

PAULO FREIRE: ANCHOR, GUIDE, INSPIRATION AN RESOURCE¹

PAULO FREIRE: ÂNCORA, GUIA, INSPIRAÇÃO E RECURSO²

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Abstract

This study is part of a larger study conducted over four months, about the life and work of Paulo Freire at one university in Rio Grande do Sul. The research question is: How have Freire's ideas and methods influenced education in RS, historically and contemporaneously, in the 21st Century? The qualitative study includes five semi-structured interviews with community activist, graduate student, university administrator, and university faculty members. The interviews lasted 60-90 minute and were conducted in English or Portuguese. Short descriptive narratives of each participant are crafted and extended by field and observation notes. An iterative approach is used and three themes emerged: personal, foundational, and intergenerational. The study reveals, Paulo Freire remains relevant.

Keywords: Relevance. Critical consciousness. Methods. Pedagogy.

Resumo

Este estudo faz parte de um estudo maior, realizado ao longo de quatro meses, sobre a vida e o trabalho de Paulo Freire em uma universidade no Rio Grande do Sul. A questão da pesquisa é: como as ideias e os métodos de Freire influenciaram a educação no RS, histórica e contemporaneamente, no século XXI? Este estudo qualitativo, inclui cinco entrevistas semiestruturadas com ativistas comunitários, estudantes de pós-graduação, administradores de universidades e professores universitários. As entrevistas duraram em torno de 60-90 minutos e foram realizadas em inglês ou português. Breves narrativas descritivas de cada participante foram criadas e estendidas para notas de campo e observação. Por meio de uma abordagem iterativa três temas foram identificados: pessoal, fundamental e intergeracional. O estudo revela que Paulo Freire permanece relevante.

Palavras-chave: Relevância. Consciência crítica. Métodos. Pedagogia.

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The lifework and scholarship of Paulo Freire has had an enduring global impact because it transcends borders, ideological as well as geographical. In 1968, Freire observed that an “awareness of the historical, sociopolitical, economic, cultural, and subjective reality that shapes our lives, and our ability to transform that reality” (p. 340). His acknowledgment of the importance of addressing the political nature and processes of education are as relevant today as they were in the 1960s. He wrote poignantly of this phenomenon: “If we have faith in men {and women}, we cannot be content with saying they are human persons while doing nothing concrete so that they may exist as such” (Freire 1998, p. 518, bracket added). In this historical moment, his understanding of the importance of developing a critical consciousness, engaging in dialogue, respectfulness toward humankind, and continual reflection, are needed and relevant.

My introduction to the life and scholarship of Paulo Freire began in the mid 1990s. His scholarship was not part of my undergraduate or graduate coursework that took place at the height of his influence in the U. S., which speaks – I believe – to how some institutions of higher education and teacher educators in the U.S., have acted as gatekeepers: restricting access to his thinking. Why, is unclear but there were certainly scholars who viewed his work as reactionary and others who negatively perceived it as communist or socialist. My own reading about his life and scholarship takes a different perspective: I envisage his work is aligned with the thinking of members of the Frankfurt School in Germany and many of their protégés: the Algerian, Frantz Fanon; the Italian, Antonio Gramsci; and the Brit, Stuart Hall. Although Freire’s work is uniquely situated in Brazil, it has enjoyed universal acceptance. In short, his thinking was revolutionary and his legacy is unfathomable. While on a Fulbright in Brazil, I conducted a large study, of which this work is one snippet. The time in-country provided me with an opportunity to explore whether Freire’s influence remains viable and whether people are carrying-on his work.

Review of Related Literature

I have conducted an extensive review Freirean scholarship, examining primary sources in English, and Portuguese translations, that includes articles, books, chapters, newspapers, official government documents, periodicals, and textbooks (Anderola, Ghiggi, & Pauley, 2011; Freire, 1968, 1970a, 1970b, 1970c, 1973, 1978, 1996). I also have reviewed archival images and documents as well as numerous websites containing historical and contemporaneous documents. In addition, I have read extensively secondary sources that include articles, books, chapters, and monographs across disciplinary fields of study. I have read primary and secondary recollections that represent auto/biographies and

memories (Silva & Sampaio, 2015; Favero, 2013; A. Freire & Macedo, 1998; P. Freire & Macedo, D., 1998; Gadotti, M., 1994; Gerhardt, 2000; Torres, 2013). Importantly, I also have read critiques and texts seeking to determine authenticity of the primary sources either to corroborate, or refute secondary sources (Streck, Redin, Zitkoski, & Torres, 2012, English version).

Given the geographical locale of the university where this study was conducted, in southeastern BR, and the experiences of some of participants, I also reviewed multiple sources outlining and describing the history of land and educational reforms, i.e., the Landless/MST (MST) social movement (Souza, 2000; Tarlau, 2014; Thapliyal, 2013). As a social movement, MST activists seek equal land redistribution – occupying it by force if needed – among farmers whose ancestors had farmed the land but were unable to purchase it. The social movement also seeks to eradicate the illiteracy rate within the nation and to improve the economic lives of people who have been disenfranchised. MST also developed educational initiatives that include overarching goals, programming for infants, primary and secondary levels, youth and adults, and leadership training. MST organizers throughout Brazil drew on his critical methods for their educational reform efforts to support literacy training and citizenship rights amongst small, rural, poor farmers. While Freire’s (1968/1970) landmark text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* features his work in Rio Grande do Norte (RN), his influence also reached southeastern Brazil, in this study the state of Rio Grande do Sul (RS). The central question of this study is: How have Freire’s ideas and methods influenced education in RS, historically and contemporaneously, i.e., in the 21st Century?

