects of reality” (Freire, 1973, 123). Freire
advocates linguistic investigation in order to create a mutual linguistic universe. Dialogue is the only safeguard against authority and manipulation of learners.
**Praxis**

According to Freire (1973), genuine theory is rooted in the *praxis* of historical struggles (ix). Freire defines praxis as “the action and reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it” (Coben, 1998, 76). Liberation comes with praxis: a process entailing transformative action (Mayo, 2004, 48). “An education based on praxis is one whereby people act on their material surroundings and reflect on them with a view to transforming them” (Mayo, 2004, 48). Action alone, without reflection, is mindless activism and empty theorizing. Cultural action is the means by which the oppressed acquire consciousness of their potential as a political force (Mayo, 2004, 47). It is “the vehicle whereby members of oppressed groups are made aware of the social contradictions that lock them in a position of subordination” (Mayo, 2004, 47). Freire suggests that the existing hegemonic – or dominant – vehicles are not permanent. They can be ruptured, as they are in a constant process of remaking. He did not believe that liberation would come about without any effort (Mayo, 2004, 47). “Only human beings, that is, beings who work, who possess a thought-language, who act and who are capable of reflection on themselves and on their own action (such actions becoming separate entities), only they are beings of praxis” (Freire, 1973, 111). They detach themselves from their environment and they transform it. Praxis is obtained through dialogue and conscientization in the process of critical literacy. It is not enough to read the word. In critical literacy one examines the context and questions what is presented as reality in addition to learning to read.

**The teacher/student relationship**

Stanley Arnowitz stated that “… the educator’s task is to encourage human agency, not mold it in the manner of Pygmalion” (Mayo, 2004, 83). Freire’s philosophy reflects this statement. Liberating education is cognitive, or based on intelligent activity (Freire, 2004, 105).
“It is a learning situation in which the cognizable object … intermediates the cognitive actors – teachers on the one hand and students on the other” (Freire, 2004, 105). Therefore, the teacher/student contradiction must be resolved to practice a problem-posing education. “The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach” (Freire, 2004, 106). Learning is a joint responsibility and a reciprocal process. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire (1973) states both teachers and students must be conscious Subjects (101) “Thus, in a situation of knowing, teacher and student must take on the role of conscious Subjects, mediated by the knowable object that they seek to know” (Freire, 1973, 101). For Freire, education is a democratic political act. The educator should then use ‘democratic authority’. Shor (1992) notes

the teacher leads and directs the curriculum, but does so democratically with the participation of the students, balancing the need for structure with the need for openness. The teacher brings lesson plans, learning methods, personal experience, and academic knowledge to class but negotiates the curriculum with the students and begins with their language, themes, and understandings. To be democratic implies orienting subject matter to student culture – their interests, needs, speech and perceptions – while creating negotiable openness in class where the students’ input jointly creates the learning process. (Mayo, 2004, 54)

The learner makes use of what is learned and then reinvents learning. He or she “is able to apply the appropriated learning to concrete existential situations” (Freire, 1973, 101). For example, a learner takes what knowledge is acquired and applies it to the home, or work, whatever the situation may be. He takes the concept and applies it to something concrete, something real.

The teacher engages in dialogue with students, and as such “is also being taught by them while the students are also teaching while being taught” (Taylor, 1993, 80). It is a cyclical, mutually beneficial, democratic relationship. “Liberatory education is fundamentally a situation where the teacher and the students both have to be learners, both have to be cognitive subjects, in spite of their being different. This for me is that first test of liberating education, for teachers and
students both to be critical agents in the act of knowing” (Shor & Freire, 1987, 33). Freire considered both educators and educatees as subjects in a humanizing relationship marked by solidarity. The learner’s reality constitutes an integral part of the subject matter that, therefore, becomes a mediator between the two subjects in question (i.e., educator and educatee)” (Mayo, 2004, 51). Teachers need to be competent and must seek teacher training.

Freire suggests that teachers need to extend their work outside the institution or group in which they work. They must “connect with what goes on in the public sphere” (Mayo, 2004, 86). Teachers should approach their work with humility, tolerance and love. They must be humble enough to relearn what they think they already know in order to connect with others. […] Gaining greater coherence entails getting to know and engaging in solidarity with, as well as learning from, others” (Mayo, 2004, 93-94). Teachers must draw on students’ life experiences in order to relate to them and codify the material. Freire believed literacy teachers should study the students’ community, learn the linguistic particularities, draw generic themes or key words from them and then engage in a dialogical process to elaborate social analysis.

In *We Make the Road by Walking* (1990), Freire states it is important to get to know students – “it took time for me to learn that the people with whom I was working already had lots of knowledge. The question for me was exclusively to understand what were their levels of knowledge and *how* did they know” (Bell et al., 1990, 65). It is then important to ask questions (Bell et al., 1990, 65). To help students learn, the teacher must understand how people gain knowledge and invent ways for people to go beyond their current state of knowledge (Bell et al., 1990, 98). Teachers “need to understand the soul of the culture in the community where [they] work. Without understanding the soul of the culture [they] just invade the culture” (Bell et al., 1990, 131). They must also respect the knowledge of the people. This is a political choice that
aligns with a freer society, one of democracy and respect (Bell et al., 1990, 101). Teachers carry with them class capital that often puts them at odds with learners. Freire encouraged teachers to commit ‘class suicide’, to set aside their class capital, enabling them to integrate themselves with the masses (McLaren, 2000, 152-153).

I turn now to a consideration of what appears to be an entirely opposite approach to transforming the ideas and actions of the masses, propaganda.

**Propaganda**

Propaganda is the manipulation of information to sway others’ views. It is the transformation of words into weapons and a tool used by oppressors or persons in positions of authority to submit a people to their views or cause. Propaganda is often equated with armed conflict. In the World Wars, propaganda was used as a tool to motivate both allies and enemies. In the Rwandan genocide radio became a propaganda tool and hundreds of thousands died. Propaganda can have disastrous effects. Jowett and O’Donnell, authors of numerous books on this topic, suggest that there are various forms of propaganda: white, black and grey. White propaganda is truth. Facts come from reliable sources and the messages are generally accurate (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 8). Black propaganda is intentionally false information, sources, lies and deception (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 9). During World War II, the Germans broadcast war information in England and France, posing as native radio stations. Their goal was to reduce the morale of the people and play on the British and French conflict (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 9). The information broadcast to the public was not factual and therefore is considered black propaganda. Grey propaganda lies between truth and lies. The accuracy of information is uncertain, as is the validity of the source (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 13). Propaganda of all nature can be potentially harmful – even truth, as it can be taken out of context and therefore
transformed into something very different from what it started with, making it into a lie, or propaganda.

