Preface

The crisis of illiteracy has usually been relegated to Third World countries. More and more, however, illiteracy is threatening the continued development of highly industrialized nations. A much celebrated book by Jonathan Kozol, *Illiterate America* (1985), provides a succinct analysis of the illiteracy crisis in the United States, where over sixty million Americans are illiterate or functionally illiterate. The implications of a preponderantly high level of illiteracy are far-reaching and yet largely ignored. Illiteracy not only threatens the economic order of a society, it also constitutes a profound injustice. This injustice has serious consequences, such as the inability of illiterates to make decisions for themselves or to participate in the political process. Thus, illiteracy threatens the very fabric of democracy. It undermines the democratic principles of a society.

The illiteracy crisis world over, if not combatted, will further exacerbate already feeble democratic institutions and the unjust, assymetrical power relations that characterize the contradictory nature of contemporary democracies. The inherent contradiction in the actual usage of the term "democracy" is eloquently captured by Noam Chomsky, *On Power and Ideology* (1987), in his analysis of the United States society.

> "Democracy," in the United States rhetoric refers to a system of governance in which elite elements based in the business community control the state by virtue of their dominance of the private society, while the population observes quietly. So understood, democracy is a system of elite decision and public ratification, as in the United States itself. Correspondingly, popular involvement in the formation of public policy is considered a serious threat. It is not a step towards democracy; rather, it constitutes a "crisis of democracy" that must be overcome.

In order to overcome, at least partly, this "crisis of democracy," a critical literacy campaign must be instituted. It must be a literacy campaign that transcends the current debate over the literacy crisis which tends to recycle old assumptions and values concerning the meaning and usefulness of literacy, that is, a notion that literacy is simply a mechanical process which overemphasizes the technical acquisition of reading and writing skills.

In *Literacy: Reading the Word, and the World,* we call for a view of literacy as a form of cultural politics. In our analysis, literacy becomes a meaningful construct to the degree that it is viewed as a set of practices that functions to either empower or disempower people. In the larger sense, literacy is analyzed according to whether it serves to reproduce existing social formation or serves as a set of cultural practices that promotes democratic and emancipatory change. In this book, we call for a concept of literacy that transcends its etymological content. That is, literacy cannot be reduced to the treatment of letters and words as purely mechanical domain. We need to go beyond this rigid

comprehension of literacy and begin to view it as the relationship of learners to the world, mediated by the transforming practice of this world taking place in the very general milieu in which learners travel.

L*iteracy: Reading the Word, and the World* is roughly divided into three parts: 1. chapters that provide a reconstructed theory of literacy as discussed in the dialogues; 2. chapters that provide concrete historical analyses of campaigns for literacy in countries such as Cape Verde, São Tome and Príncipe, and Guinea-Bissau; and 3. chapters that are informed by a language and a project of possibility that critique old views of literacy while charting new courses that point to new alternatives.

Readers are strongly urged to begin their reading of this book with Henry Giroux's introduction. Giroux situates *Literacy: Reading the Word, and the World* in a context that provides a basis for developing a critical pedagogy as related to the overall theoretical and practical implications of the book.

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PAULO FREIRE
Pontifícia universidade Católica
São Paulo, Brazil
DONALDO MACEDO
University of Massachusetts at
Boston

Foreword

by Ann E.Berthoff

In *The Politics of Education* (1985), Paulo Freire tells us that in trying "to apprehend subjectivity and objectivity in their dialectical relationship"—of understanding, that is to say, both the promise and the limitations of what he calls "conscientization"—trying to focus his efforts, he has turned himself into "a tramp of the obvious, becoming the tramp of demystifying conscientization." He continues: "In playing the part of this vagrant I have also been learning how important the obvious becomes as the object of our critical reflection."

Paulo Freire teaches us to look—and look again—at our theory and practice and at the method we can derive from the dialectic of their relationship. Nothing in the field of literacy theory is more important than looking and looking again at the role of an awareness of awareness, of thinking about thinking, of interpreting our interpretations. Those circularities make positivists dizzy; they make those whom Freire calls "mechanicists" very impatient with the pedagogy of the oppressed. One of the things I love best about Paulo Freire is that he is restless but not impatient. That's the way it is with tramps: they love their leisure and, like Socrates, the first of that ilk, they enjoy speculative and critical dialogue in pastoral settings—but they are also constantly on the move.