Methods

This qualitative study is drawn from a larger study conducted over four months at a university in the southeastern region of RS during 2014. As a newcomer in the country and someone who is not a proficient speaker of Portuguese, I relied on a cultural and linguistic broker as well as snowball sampling to recruit potential participants and interviewees (all names are pseudonyms). I use several ethnographic techniques: artifact collection; extensive field notes; observations (in university and public-school classrooms); researcher journal and memos; and individual, audio/videotaped, semi-structured interviews with community activists, graduate students and university administrators and faculty. The five interviewees featured in this study represent: one male community activist, one male university administrator, two university faculty members (one male and one female), one female graduate student. Given time constraints and availability, I collapsed Seidman’s (2013) interview schedule into a single setting to include (1) initial and on-going remembrances of Freire’s theories

and pedagogy; (2) experiences and applications of Freire’s ideas, methods and pedagogy; and (3) reflections on the influence of Freire’s theories and pedagogy in RS. The interviews lasted roughly 60 – 90 minutes and were conducted either in English or Portuguese. A native speaker of Brazilian Portuguese and local resident of RS, accompanied me on interviews conducted in Portuguese. All interviews conducted in Portuguese were transcribed by a graduate student and local native speaker. Transcribed interviews were returned to interviewees for accuracy (one interviewee was traveling and unable to respond). Then I translated the interviews into English. As an additional check, random interview transcripts were reviewed by three university faculty members who are native Portuguese speakers and English proficiency.

This study also includes excerpts from field and observation notes. The melding of individual interviews and observations of events supports Bazeley’s (2013) notion that “each single person or event embraces a degree of universality reflecting dimensions of the social structures and order of their time” (p. 411). I observed, or observed and participated in, several events: (1) two annual events, the 2014 Forum (annual conference dedicated to dialogue about the readings of Freire) in San Angelo, RS, and Corpus Christi Day; (2) one monthly event, local meetings of the Freirean Club (likeminded people dedicated to a study of Freirean scholarship that includes faculty, graduate students, and local K-12 school administrators); (3) weekly lectures of given by Lionel, (4) occasional lectures by faculty members at two different local federal universities; (5) observations in a local public school classroom; and (6) an observation at the MST campus.

My results are informed by an iterative-inductive reasoning, and constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Data were coded, categorized, and analyzed with attention to responses from participants’ interviews’ as well field and observation notes were used to place participants in historic and contemporary place. I crafted short narrative snapshots of each participant. The corpus of data was reviewed, initial codes identified, themes developed, then collapsed into one word descriptors. I also used Saldana’s (2013) technique of recording ideas about participants’ emotions.

In the text that follows, I begin by sharing participant snapshots to introduce the readers to the participants and to concretize the idea that “lived and told experience is central” (Clandinin, Caine, & Jackson, 2017, p.). The five representative participants include a community activist, university administrator, faculty members, and graduate student. Second, in this particular postsecondary setting, the stories remembered and told are individual and personal; collective and intergenerational, as well as foundational. As such, they represent “institutional, social, cultural, familial, and linguistic narratives in which individual experiences are embedded” (p.). I draw upon my field notes and memos to extend, highlight, and sketch connections among historical

circumstances and events, and similar contemporaneous circumstances and events. Finally, I share three themes that emerged and offer an analysis and interpretation.

Results

The five snapshots have been crafted to convey and highlight the participants' remembrances, current scholarship, and lifework. I have supplemented interview data with field notes and observations to more thoroughly portray each person, to situate the participants in time and place.

Snapshots

Thiago. *I meet Thiago on a section of the university that is relatively new and a considerable distance from the buildings that are located in the city. The building is much more modern and filled with light as it overlooks a lagoon. It is obvious that the area was originally built for some other purpose (commercial shipping, and the current university buildings added many years later, I met Thiago in his office. Following our interview session, he shared a story of the corruption that accompanied the purchase of the land on which this part of campus is situated. He also explicated the administration's on-going struggle to address corruption and change.*

As an undergraduate Thiago shares he was an activist in student protest movements, and learned about Freire's teachings and methods. Although Freire's writings were banned in Brazil, he secured a copy from Uruguay, illegally. He recalls being tremendously influenced by Freire's methods. A noteworthy instance occurred when, as an undergraduate student and in the Worker's Movement, he went house-to-house to encourage poor adults to attend literacy training. The training sessions put into action Freire's methods for teaching illiterate adults to read. His career in education began when he received his undergraduate degree in the arts. Later, he worked as a classroom teacher, school principal, and university instructor. Thiago completed his master's degree in BR, and earned a doctorate in the U. S. His scholarship centers on teacher education, specifically curriculum, governance, and teacher's work. He teaches courses at the graduate level around issues of educational reform, with a focus on public schools and the privatization of public education. He is currently a university administrator, at the time of the interview it was a job that he had held for less than a year and for which his colleagues elected him. He believes his administrative work and scholarship reflects his early grounding in Freire's work.