For Phaedrus, “persuasion comes from what seems true, not from what is true” (White, 1993, 191). The Latin root of the term “propaganda” means to sow. Propaganda then sparks ideas and ignites fires. However, it is not random. “In fact, the purpose of propaganda is to send out an ideology to an audience with a related objective […] is the deliberate and systematic attempt to share perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist” (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 2-4). In and of itself, propaganda is not necessarily grey or black. Propaganda is purposeful persuasion. It can transform persuasion into “the art of incremental deformation; it knows how to deteriorate from what is, little by little, so that what finally appears looks like what is but its opposite; and it likewise knows how to protect one against another trying to deceive in the same way” (Benardette, 1991, 171). Propaganda requires a leader, its form notwithstanding. “The process of propaganda takes the form of a message flow through a network system that includes propaganda agents, various media, and a social network, originating with an institution and ending with the possibility of response from the public or a target audience within the public” (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 263). Language is used to deify one cause and demonize another. Symbols become associated with beliefs, emotions and ways of life. Men and women become pillars on which hatred is directed or they become bearers of truth. Innuendo, exaggeration and the arousal of emotion become weapons. This, of course, is subject to the audience’s predispositions, which is why propaganda can spread quickly in a given area.

Hitler – perhaps one of the most notorious and successful propagandists – believed there were two stages to propaganda: first, winning people for the organization, and second,
positioning the organization to fight for power (Marlin, 2003, 81). In *Mein Kampf* Hitler wrote that “the task of propaganda is to attract followers; the task of the party organization is to win members. A follower of a movement is one who declares himself in agreement with its aims; a member is one who fights for it” (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 216-217). People need to be truly committed to an attitude for behavior consistency to occur (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 138). For example, in advertising people may relate to a commercial but they will not necessarily purchase the product that is being promoted. Upon observing the events of Tiananmen Square, Beijing, 1989, Simbardo and Leippe (1991) state that “people act in accord with their attitudes on matters that matter, sometimes no matter what” (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 138). Propaganda works best when it strikes at people’s core values.

Jowett and O’Donnell (1992) have identified stages to effective propaganda, which can also be used to identify propaganda (213). The first stage is the ideology and purpose of the propaganda campaign. This provides a comprehensive conceptual framework for dealing with reality; looks for a set of beliefs, values and attitudes and behaviors as well as the ways the target audience forms perceptions and thinks; and contains concepts of what society is really like (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 213). “An ideology is also a form of consent to be a particular kind of social order and conformity to the rules within a specific set of social, economic, and political structures. It often assigns roles to gender, racial, religious, and social groups” (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 214). The manipulation of a people’s ideology is what makes propaganda successful or not. It is the determining factor in winning people for the organization.

In the second stage, the context in which propaganda occurs is emphasized. The context should relate to the mood of the times (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 214). A propagandist must analyze the times and events in order to understand the historical background and myths.
surrounding the issue. As in education for liberation it is important to explain the history of a people but transformation begins with the present.

In the third stage, the propaganda source is identified. The source is generally an institution or an organization. “When the propagandist is a person, it is easier to identify that person because propagandists usually have what Dobbs (1966) called ‘verbal compulsions’” (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 274). However, an individual can be the spokesperson for the actual propagandist, which may be another individual or an institution (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 216). Propaganda generally emanates from an organization with a hierarchal structure that articulates specific goals (generally long-term) and the means by which to achieve them (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 217).

Finally, propagandists align messages with existing beliefs and opinions, making use of audience predispositions (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 222). Consequently, messages seem to come from within the audience. This use of channeling redirects existing behavior patterns and attitudes and ensures source credibility (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 222). This may be done by using credible opinion leaders, face-to-face contact and exploiting a group’s conforming tendencies. “The propagandist may manipulate the environment to create crowded conditions to achieve a more homogeneous effect” (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 224). Propagandists also monopolize communication sources, make use of visual symbols and verbal symbolization to create a sense of power. “The use of language associated with authority figures such as parents, teachers, heroes, and gods renders authority to that which the language describes – ‘the Fatherland,’ ‘Mother Church,’ ‘Uncle Sam.’” (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 225). Before the war, parties engage in terror with words; during the war, they chronicle victories.
Freire and propaganda in Latin America

Freire sees the Third World as those who have experienced cultural invasion (Coben, 1998, 73). He believes that the struggle of the ‘culture of silence’ is one between the Third World and the metropolis (Coben, 1998, 73). “It seemed to Freire that the dreams of the poor were always dreamt for them by distant others who were removed from the daily struggles of the working class and either were unable or unwilling to recognize the dreams that burned in the habitats of the hearts of the oppressed” (McLaren, 2000, 153). The problems faced in Brazil by Freire’s generation and now by his grandchildren’s generation include illiteracy and domination by foreign capital. “These problems remain. The answer, however, is not the same now. It cannot be the same. I am not going to repeat today the literacy training practiced twenty-five years ago” (Torres & Freire, 1994, 105). Freire’s view of the oppressed also evolved, however. It began with the struggle of those who end up as auxiliary workers in civil construction, moving on to the illiterate, to women as the majority of non-literate persons in São Paulo, and so on. Freire came to believe that not everything can be attributed or reduced to a class struggle (Mayo, 1999, 69). Freire would argue these views must inevitably change as struggles must be rooted in the present.

Present challenges to the oppressed peasantry in Latin America include lack of land and a lack of education in effective farming techniques. For example, “Brazil’s big landowners own 35,083 properties, 1 percent of the total, with a total acreage of 378 million…, almost half of the area of all rural landholdings put together. Even more unreasonably, these 35,083 holdings belong to a much smaller number of owners. Moreover, only 14 percent of their arable area produces crops and 48 percent livestock; the remaining 38 percent is totally unproductive
wilderness” (Stédile, Pinassi, Cabral, Lourençao & Hallewell, 2000, p. 47). The exploitation and exportation of Latin America’s natural resources for the benefit of global profit have left its people and land deprived. A history of colonialism has left countrymen and women bereft of land that is theirs by ancestry, but was taken by the government to give to rich foreign land developers.

**An overview of the challenges to peasant education in Latin America**

In Latin America, agronomist-educators should therefore begin by understanding the Subject, or peasant\(^3\), their current situation and their goals. Some peasants are so close to the natural world that they feel more a part of the natural world than they see themselves as transformers of that world (Freire, 1973, 105). Peasants’ attitudes towards erosion, seedtime, deforestation and so on are related to their beliefs and traditions. This system of beliefs is a structure that functions as a whole – if one part is affected it has a ripple effect on the others (Freire, 1973, 108). Therefore, to attempt to change peasants’ attitudes, agronomist-educators must deal with traditions and education as a whole (Freire, 1973, 109). “The work of the agronomist as educator is not confined, and should not be confined to the domain of techniques. For techniques do not exist without men and women, and men and women do not exist apart from history, apart from the reality they have to transform” (Freire, 1973, 121). The role of the agronomist-educator is not to school peasants in plowing, harvesting or reforestation (Freire, 1973, 110). Such limitations will contribute little to the development of peasants as people. “To discuss erosion (in the problematizing dialogical conception of education) erosion must appear to the peasants in their ‘basic view’ as a real problem, as a ‘distinct perception’ firmly related to other problems” (Freire, 1973, 109). Erosion is not only a natural problem, it is a cultural

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\(^3\) Peasants are farmers practicing small-scale and traditional forms of agriculture under a rigid social stratification
challenge as well. Peasants are erroneously deemed to suffer from absolute ignorance. Those who deem them as such “reveal their own ignorance” (Freire, 1973, 118).