Paulo Freire is once again on the move, and this activity involves, as one would expect from a master dialectician, looking again at his earlier formulations. In this book, the dose successor to *The Politics of Education,* we are again offered a series of reflections and reconsiderations: three in the form of extensive dialogues with Donaldo Macedo, along with an extraordinarily interesting letter (1977) to Mario Cabral, minister of education of Guinea-Bissau, and a substantial portion of the texts of *Practice to Learn* and other workbooks prepared for the "Culture Circles" of São Tomé and Príncipe. (Some workbooks! They bespeak the principles of the pedagogy of the oppressed as brilliantly as do the lessons included in *Education for Critical Consciousness* [1973].) In commenting on the cultural context of all discourse, Freire remarks in chapter three: "I think that a pedagogy will be that much more critical and radical, the more investigative and less certain of 'certainties' it is. The more 'unquiet' a pedagogy, the more critical it will become." It's dear that he has no intention of allowing his own pedagogy to settle into "certainty." For readers who have long been familiar with Freire's theory and practice, it might appear that this sort of review would have nothing to offer, but of course that is not so. We are invited to become tramps of the obvious, and the gains are considerable.

It's instructive, then, to return to square one with Paulo Freire because his square one has always been interesting, never banal; always complex, though not complicated. The complexity is there because dialectic is there. Nothing about society or language or

culture or the human soul is simple: wherever there are human beings, there is activity; and human acts are processes, and processes are dialectical. Nothing simply *unfolds,* either in nature or in history: the recalcitrance of environments and structures of all sorts is necessary to growth and development, to change and transformation. That is something obvious and it takes a good deal of tramping before we can claim an understanding.

It is fair to say that Paulo Freire's influence has been worldwide and that success in confronting the problem of illiteracy, whether in the Third World or in the inner cities of the Western world, might well depend on how those responsible for literacy programs come to understand the significance of Freire's ped-agogy of the oppressed. If education is to serve other than as an instrument of oppression, it must be conceived of as a "pedagogy of knowing." Education for freedom is not simply a matter of encouraging teaching that has a political flavor; it is not a means of transmitting received ideas, no matter how "good"; it is not a matter of *extending* the teacher's knowledge to the uneducated or of informing them of the fact of their oppression. Teaching and learning are dialogic in character, and dialogic action depends on the awareness of oneself as knower, an attitude Freire calls conscientization *(conscientização)*. This "critical consciousness" is informed by a philosophically sound view of language and inspirited by that unsentimental respect for human beings that only a sound philosophy of mind can assure.

In my opinion, nothing much can be made of Paulo's ideas unless two conditions are met: we study hard his philosophy of language and learning since it is fundamentally at odds with the views that have been promulgated and institutionalized (for at least forty years) by educationists, researchers, and bureaucrats alike; and we reinvent our conference and journal formats and, of course, our classrooms. I will return to this latter point, but for the time being let me sketch, particularly for the benefit of those for whom this is an introduction to Freire's work, his philosophy of language and the concept of learning it supports.

Language provides generative metaphors for Paulo Freire. His view of man as the language animal *(animal symbolicum)* is consonant with the conceptions of Whitehead, Peirce, Cassirer, Langer, and others from whom a liberation philosophy will be derived. Freire puts it this way: "The act of learning to read and write has to start from a very comprehensive understanding of the act of reading the world, something which human beings do before reading the words. Even historically, human beings first changed the world, secondly proclaimed the world and then wrote the words. These are moments of history. Human beings did not start naming A! F! N! They started by freeing the hand, grasping the world."

That was at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. In chapter three of this book, he puts it this way: "Reading the word and learning how to write the word so one can later read it are preceded by learning how to 'write' the world, that is, having the experience of changing the world and of touching the world." Freire would surely know what Emerson meant when he spoke of "the hand of the mind."