Thiago's description of participation in student protests are not unlike current student protests. During my tenure in Brazil, the World Cup commenced and

there were numerous student protests throughout Brazil. Students expressed concerns about the economy as well as ecology, given the huge amount of federal money used to host the World Cup as the many poor people lacked adequate health care, quality schools, and others were being displaced to build venues. Among the most visible and progressive, if not transformative and outspoken, were the protests among Leftist Catholic youth during the annual Corpus Christi Day celebration. Walking through the exhibits and chatting with young people, it was clear that there were many who had adopted very left-leaning, progressive approaches to understanding the sociopolitical landscape of Brazil. Some of the high school-aged Catholic students had created protest works of art with colored sand or woodchips on the streets, others had created structures using physical items such as blankets, books, posters, and bags of rice to protest what they perceived as social inequities and unjust treatment of Brazil's most vulnerable people. Collectively, the students used the bags of rice, containers of milk, and woolen blankets to send a message about social injustices in their society. In terms of education, they presented hundreds of cellophane-wrapped textbooks and towers of consumable workbooks that had not reached children who attended local schools, due to political differences among municipal, state, and federal politicians.

Lionel. *I interviewed Lionel at the university where he is a faculty member. In addition, I attended his weekly lectures and monthly meetings of the Freirean club for which he serves as the faculty advisor. The membership of the club consists of university faculty and graduate students from multiple universities, as well as local school administrators and classroom teachers. Many members also attended the annual statewide Freire conference.*

Lionel left his humble beginnings to attend a boarding school and recalls that during his early education he learned to restate what was taught by his instructors, never questioning their knowledge. He put it this way, “knowledge was deposited into the heads of the people or in the souls of the people.” Again he states, “when I read Paulo Freire I woke up, I see the dictatorship doing very badly in Brazil, then the military dictatorship that settled here in 1964.” The memory for Lionel pinpoints how as a graduate philosophy student, he worked among grassroots communities that were “very connected with the Catholic Church.” In fact, he believes that Catholicism is where Freire’s early work took root, given that Freire’s work began during an upheaval in the Brazilian way of life. He understands that the sociohistorical and competing political ideologies frame the origins of Freire’s work. Since his introduction to Freire, he announces that “we carried him with us, he is used.” Lionel believes that “Freire was always present.” Moreover, he observes that the “challenge of our time is transforming information into knowledge.”

Lionel has been a university professor in RS since 1979, first at a Catholic university, and now at a federal university. He mused, how over the course of his career, “Freire was always present some moments more and some moments less.” His current work focuses on, what he calls fundamental principles.

The monthly “Freirean” meetings typically with someone, often Lionel, posing a problem followed by open discussions among likeminded folk. As the annual conference drew near, however, the conversation turned to preparations and discussions of conference events. The nine-hour bus ride to the conference included numerous stops to pick-up people who had not been in attendance at the monthly meetings, but were attending the conference. During the bus ride people sang gaúcho folksongs as one man played a guitar, the singing bound the community in a shared history and experiences. The conference began late in the evening and had several phases: a group sang US pop songs from the 1960s – 70s in English, a panel of distinguished Freirean scholars discussed current issues, and a theatre group presented a play about the impact of Freire’s life and work. The play ended with Freire in a crucifix-like pose and followers looking up to him. Throughout the conference sessions were more akin to cultural circles than lecture format and there was ample time for dialogue. There also were mid-night dinners, afternoon lunches, and an all-conference reception with wine and gaúcho folk singing and dancing.

Imaculada. *Early one cool fall morning I arrive on the campus where Imaculada is a faculty member to conduct the interview. She has arrived early appearing uncertain and somewhat nervous about being interviewed. I also observed her work at the Landless/MST campus, attended her course on Marxism and a teacher education/literacy training class designed to prepare people to implement Freire’s methods of adult literacy training in the community.*

Imaculada shares that she became aware of the work of Freire as an 18-year old as part of her involvement in Leftist Catholic youth ministries. Her early work focused on improving the living conditions, particularly, housing among the Landless. While working in Porto Alegre, she was involved in the labor movement where she sought to unionize and improve working conditions. Next, she became very involved in Popular Education and the Landless Movement’s Center for Popular Education, based on the work of Freire. In the 1980s, she was the Coordinator of Popular Education in RS, where she taught, trained, and organized courses of study within communities. She recalls this time as one in which she “sought to advance the rights of the least of those among us, we believed it was possible to radically transform society; to build a socialist society.” She continues, noting that this idealism was “the motivation, the dream that rocked the work of Popular Education.” In the mid-1990s, although she worked with the Non-Governmental Organizations, taking on an executive role

with the Brazilian National Association and sitting on the Ethics Committee. However, she was not a proponent of this work because, from her perspective the foci were too closely tied to capitalism.

