

ANGER AND HOPE

HEINZ PETER GERHARDT^{1,*} 

ABSTRACT: This essay deals with two concepts that are central to Paulo Freire's work: anger and hope. He juxtaposes them with the equally eschatological concepts of "denúncia" and "anúncio". The former, indictment, is interpreted as the result of studying an oppressive environment—a productive expression of anger. The latter, the hope for a different kind of world, gives Freire a confidence rooted in his Christian faith in the potential for a human-centred approach to education and society. The author begins his exegesis of this topic by presenting materials that may reconcile anger and hope, cracks in the education system make appear possibilities for resistance. The essay concludes with normative guidelines for a more liberated approach to education in our society.

Keywords: Anger. Hope. Situational approach. Unprecedented viable. School of life.

RAIVA E ESPERANÇA

RESUMO: O objetivo principal do artigo é o de enfatizar a importância de dois conceitos centrais na obra de Paulo Freire: raiva e a esperança. A disseminação da esperança de inéditos viáveis se fundamenta na elaboração de uma raiva produtiva que engendre uma práxis inconformada com a produção e a reprodução de desigualdades sociais e do preconceito delirante exposta nas formas do machismo, da homofobia, do racismo e de outros. Ao analisar o modo como os conceitos de raiva e esperança se apresentam nas obras de Freire, o artigo relaciona tais conceitos com as influências do pensamento de Freire nas ideias e práticas pedagógicas de países tais como Chile, EUA e, principalmente, Alemanha.

Palavras-chave: Raiva. Esperança. Abordagem situational. Escola da vida. Inédito viavel.

RABIA Y ESPERANZA

RESUMEN: El objetivo principal del artículo es el de enfatizar la importancia de dos conceptos centrales en la obra de Paulo Freire: la rabia y la esperanza. La diseminación de la esperanza de inéditos viables se fundamenta en la elaboración de una rabia productiva que engendre una praxis inconforme con la producción y reproducción de desigualdades sociales y del prejuicio delirante expuesto en las formas del machismo, de la homofobia, del racismo y de otros. Al analizar el modo cómo los conceptos de rabia y esperanza se presentan en las obras de Freire, el artículo relaciona dichos conceptos con las influencias del pensamiento de Freire en las ideas y prácticas pedagógicas de países como Chile, EE. UU. y, principalmente, Alemania.

Palabras clave: Rabia. Esperanza. Abordaje situational. Escuela de la vida. Inédito viable.

1. Autonomous Researcher, Macau SAR/China. E-mail: hpgerhardt@gmail.com

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Introduction

Paulo Freire (1921–1997) developed his particular form of dialogue-oriented, liberating pedagogy from his learning and teaching practice—as a teacher of Portuguese language (before and during his legal studies), during his work as head of a regional government of a not-for-profit institution (the Brazilian Industrial Social Services) and later as head of a university cultural extension service that disseminated knowledge generated in the university to the local community. Thanks to the propitious political conditions of his era, he and his team were able to focus their work on developing a literacy method, a content-related approach that taught illiterate adults reading and writing skills more quickly and, in many cases, more lastingly than the competing approaches of the time. Freire’s approach to literacy soon attracted public and international funding, especially because in Brazil at that time the right to vote was linked to literacy (GERHARDT, 1983).

Thus began the worldwide success of the “Paulo Freire’s method”, especially following the publication of Freire’s *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. This book was first published in the USA in 1970, though the original Portuguese version was published in his country of birth only in 1974. This indignant work (Freire himself repeatedly spoke of *justa raiva* [righteous anger]) provided a theoretical foundation for his work in Brazil and Chile. To date it has appeared in more than 86 editions in Brazil, and has been translated into more than 35 languages. This hugely influential text elevated the pedagogical autodidact to an internationally respected specialist in the education field.

Freire’s method was applied in a variety of ways, and with statistically supported success, especially in two countries of what was then termed the Third World (KIRKENDALL, 2010): Chile and Nicaragua. The results in Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Tanzania were more sobering (ASSIÉ-LUMUMBA et al., 2019). Numerous national and international organizations claimed to be working with the “Paulo Freire’s method” (World Council of Churches, UNESCO, in Germany: German Adult Education Association). Too often, however, the curriculum and educational process were not situationally embedded, falling short of Freire’s ideal of a lived praxis of freedom in learning and practice (FREIRE, 1976).

Freire himself made no efforts during his lifetime to monitor or evaluate the various approaches that derived from his work. He answered his critics rather summarily in *Pedagogy of hope* (1992 Brazil, English version 1994), and in individual or group discussions through his “talking books” (transcribed dialogues). He practiced dialogue assiduously and saw himself more as a “pilgrim of the obvious” than as the founder of a school. He preferred to let flowers bloom from the seeds he had sown, even if some of those flowers turned out to be thistles; B. F. Skinner, Mao Zedong, Che Guevara (critical: PAIVA 2016, esp. chapter 6).