Freire argued that those teaching in field-crop production or soil maintenance do not have the role of propagandist and therefore must not view students as blank pages. They must communicate, and not ‘extend’, since, as we have seen above, to practice extension is to domesticate a people (Freire, 1973, p. 97). Agronomist-educators are faced with a dilemma: if they operate in accordance with the concept of extension, they transform students’ knowledge into something materialized and static. Extension is mechanistic and invasive. It denies peasants the right to make their own decisions. Agronomist-educators must therefore deny the term extension, and opt for dialogue (Freire, 1973, 115). Agronomist-educators have argued that dialogue is slow-moving and can be wasting time, which cannot be justified in the face of urgent needs (Freire, 1973, 116). Consequently, cultural invasion is seen as the only economically viable solution (Freire, 1973, 116).

Peasants are conditioned by their culture. The agronomist-educator must therefore begin by learning the culture of a people. One must read the context before reading the text. For Freire (1995), “in the last analysis reading texts is a dialectical exercise which leads us permanently to the reading of the original context” (Mayo, 2004, 103). Consequently, teachers and learners must reinvent Freire according to the demands of the pedagogical and political contexts (Mayo, 2004, 103). There is no room for dialogue in the latifundista structure (Freire, 1973, 120). Without the experience of dialogue, peasants are unsure of themselves. “This is the consciousness of the oppressed” (Freire, 1973, 120). Peasants are taught to listen and obey, therefore it is not surprising if they do not engage in dialogue and keep an attitude of mistrust towards those who attempt to do so (Freire, 1973, 121). “This distrustful attitude is directed also toward themselves.
They are not sure of their own ability. They are influenced by the myth of their own ignorance” (Freire, 1973, 121). Through dialogue, peasants can begin to affirm their knowledge and therefore be open to explore other realities. Agricultural production “is a result of the relations between human beings and nature” (Freire, 1973, 122). For Freire, “the point of decision in the process of development lies within the being undergoing transformation – the process is not a mechanical one. Hence, while all development is modernization, not all modernization is development” (Freire, 1973, 130). Agronomist-educators need to keep in mind that elements of the old will remain in the new (Freire, 1973, 134).

Agrarian reform is the transformation of reality (Freire, 1973, 134). “Agrarian reform should be a process of development which will result in the modernization of the rural areas along with the modernization of agriculture” (Freire, 1973, 130). According to the non-mechanical process of development, a new concept is born – drawing from the old – which combines technology with the empirical methods of peasants (Freire, 1973, 130). Everyone involved in the process of agrarian reform has areas of specialty to share and should be an educator of sorts (Freire, 1973, 131). In agrarian reform, the fundamental task of the agronomist-educator is to be an involved educator who engages in the process of transformation with the peasants, “as a Subject with other Subjects” (Freire, 1973, 135). What the educator may see as a problem for peasants may not be the case at all, and vice-versa (Freire, 1973, 158). Education then starts with generative themes. “If one offers the peasants their own theme, so that in the act of knowing they can dialogue on it with the educator … it will “generate” other themes when at a later state it is apprehended in its relationship with other related themes through the transformation undergone by the perception of reality” (Freire, 1973, 159). Educational content then springs from the peasants themselves as they relate to the world (Freire, 1973, 159).
“Human beings are not just what they are, but also what they were; they are in a state of being, this being a characteristic of human existence” (Freire, 1973, 132).

**Freire’s view on propaganda**

Freire’s writings touch briefly on propaganda, which he equates with cultural invasion. According to Freire (1973), cultural invasion is related to conquest and manipulation (113). “It presupposes propaganda which domesticates rather than liberates” (Freire, 1973, 113). The invader uses propaganda, myths and slogans to persuade the invaded. The invader must then destroy the character of the invaded culture to replace it with byproducts of a new culture (Freire, 1973, 114). People are aware of the presence of things and objects, but this does not mean they are ‘entering into’ them (Freire, 1973, 102). Consequently, things become magic, which is bound to language and structure (Freire, 1973, 103). People react defensively to someone trying to apply another language, structure or manner of acting and consequently cling to what they know.

This challenge of magic or myth threatens people’s internal equilibrium (Freire, 1973, 104). “A myth is a story in which meaning is embodied in recurrent symbols and events, but it is also an idea to which people already subscribe; therefore it is a predisposition to act” (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 215). When invaded communities perceive foreign elements they ‘purify’ or modify them in order to preserve elements of the original meaning while introducing new ones, creating a jumble of said ‘truths’ and myths or propaganda. The power of myth and magic then lies in their nature to call to action and this is what propaganda attempts to replicate. Consequently it is vital to the freedom of a people to ‘enter into’ reality. “Neither peasants nor anyone else can be persuaded or forced to submit to the propaganda-myth, if they have the alternative option of liberation” (Freire, 1973, 97). In oppressive situations “people become socially alienated, partially internalize these myths and develop a dual relationship with the
oppressor” (Kane, 2001, 38). By objectively problematizing their current situation, by becoming critically aware, peasants can critically act on reality (Freire, 1973, 97). ‘Entering into’ reality provides a viable option for the oppressed to free themselves of lies and said ‘knowledge.’ “To ‘enter into’ reality means to look at it objectively, and apprehend it as one’s field of action and reflection. It means to penetrate it more and more lucidly in order to discover the true interrelations between the facts observed” (Freire, 1973, 105). Some would suggest it is not necessary for a people to ‘enter into’ reality, and that reality can be taught through the process of extension. However, extension should be regarded skeptically. The terms persuasion and propaganda are related to the term extension and this is why extension is not square with education that is the practice of freedom (Freire, 1973, 97). Extension within Freire’s framework is oppressive.

There are two types of communication, one based on symbols and the other on convictions. “There is not only the question of the meaningful comprehension of the signs, but also the question of adhesion or non-adhesion to the conviction expressed by one of the communicating Subjects” (Freire, 1973, 142). To have meaningful comprehension, one must “reconstitute within themselves the dynamic process from which the conviction they express by means of the linguistic signs is developed” (Freire, 1973, 142). There must be agreement on the linguistic signs used in order for communication to be possible (Freire, 1973, 138). Such signs are called ‘meaning perspectives.’ ‘Meaning perspectives’ relate to work, culture and personal lives (Cranton, 1998, 189). There are three kinds of meaning perspectives: epistemic (how people gain knowledge and use it), sociolinguistic (how people understand social norms, culture and use of language), and psychological (how people see ourselves personally) (Cranton, 1998, 189). All three kinds of ‘meaning perspectives’ are used in an education for liberation and in
communication. “Communication is characterized by the fact that it is dialogue, in that dialogue communicates” (Freire, 1973, 138). Dialogue is not invasive or manipulative. For example, dialogue does not begin with the purpose of obtaining a given answer or adhesion to a specific viewpoint. Dialogue can be debate, provided the debate is not invasive. All those participating in dialogue have equal opportunity to share their views and remain open to the other’s message. However, dialogue does not begin with a set agenda, it is flowing and flexible.