Next, Imaculada turned her attention to Popular Education as she articulates, “we saw possibilities in formal education, that is, how it could contribute to the process and redirect the patterns of capitol consumption.” Her work with the Center for Popular Education and its emphasis on Rural Education nurtured the intersection of political and social movements through several federal inter-institutional university programs. Through her advocacy, she challenged governmental oversight of Popular Education, Freire’s theories, and those opposed to the MST movement. Imaculada also realized that to be effective in the political realm, she needed credentialing, not from her life experiences and work, but from the academy. Therefore, she enrolled and graduated from a university in RS, with BS, MA, and Ph. D. degrees. While at the university, she became the coordinator of the Education curriculum and drew Freire’s ideological and pedagogical models. She also has taught undergraduate and graduate education courses, while simultaneously working in partnership with popular social movements. Later, Imaculada began teaching at her current where she is a faculty member. In many ways, Imaculada’s life work in the movement replicates the movement’s trajectory: beginning as a very organic movement filled with religious zeal, a commitment to help those who are less fortunate, and a desire for liberation and social justice.

Imaculada an ardent Freirean devotee, community activist, and university faculty member who champions his theories and methods. Her commitment came into sharp relief after visiting the MST settlement, and from an informal chat with our tour guide. I learn of the constant struggle with university administrators who prefer not to support the program. They alleged that the site is substandard and that the program should not proceed until the standards are meet. However, Imaculada and our guide do not believe the argument is sincere. They hold that university administrators are not supportive of the program. Moreover, there is an on-going struggle to secure government funding to keep the program viable. She lives and walks the talk: annually – sometimes persemester – as a faculty member she struggles with federal, state, and municipal leaders to retain the commitment to adult literacy programs – as well – she struggles with federal, state, and municipal leaders to retain the commitment to the MST program for students studying veterinary medicine. During the interview, she spoke with such quiet reverence about Freire that she seemed to go into a trance, shaking, and then softly crying. For her, Freire’s theories and methods shape how she leads her life.

Rachel. *I met Rachel, a graduate student, on the university campus where the interview was conducted. At the time, she was an elementary public-school*

teacher. On several occasions, I visited her classroom and observed first-hand, how she worked with elementary-aged children and applied Freire's ideas. Moreover, three of her female students and their parents/guardians were interviewed for a small research project that Rachel helped to arrange, acting as a liaison and interpreter between the adults and me.

Rachel was born in Curitiba, Paraná and shares that her introduction to progressive ideas began early in her life, revealing that she has “always been a militant and in supportive of social movements.” Rachel remembers, for instance, that her aunt was a militant during the time of the dictatorship and that she “had access to this history.” Her access included reading leftist materials, e.g., Marxism, as well as the opportunity to engage in conversations with others. When she moved to the university town to attend school, her studies initially were directed toward technology. And, as a technical school student she participated in student movements, joining “MST, Movement for Struggle for Housing, and *Caras Pintadas* (Painted Faces Movement).” While an active member in these movements and someone who had effectively helped to bring about change, she felt that more was needed and she had some unanswered questions about how to proceed. Rachel eventually left the technical school and began studies in popular education and popular movements at a local federal university, where she has continued to participate in social movements such as Groups of Women, Women's Movement, Struggle Movement for Housing, *Central Única das Favelas* (Central One of the Favelas). At the university, Rachel found pedagogy of particular interest, especial Popular Education. After completing her master's degree, she is now a full time doctoral student. She studies under Lionel, has joined the Freireana group, while serving as the initial Coordinator of the Paulo Freire Centre.

Rachel was a fourth-grade teacher in a public school near the university campus when the interview was conducted. She described her methods of teaching, methods that align with Freire, and her attempts to address cultural difference. For example, during a week that is to center on the contributions of Indigenous people to Brazilian life, she deliberately designed lessons that focused on Indigenous life and culture including games that children play (unlike some teachers who may opt to ignore the contributions). Rachel was very passionate about her belief in Freire's ideas because as she spoke tears welled-up in her eyes. Unexpectedly, at the conclusion of the interview she collapsed onto the table from anticipation and anxiety – emotionally exhausted.

Brother Marcelo. *We arrive at the MST campus late on a Saturday afternoon. From the street, you would not know that a settlement/campus existed because although there is street access to the compound it is behind a high wall. The entrance is an unassuming wooden gate however within the walls is a pleasant*

garden, benches, grape arbor, and a sprawling set of buildings anchored by a very large metal building that is shaped like an armory. During a tour of the site, I notice murals representing Che Guevera and Nelson Mandela painted on the walls and posters in support revolution. The armory-shaped building serves many purposes: it is a dining area, dorm, kitchen, library, and study area. Other buildings on the grounds include classroom buildings and a makeshift laundromat. Campus life can be likened to a commune in the sense that attendees and workers eat, sleep, study, play, clean, etc., in single area. The armory-shaped building did not have a central air/heat system and the dorm rooms were retrofitted to five – to – seven people. The students who are enrolled in the government-supported program for the children of Landless peoples, live and study in a separate area from the main campus.