Initial Thoughts

The current situation can be described as follows:

Freire’s pedagogical approaches are widely applied in his home country of Brazil, in the nonformal and semiformal education sectors (in adult literacy and in further education provided by state and private institutions, as well as by NGOs) and in the formal school system, mainly primary schools, particularly in the teaching of science subjects. As of 2005 there were about 500 educational institutions bearing the name “Paulo Freire” (FREIRE, A., 2006).

Since 2014, a movement called “*Escola sem Partido*” (Nonpartisan School), which began among the far-right political parties and has grown steadily in influence, has attempted to strip Paulo Freire of the

honorary title of “Patron of Brazilian Education”, which was awarded posthumously by the Brazilian Senate in 2012. A bill to his effect initially failed to be enacted into law in 2017. Freire is accused of having used his pedagogy to spread communist ideas. According to these detractors, his ideas impaired the quality of public schools in Brazil, made the case for a liberal sexual morality, and instrumentalized the educational system for political ends. The fact that a national head of state is leading a campaign against a world-famous pedagogue from his own country is surely unique in the history of pedagogical ideas.

International organizations active in the field of education—in particular UNESCO and the Council of Europe—continue to promote a dialogue-based, learner-centred pedagogy that focuses on adult literacy, community development and language teaching. In doing so, they refer implicitly or explicitly to Paulo Freire and his work.

In North America, Freire’s legacy flourishes mainly in the alternative school movement and compensatory education for migrant children (Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, Donaldo Macedo).

In the German-speaking countries, Freire’s ideas exerted greater institutional influence, mainly through the “situational approach” in the kindergarten sector. Their application in the primary school sector remains the exception rather than the rule. Just a single Lutheran Church-run primary school in Parchim in North-Eastern Germany bears the name “Paulo Freire” (BRADE, 2018). After a brief flirtation with sociocritical and learner-centred approaches (cf. in particular the concept of “life experience orientation” as proposed by educationist Thiersch [1995]), the field of adult and youth education embraced the competence levels—the knowledge and skills required to become an acquiescent part of the precariat within a so-called *Ich-AG* (“I Inc.”)—promulgated by the neoliberals. Exceptions such as the experiment with social work based on the life experience model (see, for example, the scholarly work of Ronald Lutz in Germany, and the endeavour of NGOs in Bremen, Dresden, Marburg) only confirm this rule. The nursing professions have also experimented and continue to experiment with the dialogical approach; for example, in training social assistants to communicate better with Alzheimer’s patients and seriously ill people using situational awareness (see also ZWICKER-PELZER, 2013 and earlier GRONEMEYER; BAHR, 1979). The Paulo Freire vocational college [*Berufsschule*] in Berlin offers a two-year, state-approved training course for this purpose (HAHN, et al. 2019).

With the intensification of the civil wars in Syria and Libya, an increasing number of refugees have arrived in Germany and all of Europe. Many civil society organisations offer language courses to these refugees since the equivalent courses offered by the state are insufficient or often involve too many bureaucratic and other hurdles. Both the above-mentioned Paulo Freire vocational college and the non-profit association *Kontakt und Beratungsstelle für Geflüchtete und Migrant_Innen e.V.* [Contact and Advice Centre for Refugees and Migrants] have made it their business to offer courses that are unbureaucratic, appropriate to the learners’ life situations, and dialogue-oriented. “Anyone can learn German with us, all courses are free, you don’t have to pay anything, it doesn’t matter how old you are, and what your residency status is”, they write on www.kub-berlin.org.

What’s Left?

The importance of meeting the learner at their stage of life and educational development and of taking situation and prior knowledge into account are still frequently emphasized in many pedagogical pronouncements and publications. An example from the German context is the framework plan on teaching languages of origin produced by the Federal State of Rhineland-Palatinate (MBWWK, 2012). We have yet

to see evaluations of how exactly and with what results teachers, pupils and school administrations took advantage of the freedoms granted to them by such policies.

Since its inception, the Freirean approach has tended to overburden teachers. According to his *Decalogue* (FREIRE, 1998), their task was not only to take account of the learner's prior knowledge, but also to integrate and "teach" their "school of life" within the curriculum as a primary method, despite the absence of a systematic approach and its scientific untenability in parts. It was and remains a matter of a "curricular reorientation" with less science derived systems, and more orientation towards the life world of the learner (O'CADIZ et al., 1998). This integration of and respect for prior knowledge, for the "school of life" of the learners, leads to unforeseen detours in the curriculum and in the prior knowledge of teachers and learners. Detours, however, through which new things can be learned in terms of content and methodology. It allows the teacher to become a student again, and the student is perceived and recognized as an expert and author of his/her own life.

Above all, kindergarten pedagogy has been influenced by the situational approach, and many of those who work in this field have gone and are going down this, in many respects "exciting", path. By exploring, analysing and mastering the various questions and tasks that emerge in their environment, children develop a greater ability to master future challenges. Education professionals have a special role to play as attentive monitors and facilitators of this process. They are themselves learners whose role it is to keep pace with children's curiosity while contributing with their own ideas, marvelling, researching, motivating or helping the children to probe more deeply. The child is valued as a resourceful person and viewed in the context of their social milieu, origin and family environment. In this approach, children are seen as and become self-effective personalities (DAS PÄDAGOGISCHE... [201-?]).