We are sometimes so used to thinking of language as a "communication medium" that it can be surprising to discover, or to be reminded, that language is the *means* of making those *meanings* that we communicate. Freire's pedagogy is founded on a philosophical understanding of this generative power of language. When we speak, the discursive

power of language—its tendency towards syntax—brings thought along with it. We don't think our thoughts and then put them into words; we say and mean simultaneously. Utterance and meaning making are simultaneous and correlative. (Freire, like Vygotsky, sets aside the question of the priority of language or thought as a chicken and egg question.)

By demonstrating in the Culture Circles the role of dialogue in the making of meaning, Freire also suggests a way to set aside the fruitless debate over the "natural" character of language. The capacity for language is innate, but it can only be realized in a social setting. Peasants and teacher are engaged in dialogic action, an active exchange from which meanings emerge and *are seen to emerge:* it is central to Paulo Freire's pedagogy that learners are empowered by the knowledge that they are learners. This idea is at odds with the conventional wisdom of current educational practice which stresses that whereas *know-how* is crucially important, *knowing that* is a waste of time. The conventional model for second-language learning, as well as for the "acquisition" of "literacy skills," is motor activity. In conjunction with developmental models of cognitive growth, this view of learning legitimizes the idea of teaching as "intervention" and of theory as an authoritarian imposition.

Freire's conscientization turns these ideas on their heads. He helps us understand the full significance of the name of our species, *Homo sapiens sapiens:* man is the animal who knows that he knows. Freire argues eloquently in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that our species lives not only in the present moment but in history. Language gives us the power of remembering meanings and thus we can not only interpret—an animal capacity—we can also interpret our interpretations. *Knowing that* assures that there is a critical dimension of consciousness and moves us from the instinctual, unmediated, stimulus-response behavior of other animals to meaning making, to mediated activity, to making culture. Theory for Freire is the pedagogical correlative of critical consciousness; it is not inculcated but is developed and formulated as an essential activity of all learning.

Language also assures the power of envisagement: because we can name the world and thus hold it in mind, we can reflect on its meaning and imagine a changed world. Language is the means to a critical consciousness, which, in turn, is the means of conceiving of change and of making choices to bring about further transformations. Thus, naming the world transforms reality from "things" in the present moment to activities in response to situations, processes, to *becoming*. Teaching language in the context of "survival skills" is an advance over workbook drills, but it does not accomplish liberation. Liberation comes only when people reclaim their language and, with it, the power of envisagement, the imagination of a different world to be brought into being.

At the heart of Paulo Freire's pedagogy of knowing is the idea that naming the world becomes a model for changing the world. Education does not substitute for political action, but it is indispensable to it because of the role it plays in the development of critical consciousness. That, in turn, is dependent on the transforming power of language. In naming the world, the people of Freire's Culture Circles are asked to survey their farms and villages and to collect the names of tools, places, and activities that are of central importance in their lives. These "generative words" are then organized in "discovery cards," a kind of vowel grid, a do-it-yourself lexicon generator. Some words it produces are nonsense; others are recognizable. The crucial point is that sound and letter

(shape) are matched with one another and with meaning or the meaning possibility. Meaning is there from the start, as it is certainly not in the case of the two competing methods of teaching reading favored by American educationists—phonics and "look-say." *Coding* and *codification*—corresponding to *what-is-said* and *what-is-meant*—are learned correlatively and simultaneously. *Decoding*—learning the relationship of letters to sounds—proceeds with *decodification* or interpretation. Meaning is thus present from the start as learners "problematize the existential." In sketches of a primitive hunter or of a squalid kitchen, or in response to a bowl of water or other codifications, they name what they see and remember, identifying and interpreting the significance of what they see.

Paulo Freire argues that for teachers simply to deride magical thinking, to try to kill off superstitious belief, is not only impossible but counterproductive. Pre-critical thought is still thought; it can and must be not simply rejected but transformed. The central task of "the adult literacy process as cultural action for freedom" is to provide the means of such transformation. The peasant—or any learner who suffers the oppression of superstition, whether of religious ideology or cold war ideology, doctrinaire liberalism or any of the multitudinous forms of totalitarian thinking—can liberate himself only by means of developing a critical consciousness.