As I begin the interview session, Brother Marcelo hesitates, humbly insisting that he does not have anything of value to share, that there are others who are far more important, and that he is merely a worker. He shares that as a teenager he had learned about the work of Catholic Youth ministries in local villages and was drawn to the ministry. As a university student, he remembered participating in weekly teas held by Ernani Fiori. In the meetings students discussed Popular Education and the work of Freire. Brother Marcelo read mimeographed copies of Freire's text from Chile, chapter by chapter, as well as other texts/broadsides. Freire's book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* had been smuggled across that Uruguayan border into southern Brazil because it was illegal to read Freire in Brazil. He also mentioned that copies of the published text deleted much of Fiori's thinking. It was during those meetings that Brother Marcelo had an opportunity to understand the thinking of Freire, although he attributes much of Freire's thinking to what Freire learned from Fiori. In fact, he believes that Fiori was far more influential on Freire's thinking than he is given credit. Brother Marcelo shared a story that Professor Baudouin Andreola has written about in his work. According to Andreola, Freire shared the manuscript for *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* with Fiori. After reading the manuscript, Fiori thought it was worthwhile and wrote the preface. Once Freire read the preface he locked himself in the house and completely wrote the book because the preface was more in-depth. Freire realized that Fiori had insights that had not been addressed in the book. Brother Marcelo ran away from the university and went into the field, where he continued to work along with peasants to build their awareness and organize their efforts for change. He recalls that everyone was inspired by the work of Freire at this time in part because people did not know to whom to anchor themselves. Eventually, he entered the ministry among the MST/Landless full time. He has undertaken the work for 25 years and he travels amongst the university programs throughout RS. In addition, he works with Leftist Popular Youth and Pastoral Ministries of Rural Youth [Comunidades

Eclesiais de Base are the Base Ecclesial Communities and Comissão Pastoral da Terra is the Pastoral Commission of Land].

Brother Marcelo has dedicated his life to work among the MST. The focus of this university's five-year program is Veterinary Medicine, however university instructors travel to the MST campus to deliver instruction. Given the time of day, classes were over and students were cooking, doing their laundry, learning to play guitar, mingling, or studying. Brother Marcelo offers free guitar lessons and sings folk songs with them students. When there was time, I held informal conversation with students, they zealously expressed strong communist and Marxist points of view that more than a sense of activism, they are revolutionary. He does not consider himself a devotee of Freire as his true calling is to Christ. He understands Freire as a man who worked collaboratively with others. He is adamant that other scholars who contributed to the foundations of the movement, are under appreciated and often overlooked.

Themes

The three themes that emerge from the interviews are captured by the monikers: personal, foundational, and intergenerational. These labels are convenient markers and should not be understood as static. They are permeable and fluid within the lives of the participants. In the text that follows selective interview excerpts are shared to demonstrate themes and subthemes.

Personal. Two complementary subthemes emerged that reveal: (1) participants' were activists, as young adults, although in different generations – either while attending university or working with left-leaning Catholic Youth ministries; and (2) participants' activism preceded their introduction to the theories of Freire and as activists they were introduced to, and transformed by, his work (interview data used in the snapshots is summarize but not repeated).

Each participant shared how they were activist as young adults as university students (Brother Marcelo, Lionel, Rachel, and Thiago), sans Imaculada, whose work in the field preceded enrolling in the university. Participants' early engagement began with their involvement with the Leftist Wing of the Catholic Church or Catholic Youth Ministries (sans Rachel, a university student and activist). During the 1960s in Brazil, these groups held a Marxist orientation that sought to disrupt the hegemonic practices and social injustices enacted on the poor and uneducated rural farmers and workers.

Thiago, for instance, was introduced to Freire while an undergraduate. He was fortunate to meet Freire on two occasions. The first time occurred while in Sao Paulo at a national meeting of education students. As he recalls, someone called Freire, who in-turn, invited students to his apartment. A second meeting occurred when Freire made a visit to the city where the university is located. Freire was there to give a lecture about the Worker's Party but he also held a

separate meeting with teachers and Thiago attended. Later, was a principal he worked hard to implement Freire's methods throughout the school, and make the school "more democratic, more pedagogical."

Rachel recalls it was her first semester at the federal university when she enrolled in an in an extension course, Youth and Adult Education. In the course, she was introduced to the work of Freire, although she had heard of his work, it was not until this course that she began an in-depth study of his ideas, pedagogy, theories, and methods. As part of the course, she worked to persuade cart drivers of recyclable materials to become literate. A man she worked with shared a story of how, when he was in the first grade, his teacher told him that he was destined to pull a cart. After hearing this, he become both discouraged and disillusioned about furthering his education. When she met him. his horse died, and he was forced to pull the cart himself. Rachel observed that "he saw the prophecy of the teacher materializing." Rachel was very disturbed by this experience and sought answers in Freire's writings. She also approached Lionel, "because it was in Freire that I managed to answer questions and I could see what Freire saw in the popular classes, ... and from that I got very involved and immersed, maybe not as much as I should, but Freire still answers some things for me in my training."