Going back briefly to Habermas, humans have three basic interests: technical (interest in manipulating the environment/control); practical (understanding each other and social groups); and emancipatory (freedom from ignorance) (Cranton, 1998, 191). Each interest leads to a type of learning, respectively instrumental, communicative and critical. Instrumental learning leads to acquiring instrumental knowledge such as how to build a shelter, grow food, create computers, and so on (Cranton, 1998, 191). Communicative learning uses language to understand others’ intentions and be understood; for example, conversation, listening, reading and watching television. In communicative learning, the subject gains knowledge of social norms (Cranton, 1998, 191). Critical reflection occurs with the desire to grow and increase self-awareness such as self-improvement and freeing ourselves from self-distortions. It influences instrumental and practical knowledge. Critical reflection is often transformative (Cranton, 1998, 191).

“Communicative action takes place when one person communicates with another with the goal of arriving at a mutual understanding about an experience or situation” (Cranton, 1998, 192). During communicative action, participants engage in validity testing – one provides evidence in support of his point of view with the goal of persuading the other (Cranton, 1998, 192). At the centre of communicative action we find rationality (Cranton, 1998, 192). It is rationality that allows the Subject to negotiate meaning rather than just accepting another’s point of view
In all communication, the lifeworld is always in the background (Cranton, 1998, 192-193). The lifeworld “is a culturally transmitted set of patterns or perspectives that allows us to go about our everyday activities in an unquestioning way” (Cranton, 1998, 193). It is the life experiences that Freire deems invaluable. The lifeworld is dependent on an intersubjective understanding that others make the same assumptions or take the same things for granted as we do (Cranton, 1998, 193). By contrast, the ‘systems world’ is self-regulating and includes bureaucracies, political systems and other institutionalized systems (Cranton, 1998, 193). The systems world stifles people’s ability to question (Cranton, 1998, 193). The lifeworld is dominated by our systems world, which is oppressive (Cranton, 1998, 193). Awareness of the systems world can then enable people to reevaluate their lifeworld and begin the path towards liberation. We will examine below what happens in the nexus between the systems world and the lifeworld in cases of mass mobilization.

**Propaganda in Freire’s philosophy**

As we have seen, propaganda is subjective, in that it is dependent on the receiver’s interpretation of the material. In this respect, anything can become propaganda, given a specific context associated with a specific person. Are there elements in Freire’s methodology and ideology that leave room for subjective interpretation that can lead to propaganda? Freire believes one of the strengths in his teaching is that it can be adapted to suit various audiences at various times. In this adaptation process, as we shall see, there are elements, such as the teacher/student relationship, dialogue and the methods employed in literacy teaching that may fall prey to propaganda more easily than others.
Critique of the teacher/student relationship

The teacher/student relationship is likely the weakest element in Freire’s writings. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the most accessible of Freire’s publications, the teacher/student relationship is generally interpreted as egalitarian. In her study of three non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Brazil, Bartlett (2005) observed that teachers said their methods were based on the Freirean model but those teachers did not have exhaustive knowledge of his corpus. Few had read more than a few chapters from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and had little knowledge of his other works (Bartlett, 2005, 351). Consequently, they often invoked Freire’s ideas rather than discussing them at length (Bartlett, 2005, 351). Educators focused mostly on the teacher-student relationship and employed the friendship strategy (Bartlett, 2005, 352). In the friendship strategy, teachers cultivate social relations with students and the two confide in each other (Bartlett, 2005, 352). “By and large, the NGO educators that I interviewed felt that their stance of respect and friendship toward students was the hallmark of their pedagogy” (Bartlett, 2005, 354). Educators believed teachers should be loving, caring, and understanding. One shortcoming of this friendship strategy is that the ‘deepened’ relationship was limited to the classroom (Bartlett, 2005, 355). Outside the classroom the student-teacher relationship resumed, creating confusion. Some programs engaged teachers in social marches – including MST marches – and as such sought to link classroom activities with political mobilization (Bartlett, 2005, 355). However, the “teachers’ overly romantic notions of friendship, associated with a pretheoretical notion of empathy and human relations, deflected them away from the very social critiques that Freire advocated” (Bartlett, 2005, 359). Consequently, such an approach is counter-productive to an education for liberation. Education begins when the contradiction between
student and teacher is resolved. These poles of extremity must be resolved so that one is both at the same time, rather than one or the other (Mayo, 2004, 52).

However, in Freire’s earlier works, very few details are provided on how teachers are to make the transition from critical thought to critical practice, making it difficult for educators to understand and apply the philosophy (McLaren, 2000, 164). Freire later elaborated that the teacher does possess knowledge the students may not have, and the teacher should be a person of some authority, though he does not advocate authoritarianism. Another development “is Freire’s rendering explicit the belief that educators and learners are not on equal footing in the learning process, a point developed within the context of his discussion of the tension between authority and authoritarianism” (Mayo, 2004, 22). Freire’s later works imply educators can have a theoretical understanding that is superior to that of the learner (Mayo, 2004, 82). An entire section in *Pedagogy of Freedom* is devoted to the role of the teacher who balances freedom and authority (Mayo, 2004, 82). Freire does not use the term ‘facilitator’ but rather the terms ‘teacher’ or ‘coordinator’. Students bring with them manifestations of the oppressor consciousness, which must be addressed through dialogue with the teacher, which is a significant difference between the learner and the teacher. This is why it is important for the teacher to have a degree of authority but not be perceived as authoritarian. Teachers maintain a certain level of authority through the depth of knowledge and subject matter in which they teach but this does not denigrate into authoritarianism (Mayo, 2004, 83). This is achieved by ensuring that the teacher’s authority does not intrude on the creative and investigative capacity of the learner (Mayo, 2004, 83).

For Freire, “in avoiding directivity [educators] need to prevent losing themselves in the lack of clear limits that often leads to a laissez faire approach” (Mayo, 2004, 82). Teaching may
begin with an agenda, but it should not be directive. The agenda should be malleable and flexible to adapt with the student. The teacher may teach without being overly authoritarian and as such provides a degree of structure to the learning process. In a dialogue with Donaldo Marcedo, Freire stated “educators must develop radical pedagogical structures that provide students with the opportunity to use their own reality as a basis of literacy. This includes, obviously, the language they bring to the classroom” (Bartlett, 2005, 346). The teacher is directive and authoritative but not authoritarian (Bartlett, 2005, 348). The teacher has a directive role but still respects students’ autonomy. “It is the power of the learning group, of which the educator is a part, that is most likely to lead individuals to critical reflection” (Cranton, 1998, 196-197).