Further Considerations

The state schools in Germany continue to focus on the "industrial production" of graduates. The factory metaphor was already widespread in the 19th century (GUSKI, 2009) and has now become—in both concealed and exaggerated forms—the professional reality of almost every teacher. Educational publishers and software producers outdo each other with instructional products supposedly tailored to every competence, every educational goal, every teaching or learning situation. The teacher has thus become a kind of waiter (DABISCH, 2014), serving up *dishes* with which ingredients, depending on their own education and the culture of the school, they are more or less familiar. Pedagogical Michelin Guides (ISA, TIMSS, VERA etc.) award ranking points. Many teachers are comfortable being part of such a production chain as it relieves them of the need to be psychologically and pedagogically attuned to their students. The individual student merely receives the level of service mandated by the higher-ups. More is not possible! The ongoing Corona crisis exacerbates these tendencies.

The stated objectives of state schools, such as fostering individuality, providing a spectrum of educational opportunities, and educating for liberty and democracy (DEMOKRATIEBILDUNG... [201-]) are rarely achieved. Inclusion is only implemented administratively; the educationally privileged progress further and those who from birth have received less educational support at home are either segregated out or dragged along behind the "brighter" students.

The system acknowledges these failings (in PISA etc.) yet its response is merely to serve up more of the above and congratulate itself for following an evidence-based approach. When the decision-makers take stock of the situation, they rarely pause to consider the subjects of the debate—the students and teachers

who are engaged in a process of individuation, learning and teaching based on the objects and subjects of their respective environments (BIESTA, 2010). It is difficult not to lose hope in such circumstances. Anger is provoked, even rage.

Freire suggests that we shouldn't be engulfed in our just anger. We need to turn our wrath productive. Denouncing the oppressive conditions is only the first step, we need to announce the unexplored possibilities, what Freire described as "untested feasibilities" (in Portuguese "*inéditos viáveis*").

There is some resistance to the funnelling of schools and those working in them into industrial and administrative appendices of educational streaming platforms. It is reflected in the proliferation of private schools, in early retirement, and in teachers fleeing the profession (See, for example, www.victoriaghorbani.de).

Parents have been under pressure for years, today 2021 all the more. However, only in isolated cases do they mobilise collectively against the regime of standardized testing that begins as early as the third year of schooling, against teacher shortages, the investment bottleneck, and the neglect of the primary schools (WIPPERMANN et al., 2016), the tacit introduction of "home schooling" during the pandemic.

What Can Be Done?

Freire's final book, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, was written as a breviary of pedagogical ethics. As early as 1996 (Brazilian first edition), he recognized that the dominant neoliberal paradigm needs to be countered by a professional ethic among teachers, an ethic based on practice that defines uncircumventable maxims of the profession. He saw early on that teachers and students have to find and define their word, their language, in order to enter into an equal dialogue with the school environment, with the wider human environment (e.g., politicians, administrators, and parents), and with the objective conditions (condensed in the current state of knowledge and cognition). This means the development and practice of authenticity, the life-long individual acquirement of the world, with all the strengths and weaknesses of us humans.

Those convinced of the relevance of Paulo Freire's pedagogical work should pay attention to status signals coming from within the education system. They should "integrate" themselves critically into the ongoing readjustments and enlargements of the system and resist its actual refurbishments—as is currently happening in Brazil and the USA with privatisations, nationalist/creationist curricula, and ideological policing of the classroom.

It is time to spread hope by speaking one's mind with and to all actors in the educational field, bear witness of one's own approaches to solving the current problems with education, and invite others to join in. It was encouraging to see how during the festivities for the one hundredth birthday of Freire in there was a revigoration and self-assurance of the Brazilian colleagues in their quest for a less ugly and less unjust society. The outreach to the world across their borders was still rudimentary, understandable though, because of the constant attacks they suffered from their national and regional governments during the last years.

It remains to be seen whether "liberating" approaches will bring about more equal opportunities, more educational justice, and more comprehensive thinking and action by professionals and citizens (Freire's "awareness building", *conscientização*). Financial resources are currently abundant in the system at national and European level, as is the pressure to solve the problems of failing infrastructures. Arguably, Germany presently has a favourable political climate for innovation in education and society, not unlike Brazil in the early 1960s. It is important to take advantage of these auspicious conditions in a dialogue- and learner-oriented approach.

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About the author

HEINZ PETER GERHARDT is an independent researcher and Visiting Professor at the University of Macau in the Summer Course 2020 and in the Department of Portuguese. He was also a Visiting Professor at the University of San Jose from 2015 to 2019. He has a PhD in Philosophy from J. W. Goethe University of Frankfurt, Germany. He has taught and researched there, as well as in the United States (SUNY/ Albany), Brazil (UFRN/ Natal), and China (USJ/Macau-China), and again in Germany (FH Bund/ Brühl-Rhineland). He wrote the biography "Paulo Freire" for UNESCO (www.unesco.org/education/uie/pdf/freire.pdf) and has as current research interests: Intercultural Education, Teacher Education and Organizational Psychology. For more specific information about his publications, please visit his website: <https://heinzpetergerhardt.com>

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