By contrast, Imaculada worked for many years as a community activist, and knew Freire due to her work with MST prior to attending the university. She acknowledges that historically times are different from her early introduction to Freire's work. As she articulates:

There is a big difference between what we believed in the 1980s, Freire did not understand at the time, when our understanding of consciousness was too closed, because it was limited to the political. Today we work toward a conception of awareness that is linked more with the idea of being generic, the left and the right – moving toward – a good material life for everyone, ... issues of gender, generational, ethnic, racial, and so on, we work in this perspective, the acceptance of diversity.

Foundational. Each participant grounds his/her current thinking beyond initial introductions to Freire, experiences, and readings. They express how Freire's work serves as a foundation for their lifework. Two subthemes emerged from the interview data (1) "meeting" Freire had a transformative effect and their evolving interpretations of Freire' work shifted in real world applications, and (2) there is growing support of additional scholarship that informs their thinking.

"Meeting" Freire had a transformative effect and their evolving interpretations of Freire' work shifted in real world applications. Among Freire's pedagogical teachings, Lionel found Freire demystification of the banking

method of instruction captured the teaching popular in the 1960s, and the form of instruction that he had experienced. He reminisced about reading Freire under the directorship of his graduate advisor, who so impressed by Freire's ideas, that he "jolted upright in the work of Paulo Freire." He also nurtured Lionel's devotion and understanding, so that after receiving his doctorate, Lionel began seeking opportunities to implement Freire's work, at a time when Freire's work was held in very high regard at the university level as well as within social movements. Lionel summarizes his early experiences as well as social and political stances since the 1970s, somewhat reverently declaring that, "Freire encourages me to continue living . . . not only for myself." He acknowledges that teachers are not the only people with knowledge, as he understands that students bring knowledge with them into the classroom as well. In the late 1980s, Lionel and others sought to implement Freirean methods, through the Popular Education movement, by training teachers in RS. Lionel mentions that he, and Professor Andreola, were part of a Popular Education group that sought to implement Freire's methods in Pelotas (1983) and Porte Alegre (1986), focusing on the use of cultural circles. Lionel believes "that living in society, we work from what we bring with us . . . and what we have learned from the experience with people." He recalls that Freire mused, "we are unfinished beings and as such beings always ready to make us more than we are, ... is the foundation of education." Moreover, Lionel declares that it is not so much the knowledge we have, differently from others, but "the way in which we approach knowledge in relation to life."

Imaculada also articulates that her understanding of Freirean theorizing and pedagogy goes beyond learning specific content. She envisages reflection and awareness as part of the role of teacher, and the teacher as someone who seeks to transform, leading students to think critically. Further, she admonishes:

I will tell you that the heart (of the matter) is, nobody liberates anyone, understand, for people will gain a position to understand the world and transform their mindsets and embrace this perspective does not happen, on its own; education is the key to this [. . .] He is the most effective when it is vital for people to make a transformation [...] or talk about changing education.

She recalls that Freire's goal was to use education, literacy in particular, to advance human rights and fight against social injustice. She praises his efforts, "the struggle of these people for a right to an education and the right to live with dignity in this country is a very beautiful history of these people." She goes on to say the story, "offers a clear strategy in building a better society for all." She also has fought, and continues to fight for people, as with her work among the MST and her coordination of the federally funded literacy program

for illiterate adults. Imaculada claims, “Freire never confused cultural diversity, individuality, and the right to free expression, with social inequality, which is unacceptable because it does not allow the meeting of basic needs without which nobody develops, this is the first condition to be fed, live well, be able to take care of health”.

Brother Marcelo also adamantly argues that Freire was never concerned about literacy, instead he thought of “literacy as an appendix” to building critical awareness. He submits that Freire was more concerned with helping rural people to improve their daily lives, helping them to become more aware of the power structures that framed and delimited their lives. Although he acknowledges that Freire’s cultural circles, “exposes a different reality, a ‘reading of reality,’ and their reality is a discovery of the ways of intervention to change their reality.” For example, he observed that Freire was attempting to help those who were being cheated out their wages by signing promissory notes, that they thought were for a month’s labor, but were promissory notes for year of labor. He believes that Freire sought to help people address and survive the oppression that shaped their lives.

He also understands Freire’s methods as a relational process, human-to-human, and less about methods per se. He is confident that the key component of the success of Freire’s methods are interpersonal dialogue, a process that begins and ends with people in dialogue, that is, engaging in “on-going serious dialogue with one another.” Brother Marcelo characterizes the processes as: “not something imposed, mandatory; it (is) a process, an opportunity.” He also declares that “individuals must learn to live and work together for the common good, not a preset curriculum: they create the demands and seek the solutions” as a collective. He declares that Freire’s message and methods are “a source of inspiration,” and his methods were indispensable for exposing injustices and giving voice to the concerns of the farmers.

Brother Marcelo believes that there has been an evolution for community-based use of Freire’s method by the academy, where people are using Freire’s methods for their own purposes. He holds that this process has caused misunderstandings of Freire’s work. He believes that academics have attempted to restructure and systematize the Freire’s processes, followed by university students who pick up the methods and return to the community.