Critical to this is the role of the teacher helping students discover that in moments of difficulty, there are moments of joy (Bell et al., 1990, 23). Teachers should try to convey beauty in the act of reading; they should not have the experience in lieu of the student; and the teacher has to know what he teaches. A teacher will also ask “Is my knowledge necessary?” Freire states “the question is to know whether my knowledge is necessary, because sometimes it is not necessary. Sometimes it is necessary but the need is not yet perceived by the people” (Bell et al., 1990, 66). Through dialogue with the teacher, students can become conscious beings, learn from the teacher’s experiences and vice-versa, and begin to change their reality. Students also help the teacher learn and grow, making this a mutually beneficial relationship.

Critique of dialogue

A second shortcoming is the role of dialogue. The use and importance of dialogue can be misunderstood if it is not taken in the context of Freire’s teachings. As seen earlier with Habermas, dialogue is often misused to persuade people. The speaker attempts to change, influence or alter the listener’s view. Words are weapons. Some of the most powerful orators
utilize propaganda to further their cause. There are various ways in which dialogue can become propaganda. A good speaker can convince a group that a phenomenon is just. He can also convince them it is unjust (White, 1993, 197). On political speaking, Socrates – in *Phaedrus* – asserts “that it will make the same things appear to the polis to be good at one time, the opposite at another time” (White, 1993, 198). In true dialogue, the rhetorician begins by seeking the truth, though he cannot be compelled to use it. Of facts, “the malice lies in their form, in the discretion with which they are handled. They suggest more than they articulate the desired conclusion. Multiplied, they soften the mind, which drinks in the content” (Marlin, 2003, 87). This suggests the speaker must know its public in order to determine how to manipulate information.

Rhetoric must be an art if the speaker is to persuade the people (Benardete, 1991, 169). In *Phaedrus*, Socrates believes the nature of rhetoric is the “art of leading the soul by means of words or discourses, not only in courts of law and other public spaces, but in private situations as well” (White, 1993, 194). Here, the soul is not intelligence therefore the rhetorician has to appeal to more than intellect (White, 1993, 195). The speaker must know what types of souls he or she addresses. He must study the actions and reactions of his listeners. He should be able to sense what types of souls are present and know when to be silent (White, 1993, 243-244). Speakers must also have a theoretical glimmer of their intended goal before they speak. “The artful rhetorician packages ideas to make them palatable, like sugarcoating a bitter pill” (Marlin, 2003, 46). The listener accepts the successive ideas and conceptual shifts until the end.

**Mass movement mobilization and literacy campaigns: Case studies**

For Freire “it is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as Subjects of the transformation” (Kane, 2001, 42). Action requires critical reflection, which is reflective of a democratic regime.
Education and conscientization, which cannot be neutral, lead to active political action such as a revolution (Mackie, 1981, 96). An authentic revolution is communal and is based on a dialogue between leaders and the people (Kane, 2001, 42). Political action and revolution are dialogical (Freire, 2004, 110). “The ideal is to fight against the system taking the two fronts, the one internal to the schooling system and the one external to the schooling system. Of course, we have much space outside the schooling system, much more space to work, to make decisions, to choose. We have more space outside the system, but we also can create the space inside of the subsystem or the schooling system in order to occupy the space” (Mayo, 2004, 86). One of the means used to bring change is mass mobilization or national literacy campaigns, which can be very effective if executed properly and in the spirit of freedom. The black civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr. is a good example of this. However, there are many dangers associated with mass movements, one of which is agitation propaganda. “Agitation propaganda seeks to arouse people to participate in or support a cause. It attempts to arouse people from apathy by giving them feasible actions to carry out. Agitation consists of stimulating mass action by hammering home one salient feature of the situation that is threatening, iniquitous, or outrageous” (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 214). Here, only one message prevails at the expense of individual rights.

Case Study: The Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST)

There is evidence in Freire’s later work, which was influenced by various groups including the MST, “that he supported the view that regards Cultural Action for Freedom as being more effective when carried out within the context of a social movement or movements” (Mayo, 2004, 58). The Movement of Landless Rural Workers (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, MST) is one of the most vibrant movements in Latin America (Mayo, 2004,
Key characteristics of the MST are as follows: it is run by the landless themselves, it is independent of the church, political parties and unions; and it is open to all family members, giving equal rights to women, men and children of all ages (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 23). There are four aims of the MST: “to fight agrarian reform; to fight for a just, fraternal society and for an end to capitalism; to include rural workers, tenant farmers, share-croppers, smallholders and so on, in the category of landless worker …; and to ensure that the land be used for those who work and live from it” (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 23). The aim is then to transform the *latifundista* structure.

From 1987 to 1988 people became excited about organizing settlements. The MST followed the Cuban model and established farming cooperatives (CPAs) (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 92). The MST focused on large associations with large numbers of people “to carry out ‘big production activities… in areas such as timber extraction, the processing of agricultural products, agri-business and so on’” (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 92). It encouraged the mechanization of activities, economies of scale and cash crops. The CPAs were not successful. There was not enough revenue to cover expenses (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 94). The MST consequently shifted its focus to putting “pressure on the state to provide the services [the MST] needed – subsidized farm credit, schools, roads, electricity, health posts and so on” (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 94). It increased its mass mobilization strategies to get what it wanted from the state. This shift allowed settlements to organize production as they wanted but people went to the extreme and became too isolated for the MST. Consequently, it established service cooperatives that helped people fill bank loan forms and provide cheaper farming products, initiatives that were met with more success (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 95). It is interesting that when the
movement attempted to shift to large scale production via CPAs it was unsuccessful. However, when members strayed too far on their own the MST sought out means to hold them closer.

According to José de Souza Martins, a founding member of the movement, “the MST only succeeds because the people in it don’t just want a piece of land; they also have a way of life as a banner. They have a *mística* of how to live, of how to be a human being” (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 30). In its early days, the MST focused on obtaining land, not on how to farm it. “As time went on, the landless families became symbols of resistance. Their defiance inspired solidarity from all over Brazil, and the support they received from the public put the question of land reform back on the agenda” (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 15). This proved that the military government was not invincible. Following a land protest “even at the end, very few of the families knew what the term ‘land reform’ meant, but they had learnt that they had to organize themselves to achieve their goals …. That was the important lesson. It was here that the MST was born” (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 19). Another important lesson was the importance of informing and educating all MST members. In its beginnings, the MST did not clearly communicate its goals and educate its members. Members only had a vague idea of what they were fighting for. This is propaganda. However, the MST recognized the importance of education, which is closer to liberation.

Education was a conscious decision for the MST (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 114). Some teachers and mothers began organizing play groups and telling children why they were there, why the police were present and what was happening (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 114). As time went on, parents began to realize they would be in settlements a while and they became concerned about their children’s education (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 114). MST schools were then set up in all camps, settlements and occupations wherever there was room. “The struggle for
land has also become the struggle for education, for schools, for the right to know” (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 112). At first, education was met with resistance because some members did not want to worry the children. Members saw the goal of the MST as being one of obtaining land. Education would be a distraction. However, over time it became clear that education was necessary. As Bradford and Rocha (2002) point out,

In her book *Pedagogia do Movimento Sem Terra*, Roseli Caldart said that many adults felt they had wasted a lot of opportunities in their lives because they had not understood how things really worked in society, and they did not want their children to have the same experience. The families wanted a school that taught their children to ‘fight for their rights, to work together, to value the healthy life they could live in the country and to resist the lure of the city’. (115).