Freire rejects the banking concept of education (the teacher makes deposits, which accumulate interest and value.) Nutrition is another metaphor: "Eat this. It's good for you!" Freire cites Sartre's sardonic salutation, "O! philosophic alimentaire!" Instead of education as extension—a reaching out to students with valuable ideas we want to share—there must be a dialogue, a dialectical exchange in which ideas take shape and change as the learners in the Culture Circle think about their thinking and interpret their interpretations. The dichotomy of "the affective" and "the cognitive," so important in American educational theory, plays no part in Freire's pedagogy. He sees thinking and feeling, along with action, as aspects of all that we do in making sense of the world.

One of the remarkable things about Paulo Freire is that he can make these ideas about the generative power of language and the role of critical consciousness accessible—and they are neither commonplace nor simple-minded. He is a master of the aphorism and of what Kenneth Burke calls the "representative anecdote," a story that points beyond itself like a metaphor. He warns against sloganeering, but mottoes and maxims are something else—and Freire is a superb phrase maker.

One should not think that reading Freire is an exercise in surveying received ideas. Even when he is setting forth conventional ideas, there are gains in significance as he develops contexts and draws implications. Paulo Freire is not only a superb theoretician; he is one of the great teachers of the century.

In this book, the principles of critical consciousness and the pedagogy of knowing again appear: they are rediscovered, reexamined, reevaluated, reinvented. *Recognition and reinvention* both centrally important in theory and practice echo throughout the pages of *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World.* Recognition entails an active critical consciousness by means of which analogies and dysanalogies are apprehended and all other acts of mind are carried out, those acts of naming and defining by means of which we make meaning. Indeed, it makes sense to say that cognition itself is contingent upon recognition, for we never simply *see:* we see as, *in terms of, with respect to, in the light*

of. All such phrases signal the purposes and constraints that constitute the boundaries of "discourse" in the current use. The concept of recognition is one we must think *with* as well as *about*. One of Paulo Freire's representative anecdotes (in chapter four) ilustrates how:

> …we visited a Culture Circle in a small fishing community called Monte Mario. They had as a generative word the term *bonito* (beautiful), the name of a fish, and as a codification they had an expressive design of the little town with its vegetation, typical houses, fishing boats in the sea, and a fisherman holding a *bonito*. The learners were looking at this codification in silence. All at once, four of them stood up as if they had agreed to do so beforehand; and they walked over to the wall where the codification was hanging. They stared at the codification closely. Then they went to the window and looked outside. They looked at each other as though they were surprised and looking again at the codification, they said: "This is Monte Mario. Monte Mario is like this and we didn't know it."

What we have here is a representation of the fundamental act of mind—*recognition*. Freire's comment on this representative anecdote is that the codification allowed the participants of the Culture Circle to "achieve some distance from their world and they began to recognize it." This interpretation of the story's meaning prepares us to recognize further that it represents the essential dialectic of all scientific investigation; it shows us how perception models concept formation; how looking and looking again is the very form and shape of creative exploration and critical thinking; how observation is the indispensable point of departure for the pedagogy of knowing. Indeed, the story is a parable of the ways of the eye of the mind, of the imagination: until the imagination is reclaimed as our human birthright, no liberation will be conceivable. The story is thus a parable of the pedagogy of knowing.

Recognition, on the part of the teacher, involves acknowledgment of what the learner knows and respect for that knowledge; it also requires evaluation. Freire realizes that to be "nonjudgmental" is a rhetorical virtue, not a logical option. We must respect the plurality of voices, the variety of discourses, and of course different languages; we must be tactful, but a neutral stance is impossible. Freire notes that all human activity is by definition purposeful and has, therefore, a direction. For a teacher not to undertake to make this direction apprehendable and to join in dialogic action to examine it is to refuse "the pedagogical, political, and epistemological task of assuming the role of a subject of that directive practice." Schoolteachers who say "'I respect students and I am not directive and since they are individuals deserving respect, they should determine their own direction'" end up helping the power structure.