There is growing support of additional scholarship that informs their thinking. Thiago readily admits that he is not an ardent follower of Freire. He is someone who has been influenced by Freire but also is informed primarily by the work of Michael Apple, Stephen Ball, Antonio Gramsci, Ernesto Laclau, among others. Brother Marcelo posits that Freire had many sources of inspiration, scholars who often are unacknowledged. He believes the thinking

of Fiore and Morais is overlooked as is the work of Makarenko, a Russian sociologist (whom he suggests is the true source of Freire's methods). Brother Marcelo acknowledges that Freire's methods correlated nicely with the work being undertaken by the Peasant Leagues at the same time. He, however, credits the work of Clodomir de Santos Morias's organization among the Peasant Leagues as instrumental in helping Freire's ideas move forward. He notes that MST used Freire's ideas thus, adding consistency, stability, and uniformity to training for MST administrators, and later us the Workers Party. He suggests that MST represents Freire's pedagogy and methods. Adding, that Freire wrote several books with Fiori, including *Paths of Liberation* and *Pedagogical Method*, published by The Institute of the Land. Ernani M. Fiori (1914 – 1985) was a friend of Freire's and someone also exiled in Chile for his beliefs and teaching.

Intergenerational. Participants' intergenerational positioning includes expanding and sharing their intellectual scholarship, relational work, and enduring personal connection to Freire. Three subthemes emerged: (1) looking back and recalling the influential people and ideas that energized their early experiences and scholarship based on Freire's writings, (2) their present circumstances and connections to ideas and people inspired by Freire, and (3) the potential for their current activism and scholarship to influence future generations. Devotees believe they are honoring Freire with the lives and in their work.

Looking back and recalling the influential people and ideas that energized their early experiences and scholarship based on Freire's writings. Lionel acknowledges that Freire's ideas emerged "perhaps in dialogue with other authors, including philosophers." He states that it is important "to recognize that people together build knowledge, the students carry with them a knowledge that is different from mine, ... we can construct ideas about the phenomena, ... this is knowledge production." He also ponders Freire's ideological basis, recalling that Freire recognized both Christ and Marx, he goes on to claim that "Freire said they were the fundamental bases, the major theoretical bases of his work." Likewise, Lionel believes in Christ and Marx, and suggests that "Freire is a good translator of this conjugation." Moreover, Lionel states that he has tried to implement Freire's teachings throughout his life:

I tried to do it for a good part of my life, still today , a little, less, but in the sense of trying I do not know if to change the world today, but to somehow improve the lives of people, that people live better, not only my people, the people with whom I live, but the people I see.

According to Lionel, Freire gave him, and continues to give him, "a certain basis, a certain justification for continuing to fight for a different world." From

his perspective and throughout his long career, Freire has been a source of inspiration.

Imaculada's understanding of Freire also centers on his approach to humanity: "we are all generic beings, we are one race, the human race and we have to aware of this, if not, education is an essential tool to make it happened, ... absolutely essential as Freire said." She continues by explaining her unwavering belief in Freire:

it allows me to make a synthesis between my beliefs as human being and my professional activity, it enables me ...because from a philosophical standpoint all mankind will have to walk in that direction, that is, to understand that we are generic beings, we are part of the same species, and that exploitation and oppression are meaningless.

She characterizes her life as entwined with the life of Paulo Freire, from working within Popular Education, to her decision to forego a professional life and dedicate herself to the popular work. Moreover, she held that all she does is in support of what Freire taught, and the lessons that she has learned, as a devotee.

Brother Marcelo believes that within the process of the founding of the Landless Workers Movement, people had to learn to work team. He notes that once Freire was named Secretary of Education, teachers tried to translate his thinking into classrooms: a reality, according to Brother Marcelo that Freire had not considered. He says that he has read a lot of Freire's writings and always found the ideas of Freire inspiring, although he does not consider himself a devotee, or a follower. He believes that Freire offered important ideas about how to build methodologies and was helpful in support of building people's understanding of the need for liberation. Brother Marcelo also felt compelled to add, a second time, that Freire did not work alone. Besides the inspiration from Fiori, he observes that de Moraes influenced Freire. Specifically, he mentions that de Moraes published a personal letter he had received from Freire, following his death. In the letter, Freire offers ideas for interpreting his work beyond *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire allegedly describes the goal to transform the methods explicated in the text to "a kind of pedagogy of praxis". Brother Marcelo, again, proffers that Freire's scholarship was influenced by Makarenko, although Freire made it his own. Moreover, he sees real unacknowledged contributions from, Piaget, and Vygotsky.

Present circumstances and connections to ideas and people inspired by Freire. Thiago notes that his graduate work in educational reforms center on the restructuring of capitalist societies in neoliberalism and the difference these reforms make, especially political reforms in schools. He acknowledges the "major group here is the Leftist of Liberal Group," and reveals that "many of our colleagues in Central Administration have been influenced by Freire."