Within two years of establishing formal MST education settlers began thinking they were not only fighting for land, but for education as well (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 115).

The MST established its own schools in settlements and demanded that they be recognized by the government by using sit-ins, negotiation, demanding meetings with the authorities and other classic MST strategies (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 115). “It adopted an ambitious aim: to set up a school system that would produce ‘new human beings’” (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 116). At first, the MST had demanded that the government provide teachers. This posed a problem because teachers were part of a city-based educational system, which was based on different values than those of the MST. Teachers were also prejudiced and saw it as a punishment to be sent to the settlements (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 115). The MST sought a more Freirean approach, one in which teachers could associate with and respect students’ experiences. “The MST adopted [Freire’s] perspective as the foundation for its schools and other educational programs (UNICEF honored the MST with an award for its innovative use of Freire’s ideas)” (Wright & Wolford, 2001, 62). Using a Freirean ideology, the MST set out to train its own teachers by establishing the National Education Sector and the National Education

In 1996, the MST began to focus on adult illiteracy. It organized a campaign that would train more than 7,000 literacy agents who would work in MST settlements (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 119). In 1997, the MST established the Itinerant School, which sent teachers with all their equipment to camps to train camp dwellers as teachers and monitors while the base school provided support in class materials and during inspections (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 118). The MST even arranged schools to work in stages that can be shorter or longer, depending on students’ needs (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 118). In 1998, a group of settlers were evicted. In response, they organized a protest march, and the Itinerant School followed (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 118-119). “We learnt by seeing, living and doing. We calculated the kilometers, meters, centimeters of the road we had to take, the number of days it would take to arrive in the capital, what was produced in the towns we went through…” (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 119). Learning begins from the student’s life experience.

The movement has established relationships with organizations like UNESCO and UNICEF and has started building the University of the Land (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, p. 124). However, there is still work to do. “Many activists believe that most teachers in their schools are too conditioned by the dominant methodology of learning by rote and are too uncritical of orthodox views” (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 124). In the 1980s, MST and trade union confederation joined together to offer three training courses per year to teach the basic principles
of economics, politics and sociology (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 120). The MST also organized a
one year course for those aged 16 to 24 where they learned basic school subjects (mixed with
MST principles) and the principles of organic farming (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 120).

When Bradford and Rocha visited MST camps, schools consisted of “a big hut with a
thatched roof turns out to be the school. Twenty-five children aged 7 to 14 sit together in the
single mud-and-wattle classroom. There is one small blackboard, and not yet everyone has a
and books were adapted to the different levels of learning (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 111).

White and Wolford (2001) reported in one region, children attended the Paulo Freire Elementary
School (61). Today, “the MST’s extensive educational program includes courses carried out
within the various landless peasants’ encampments, the running of primary schools (by the end
of the 1990s, there were around 900 such schools, catering to 85,000 children), and teacher
education programs” (Mayo, 2004, 75). According to the MST website, the movement has 1,000
schools from the 1st to the 4th grade and 50 schools from the 5th to the 8th grade with 95,000
children and teenagers and 2800 teachers (The MST and Education). “Despite this, the number
of children and adolescents out of school is growing, either because the schools are not legally
recognized or because the proposed curriculum, adapted to the necessities of the children of rural
workers, is not respected” (MST and Education). The MST realized that the battle for land
required more than physical force. It requires “the intellectual confidence to confront opponents
in the government offices, courtrooms and television studios” (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 120).

Over time, the children of illiterate MST members became leaders of MST. They were educated
but still needed more political and practical training (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 120). An MST
education includes everyone, regardless of age, gender or ethnicity. It builds new relations, raises
consciousness and includes active participation in changing the present reality. It advocates solidarity, mobilization and infuses its members with the ability to write and read life (MST and Education).

**Case Study: Third grade literacy teaching, Cuba**

While visiting a third grade class in Cuba, Worthman and Kaplan (2001) observed the teaching of literacy. Cuban children and adults are remarkably literate, in fact, the country’s illiteracy rate went down from 25 % in 1959 to 5 % in 2000 (Worthman & Kaplan, 2001, 648). The teaching approach observed seemed to stem from a Freirean model, as Cubans epitomize the belief that institutional education, or banking education, only serves to reproduce the status quo (Worthman & Kaplan, 2001, 648). The teacher begins by looking at the images in students’ readers. Students are then asked to share what they observe in the image, using their own words. More than one student is asked to provide a description, however, the teacher then asks the class who provided the better description and then moves on, not sharing why the description may have been better. The teacher reads the text that accompanies the picture and students follow along. This is followed by probing questions, which are again posed to more than one student. When the teacher receives a satisfactory answer she moves on, again, without further discussion (Worthman & Kaplan, 2001, 652-653). The teacher asked about vocabulary and spelling rules, which students readily knew the answers to. Students were then instructed to read alone which was followed by reading aloud. Students were then asked to criticize the reader’s performance (Worthman & Kaplan, 2001, 654). While elements of Freire’s approach can be seen here, such as the use of illustration and the beginning of dialogue between students and teacher, very little is liberating education. The teacher spoke of Che Guevara, of honesty and of other values,
however, this discussion was brief, and as Kaplan observed, very factual – as though memorized (Worthman & Kaplan, 2001, 653).

When speaking with adults, the researchers report that during the Cuban revolution, education became synonymous with liberation, and this was done largely through literacy and dialogue, whose purpose it was to lead to action, which it accomplished (Worthman & Kaplan, 2001, 649). Worthman and Kaplan (2001) state, “in the case of the literacy campaign of the 1960s and 1970s, the purpose of action was to transform the country from a poor, totalitarian-ruled island to a socialist state. The result of such dialogic exchange was exponential growth in literacy rates and health benefits and statistics. Thus, it was ironic for us then to experience the dichotomy of a people able to define their world verbally but unable to define their lives within the context of desired action or of what needed to be done to change their circumstances” (649). Cuba is a literate country that can engage in dialogue with regard to their world, but they are unable to articulate change and see beyond their current reality. Again, elements of the Freirean model, in and outside the classroom are present but it stops at the surface of his work and does not delved deep enough to liberate a people.

**Case Study: The Sandinista National Literacy Crusade, Nicaragua**

During the Sandinista National Literacy Crusade of 1980, in Nicaragua, literacy became a means for the people to free themselves from oppression by changing the government. Once again, educators and political leaders realized the impact of Freire’s teachings. The project convinced youths who were not partaking in the political overthrowing of the dictatorship to become involved. One youth states:

I was 13 years old. […] It was a time when there was a lot of enthusiasm for the revolution. … Two months after the revolutionary government took power they began to organize the literacy crusade. They called upon the young and the majority of young people enthusiastically got involved with the desire to continue
the process of liberating people. They understood literacy as a further progression of liberation from the dictatorship, from obscurantism (Baracco, 2004, 344).