This point is very important when it comes to reinvention, which, along with recognition, is the chief theme of this book. Evaluation, direction, recognition, and articulation of purpose are not interventions, nor are they authoritarian per se. The chief reinvention that radical teachers must occasionally undertake is precisely to differentiate authority from authoritarianism and to know how to find it in all "discourses," in all meaning makers. *Respect* is the correlative of recognition, and Paulo's expression of it is

always inspiriting, never question begging or sentimental. "Reinvention," he declares, in chapter seven, "requires from the reinventing subject a critical approach toward the practice and experience to be reinvented." *Criticism* for Freire always means interpreting one's interpretations, reconsidering contexts, developing multiple definitions, tolerating ambiguities so that we can learn from the attempt to resolve them. And it means the most careful attention to naming the world. Any "discourse" has embedded in it at some level the history of its purposes, but Freire continually reminds us, as well, of its heuristic (generative) character: we can ask "What if…?" and "How could it be if…?" By thus representing the power of envisagement, language provides the model of social transformation. When Freire writes in chapter three that "the reinvention of society… requires the reinvention of power," he means, I think, that reinvention is the work of the active mind; it is an act of knowing by which we reinvent our "discourse." Freire is never beguiled by Utopian dreams. His dreams are formed by a critical and inventive imagination, exercised—practiced—in dialogue, in the naming and renaming of the world, which guides its remaking.

One way to remain alert to the significance of the distinctions Paulo Freire insists on is to think of them in threes. In *The Politics of Education,* he juxtaposes both the traditional church and the liberal, modernizing church "another kind of church…as old as Christianity itself. It is the prophetic church." That triad—*traditional/liberal-modernizing/prophetic* can serve as a paradigm of those deployed dialectically in this book; *authoritarianism/domestication/mobilization;* attitudes that are *naive/astute/critical;* and pedagogies that are *bourgeois-authoritarian-positivist/laissez faire/ radically democratic*. Most provocative is one with a double middle term, the pedagogical attitudes characterized by *neutrality/manipulation or spontaneity/political praxis*. Half the controversies raging in education could be brought to an end if critical consciousness of the significance of that "or" could be developed.

Each of the chapters in this book contributes to our understanding of what is entailed in the choices we make among these triads. Those familiar with Freire's work will probably find chapter 5 of greatest interest since he discusses criticism of his work in Guinea-Bissau, especially the charge that it was "populist." "I will reflect on past reflections," Freire writes, and he proceeds with a searching analysis of what can be required of an eman-cipatory literacy process in a society with multiple discourses and two competing languages. The chapter all readers will find immediately enlightening, as well as entirely delightful, is the first, "The Importance of the Act of Reading." There is more wisdom in these few pages on "reading the world, reading the word" than in the so-called research cascading from psycholinguists and the agents for computer-assisted instruction, to say nothing of rhetorical theorists, who can not yet bring themselves to speak of *meaning* and *knowing* and *saying,* though they might refer gingerly to "content space" and "rhetorical space"! Positivist researchers who undertake to study literacy with "mechanicist" conceptions of language have concluded that reading the word and writing the word have no effect on cognitive capacity. My own opinion is that they are invincibly ignorant; but for those who have found such research compelling, an afternoon studying Freire's conception of *writing* as a figure for *transforming the world* would certainly be salutary and it could be prophylactic.

Three chapters are in dialogue form, and my guess is that for some readers they will be

difficult to read. I think American academics—especially in the social sciences—find spoken discourse (conversation!) an alien form. Paulo and Donaldo listen to each other. They give each other feedback, saying (and really meaning) "I hear what you are saying and it seems to be this…." They go on tediously, perhaps, for an impatient reader, but not for anyone who can imagine the appropriate pastoral setting or the café where these ranging, disorderly, but intensely dialogic exchanges would be listened in on. Such readers will feel that they can kibitz, can disagree or interrupt with marginal annotation. They can become virtual dialogue partners by reflecting on their own reflections.

My own experience overhearing conversations in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and on campuses across the country is that American academics keep saying "As I was saying…"; decoded, this means: "You interrupted me!" Such undialectical dialogues are replicated at our conferences, where we allow ourselves to be victimized by architecture, controlled by the design of meeting rooms and the schedules of maintenance staff. (Two thousand plates being stacked beyond a partition makes the encounter between two people trying to name the world a very difficult operation.) If the hotel management disallows moving the chairs around or if they want to charge thirty-five dollars apiece for extra microphones, can we not threaten to take our convention outside? Some things are more in our direct control: why is it that the favored convention genre is the lecture? Shouldn't we tramp around the obvious paradox of a *lecture* on *dialogic action*? Lectures are outmoded: why do we cling to them in our classrooms and at our conferences? The lecture is a late medieval invention instituted because books were scarce. The lecture was originally a reading *(lectito, lectere);* one man reading aloud could make a single book accessible. Why has it survived among the literate in the post-Gutenberg era? Surely, the lecture requires reinvention.