As in Freire’s Brazilian campaign, literacy was equal to political armament. Freire even participated in the discussions establishing the literacy booklet entitled *The Dawn of the People* (Baracco, 2004, 345). The publication contained 23 lessons or themes with a photograph for discussion and one short phrase that represented a syllable family. Each lesson encouraged students to discuss and analyze the photograph and then relate it to their own lives (Baracco, 2004, 345). During follow-up interviews, Baracco (2004) notes literacy is not what people remember of the Crusade. They recall people learning history and a bringing together of rural and urban citizens (346). The lessons learned during the process go beyond literacy and touch on political consciousness. However, Baracco (2004) does note some who had participated in the program forgot how to read without post-Crusade adult education (346). The fact that literacy became secondary in the Crusade summons the question as to whether such campaigns are propaganda. Was the Crusade’s goal to teach people to read or was it to engage them in political battle? Freire may argue that the two are inseparable. As people become more educated, they can – given the proper teacher and circumstances – become more aware of their current situation and as such be called to engage in dialogue, which Freire believes should lead to action. Education is then a political process that is fuelled by the masses by the idea of liberation.

**Case Study: National Literacy Campaign, Chile**

During his stay in Chile from 1964-1969, Freire worked for the ministries of education and agriculture and he participated the Christian Democratic reformist project, which advocated literacy. At this time, Chile, under the administration of Eduardo Frei, made popular education part of a state project that promoted land reform and civil society (Kirkendall, 2004, 688). However, while the Frei administration sought to liberate, it also sought to control. “In practice,
the campaign often blurred the line between creating a critical consciousness and creating a Christian Democratic consciousness, while Freire himself became caught up in political struggles within the administration over the extent and pace of reform” (Kirkendall, 2004, 687). One of the tactics used to ensure the sustainability of literacy was to highlight the importance of knowing how to read and implementing literacy programs in the workplace (Kirkendall, 2004, 295).

Literate citizens meant a better economy for the country, more crop production and less import. As the campaign progressed, salaried peasant-teachers were brought on board and 800,000 copies of Christian Democratic introductory reading manuals were distributed (Kirkendall, 2004, 699). The focus of the campaign was on rural peasant workers. “The Chilean people should ‘support honest governments’ that were directing their ‘destiny’. Photos depicted previous conditions in which peasants worked unhappily, whereas now they owned their own houses and had schools for the children” (Kirkendall, 2004, 700). The goal was to persuade the people that they were working toward land reform for themselves, and for their country (Kirkendall, 2004, 700). The manuals also preached against the dangers of alcoholism and the importance of temperance.

While the literacy campaign began by following a Freirean model, the published manual strayed from Freire’s teachings. The manual standardized discussion content, rather than following the lead of the peasant, a critical element in Freire’s teachings. It also blurred the distinction between critical consciousness and Christian consciousness (Kirkendall, 2004, 700).

As peasants became more educated, they began organizing land invasions. In the second-half of his term, Frei and the Christian Democrats became more conservative and began taking strong measures against those who engaged in land invasions (Kirkendall, 2004, 710). “The masses demanded more participation in the process of reform’ that Chile was undergoing. ‘The
government refused, and parts of the population took extreme attitudes’ and ‘were suffocated by the authorities’” (Kirkendall, 2004, 711). The government later took credit for the establishment of unions and for the rise in the people’s consciousness though the people themselves did not believe the government was to be thanked. In the end, Freire became shunned by the government and he left Chile to pursue offers to lecture in the United States.

As stated earlier, propaganda needs a leader. Here, it can be argued that Freire was one leader. The campaign was conducted in accordance with Frei’s objectives, Frei being the true propagandist leader. When Freire had done his job in creating a literacy campaign, he was dismissed. Frei began the campaign with the goal of having more peasants vote. “The Christian Democrats [the party to which Frei belonged] hoped to harness the potential of [the rural peasant] part of the electorate by enacting reforms that appealed to them” (Kirdendall, 2004, 691). Frei may have wished to better people’s lives, to the extent that it served his and his party’s agenda. However, as stated earlier when examining Freire’s view on propaganda, peasants cannot be forced to submit to the propaganda message if they have the option of liberation (Freire, 1973, 97). The people of Chile used their literacy skills to begin questioning the very government that sought to manipulate them.

Analysis

Freire’s weaknesses are also his strengths because he allows flexibility in his teachings, therefore allowing his work to be reinvented according to the context, and transcending geographic, geopolitical and cultural boundaries (McLaren, 2000, 164). He allows teachers and subjects to engage in the learning process, to ‘enter into’ the process and make it their own.

Freire’s ideas have also been distorted in the past through the overzealousness of revolutionary governments wanting to implement programs or campaigns in a short period of time and through teaching carried out by inexperienced educators, often schoolchildren, whose so-called dialogical approach amounts to hardly
anything better than the mechanistic process of virtually administering a questionnaire. (Mayo, 2004, 63)

Founding MST members, leaders and educators were of a generation of people from illiterate families with no tradition of reading or political awareness (Bradford & Rocha, 2002, 124).

Consequently the more widely known elements of Freire’s theory, such as dialogue and the use of life experiences as learning vehicles were applied but not necessarily researched in depth. This is also clear in Bartlett’s study. Many in Brazil knew of Freire and the general guidelines of his teachings but the success of the Freirean method lies in its methodology as a whole.

One of the strengths, which is also a weakness in Freire’s philosophy is its adaptability to various contexts, political situations and groups. The limitations lie in the accessibility of material and interpretation. For example, Freire lectured at a school in Mexico and when he returned six months later a group had formed who had applied his literacy technique with slight modifications. They started with one image, rather than several, and from the one image obtained one generative word. They worked with this one word and through dialogue with the group came to discover the second generative word and so on. For example, a generative word such as *paloma* (dove) can be broken down into pa po pi pe pu, la le li lo lu, ma me mi mo mu, which can form about 80 other word combinations (Davis, 1981, 63-64). This is an example of Freire’s philosophy adapted by a group of students with proper resources. A group of educated students with access to Freire’s writings and privy to a lecture by Freire himself had ample resources to assess the message, evaluate the context, subjects and cultural setting, and modify the philosophy to better serve the subject’s needs. Now imagine the same scenario but in a remote village, with students of a school with limited resources. The outcome may be very different.

The question then remains: should Freire’s teachings be utilized in developing countries with limited access to his work? If one only has partial access to Freire’s work can it be
considered grey propaganda – part truth and part lies – the lies being the voids that are filled by ill-informed, unassuming teachers? In her study, Bartlett illustrated the dangers and repercussions of misinterpreting the teacher-student relationship. For example, in Africa there is a myth that sex with a virgin will cure AIDS. Elements of truth can be found here. A virgin is less likely to have AIDS and so the chance of infection is less likely. However, someone with a clear picture of present-day Africa would know many newborn children are infected with the HIV virus at birth. Truth is subjective, regardless of the intent of the speaker.