We need new models for conferences and it might well be one of Paulo Freire's gifts to us that he can help us imagine the forms our conferences might take. Here are a few procedures that could be followed without massive transformation.

1. Real panel discussions are possible if the lectern *(lectito, lectere)* can be dismantled. Three short (ten-minute) presentations followed by informal, spoken response from another three participants, who then have their turn.
2. As a variant, three participants can speak in sequence on a single topic (rehearsed spontaneity is best) with questions from the audience before they turn to the next topic.
3. Such a panel—or, indeed, a formal talk—can be followed by a scheduled ten minutes during which the audience is invited to respond *in writing*. These are gathered, a selection is made, and, with the help of information-processing equipment, made available to the participants the next day. This procedure—called "ink shedding" by its inventors, Russ Hunt and Jim Reither—moves the virtual dialogue toward actual dialogue, creating networks along the way. Technology lets us reinvent Monte Mario.
4. Scientists have developed "poster presentations" for their conventions: they are codifications of current research. A carefully formulated problem is followed by a cogent expla-nation of an experimental procedure and a statement of the findings. Diagrams, micrographs, and other "visual aids" make the point. The scientist whose work is represented is on hand intermittently to "read" the poster and answer questions. Why haven't we done this? Why are there no poets at institutes sponsored by the National Institute of Education? Who better could develop the emblems and

narratives to serve as codifications and representative anecdotes?

An unquiet pedagogy means that we must rock the boat. The simplest way to begin to do that would be to problematize the format and the function of our professional meetings. Here's an example. An admirer and close student of Paulo Freire was invited as a consultant to a meeting on literacy. He and his fellow consultant listened to the teachers (mostly black) all day as they explained in detail the standards they were ordered to uphold, the curricula they were required to plan, the tests they had to administer. When questioned, they either refused to recognize the oppressive and irrational character of these structures or they declared their powerlessness: "*They* say we have to do it." The consultant that evening consulted with his fellow consultant; they discerned a pattern: the "they" who were insisting on standards to be upheld were mostly black; "they" were insisting that (mostly) black teachers follow testing procedures with compunction, if not zeal. With a consciousness made critical by careful examination of the proceedings thus far, the consultant went to the phone and began calling superintendents: where did *this* idea about second language acquisition come from? Who is the chief source for *that* theory? Who states that *these* are the only ways? The consultant then began a second round of calls to these sources—famous linguists, famous professors (some of whom he had studied with), and famous theoreticians. They should, perhaps, have been "conference calls," but in any case that afternoon he could report verbatim from the experts: "No, that is not what I meant. No that is a misinterpretation of my research. No, that test was never intended for such a purpose. No, those are not the implications." Liberated from misinterpretation of theory, the conferees were able then to turn from problem solving (How can we raise test scores?) to problem posing (If we can define the role of writing this way, what would be the consequence for curriculum design?). The Freireista had managed to transform the conference into a Culture Circle. He had found ways of having the participants look and look again at their theory and practice until they were free to invent new pedagogies.

Paulo Freire has the audacity to believe that teachers must learn from their students in dialogue. His practice is imaginative, inventive, reinventive, and thoroughly pragmatic. Paulo Freire is one of the true heirs of William James and C.S.Peirce. He says to us, "How your theory works and what it changes will best tell you what your theory is." He wants us to consider the worth of an idea by asking what difference it would make. He wants us to think about the dialectic of ends and means, about the mysteries of despair and hope. And he encourages us not to defer change until some propitious moment; not to waste our substance on getting people ready for change, ready to learn, ready for education, but, rather, to recognize that "the readiness is all." He reminds me of A.J.Muste, the pacifist who so annoyed Reinhold Niebuhr. Muste used to say: "There is no way to Peace; Peace is the way." I think Paulo is saying to us: "There is no way to transformation; transformation is the way." That is not mumbo-jumbo, it is not a witty paradox we should resolve: it is a dialectic we should enact.

Concord, Massachusetts