In dialogue, the teacher needs to have knowledge of the learner’s background, as in propaganda. In 3rd grade literacy teaching in Cuba there is the beginning of dialogue as the class discusses the pictures shown. However, there is no follow-through provided to the answers given by students. In dialogue, the teacher would have probed students to see why they had given that answer in an attempt to better understand the student’s life experiences. Students in this class were not invited to ‘enter into’ the things and objects that surround them. They memorized facts and only engaged in a form of dialogue when prompted by the teacher.

Many of the communicative tools outlined by Freire can be compared with propaganda. Propagandists suggest they are enabling people to critically reflect on the current situation – white supremacy groups would claim they are exposing Caucasians to their oppression to other races. Propaganda claims to reveal truths and those who accept the propagandists’ message may very well believe the messages to be truth. However, the difference with Freire is that the truth Freire preaches is arrived at by the individual, rather than by a people who utilize discourse as opposed to dialogue. If a civil rights group organizes a march or a sit-in, is it propaganda? Or does propaganda depend on the public’s view of the message. Were union leaders who stood on soap boxes and eventually improved the rights of workers propagandists because they did not
engage in dialogue? The answer may be that it depends on the historical context in which you ask the question. Martin Luther King Jr. speaking to the people at the March on Washington may have been interpreted as propaganda by some at the time, but today most would agree it was education for liberation. The present situation is then an element of the utmost importance when applying Freire’s teachings.

Public speaking can be a powerful motivational force, as seen in many civil rights movements and in war. As the masses gather to hear the message of the orator, they feel empowered and able to act. In Freire’s words,

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\text{The inability to act which causes men’s anguish also causes them to reject their impotence, by attempting “…to restore [their] capacity to act. But can [they], and how? One way is to submit to and identify with a person or group having power. By this symbolic participation in another person’s life, [men have] the illusion of acting, when in reality [they] only submit to and become a part of those who act.” Populist manifestations perhaps best exemplify this type of behaviour by the oppressed, who, by identifying with their charismatic leaders, come to feel that they themselves are active and effective. (Freire, 2004, 104)}
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Therein lies the weakness of the masses. While they are a powerful entity, the masses tend to flock to one leader and take his or her cause to be their own without necessarily evaluating the facts or ideals proposed, which further oppresses them. Conscientization is replaced by the ideals of the masses or of one leader. Dialogue is replaced with listening. “Bandura’s (1986) theory of observational learning links behaviour and behaviour change to modeling that people observe in their homes, among their peers, and in the mass media. According to this theory, modeling influences produce new behaviors because they give people new information about how to behave” (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 138). People acquire symbolic representations through observation (Jowett & O’Donnell, 1992, 138-139).

In the Chilean National Literacy Campaign photographs depicting a better life for peasants were used to persuade the people. The use of photographs was also applied in Hitler’s
propaganda campaign during World War II. Advertisers often make use of this tactic, such as the ‘happy housewife’ who washes with Ivory soap. While images of peasants leading a better life were used to address the issue of the need for literacy – learning to read can change your life – it was part of a larger campaign: that of ensuring more peasants earned the right to vote for Frei. This is clearly not education for liberation, it is manipulative. How can a people ‘enter into’ a reality that is staged for them? When Chileans swayed from the path Frei had set for them, the path that would lead them to the happiness in the photograph, peasants were penalized. He did not support their land ownership claims. The goal was not for the people to achieve conscientization. The goal was to make people literate enough to vote.

Conclusion

The significant difference between Freire’s teachings and propaganda is that his message is rooted in love. For Freire,

… dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love. Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. It is thus necessarily the task of responsible Subjects and cannot exist in a relation of domination. Domination reveals the pathology of love: sadism in the dominator and masochism in the dominated. Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause – the cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical. As an act of bravery, love cannot be sentimental: as an act of freedom, it must not serve as a pretext for manipulation. It must generate other acts of freedom; otherwise, it is not love. Only by abolishing the situation of oppression is it possible to restore the love which that situation made impossible. If I do not love the world – if I do not love life – if I do not love people – I cannot enter into dialogue. (Cited in McLaren, 2000, 171)

People begin by being preoccupied with their survival; then they see life as being out of
their control or ruled by destiny; then they begin questioning their lives though they are still vulnerable to various powers; then they participate in dialogue which criticizes the ideologies
that foster oppression (Cranton, 1998, 194). Dialogue does not invade a culture, nor is it manipulative. Dialogue, teaching and conscientization are rooted in love. However, even with the best of intentions, messages can become confused.

The elements in Freire’s educational philosophy taken by themselves are not propaganda. They can be ineffective and counter-productive when they are not researched properly and interpreted incorrectly, as seen in Bartlett’s study and in literacy teaching in 3rd grade classes in Cuba. The overall message in Freire’s teachings can be productive in furthering a group’s cause, as seen in the MST and the National Literacy Campaign in Chile. Chileans used the tools given to them by their oppressor to take action. Freire’s teachings are malleable and can be modified to suit various target groups, social contexts and political situations. However, the danger behind Freire’s theory lies in the intentions of the leader, or teacher who applies it. Is the freedom from oppression lost in the masses? In the MST’s early days people embarked on a battle though they did not know what they were fighting for. When does the view of one become that of the general public? Freire’s message is rooted in love and he encourages and acknowledges that his theory needs to be altered to adapt to the person or group using it.

I return to my argument that propaganda is determined not only by the intended message, but the context in which it occurs. In Latin America and in most parts of the world today, Freire’s name and literacy teaching methods are equated with an education for liberation, a call to action and freedom from oppression. However, as seen in government campaigns and educational institutions, his methods can be transformed into oppressive tools. The case studies provided illustrate the danger in applying the Freirean method without carefully considering every aspect of his teachings – dialogue, the teacher/student relationship, conscientization and so on. His teachings have incredible potential for liberating the oppressed in developing countries,
however, the process must be rooted in genuine love. Can what Freire represents become propaganda? Yes. His image, his name and his methods can become propaganda. However, love is at the heart of Freire’s method and this is what distinguishes it from propaganda. When taken in its true form, Freire’s method is authentically liberating.
Appendix

Generative word
tijolo

Situation (context)
construction work

Phonetic family (discussed orally by the group)
ta-te-ti-to-tu, ja-je-ji-jo-ju, la-le-li-lo-lu

Discovery card

\[
\begin{array}{c}
ta-te-ti-to-tu \\
ja-je-ji-jo-ju \\
la-le-li-lo-lu
\end{array}
\]

Syllables are read aloud first horizontally and then vertically to grasp the vocal sound, which is then followed by oral synthesis led by the group, not the coordinator (Freire, 1974, 47).

Ensuing word combinations
tatu, luta, lajota, loja, jato, juta…
References