Rachel reflects on her 2013 graduate thesis in which she focused on the high dropout rate in a special youth and adult education program. Of particular interest in this study were 27 former students who had dropped out of the program. She conducted in-depth interviews in their homes, “I tried to read their lives so that I could understand the context of each one of them.” Among her findings she were: 1) many students dropped out for financial reasons, 2) others were often exhausted from their jobs and unable to keep abreast of their studies, and 3) some lacked reliable transportation or feared theft while they attended night school. An unexpected finding was that many students re-experienced the same instructional methods that caused them to leave school, initially. Rachel concluded that educators were missing “a great deal of the creative and unique talents of young people” as they continued to use old methods of instruction. In addition, she surmised that many schools have not adapted their methods to reflect the lives of the students and seemed out-of-touch about what was needed for the students to be successful in today’s society.

Forms of current activism and scholarship that has the potential to influence future generations. Thiago offers two examples of how he believes the university is seeking to implement ideas drawn from Freire by addressing cultural, economic, and social injustice: (a) through admissions and retention programs aimed designed for ethnic minorities and programs meeting the day-to-day needs of students, and (b) widening the curriculum, i.e., make it more diverse, to include the histories and contributions of ethnic minorities. Thiago suggests that “if you look at the School of Education, there may be a few people who are working strictly with Paulo Freire, but I think ... many, many professors are very influenced by Paulo Freire.” Freire’s influence also is demonstrated by the university’s support of a literacy program for adults, administered by Imaculada. Thiago, however, he declares that “Paulo Freire is always in my background.”

Brother Marcelo reveals that the program at the university, where I interviewed him, is one of many, and other universities use similar methods among MST students. He admits that “the process – of organizing, teaching, training – among individuals is fraught with the problems that people have amongst themselves; it is also grueling work. There are constant negotiations and renegotiations, but he believes it is important to remain focused on what you hold dear.”

Discussion

The question framing this study is: How has Freire’s ideas and methods influenced education in RS during the 21st Century? Each interviewee spoke of their personal relationship with the ideas expressed by Freire as well as their active participation in implementing his critical methods and pedagogy.

The interviewees represent, in part, diverse commitments and interpretations of Freire's work, some place his work on a continuum of likeminded thinkers, and others have adopted his ideas as the purpose of their lives. Participants conveyed that his work has influenced, to varying degrees, their decision-making, lifework, political viewpoints, and scholarship. While others admit to broadening their ideological and philosophical interests. Descriptions of current endeavors at the university and within the community also reveal how Freire's theories continue to influence some participants' interactions and commitment to progressive change.

Freire's work is foundational to many participants' thinking about education, politics, and society; whose devotion and commitment to his work began while they were young adults. Andreola, et al., (2011), for instance, present an historical overview of Freire's work in RS, based on primary source data including from newspaper articles written throughout the state of RS, but primarily Porte Alegre. Their research was particularly helpful as it provides historical and contextual insights into Freire's influence in RS by documenting his work in the state beginning in the 1950s. The authors characterized the use of Freire's methods in courses that used Cultural Circles and events that included music, theatre, and film (p. 7). Brother Marcelo and Imaculada's work in Catholic Youth Ministries appear to corroborate the article, as they worked in RS at the time, and support their remembrances and experiences.

Recent histories appear to confirm Brother Marcelo's understanding about the influence of the Leftist Catholic Church in booklets, methods texts, and other publications, similar to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Biographies of Fiori and Morias confirm their influence on the thinking of Freire, including a published statement by MST (15 March, 2016 – on the passing of Clodomir Santos de Morias). The website acknowledges Morias, “was one of the organizers of the Peasant Leagues in the 1950s and has always been involved in agrarian reform and rural development, even in exile” (<http://www.mst.org.br/2016/03/26/mst-lamenta-e-morte-de-clodomir-santos-de-moraes.html>). It also emphasizes his “struggle for social transformation in Brazil, that continued after he had his political rights canceled for 15 years while in exile in Chile, with Paulo Freire and Ernani Fiori.”

Lionel and Brother Marcelo also acknowledge the role of Catholic Liberation Theology and Freire's theorizing also are linked to the ideological principles and militant activities. They note Freire was seen as a resource in the development of political and social movements, in particular MST, at a time when there were few theorists who discussed educational processes within popular movements in Brazil. Thapliyal (2013) observes there has been a working relationship between the “MST and Left-leaning Brazilian academics that served the strategic purpose of negotiating with state apparatus committed to delegitimizing and

criminalizing the MST (p. 121). She also articulates that MST “understands that the struggle for literacy is part of a broader struggle against capitalism in which the rural worker has been systemically dehumanized and exploited” (p. 111). MST has contractual agreements with a number of universities to offer university programs and courses, as documented in the 1996 Principles of Education in the MST. The educational programming of MST draws on Freire’s pedagogical principles and methodological and instructional ideas.

Intergenerational connections arose as the interviewees shared individual histories of their early participation as well as collective histories about Freire’s influence and sustained relevance (federally supported programs, annual conferences, monthly meetings, and classroom instruction/application of critical pedagogy). Several scholars have tracked the impact of Freire’s educational theory and methods, for instance, Casali (2002). Community activism and federal programs in the community (and those sponsored by the university) are key to intergenerational sustained engagement with Freire. As well, annual and monthly meetings provide venues for dialogue across age, gender, and social class/status.

Conclusions and Future Study

The life and scholarship of Freire has shaped education as globally scholars embrace and respect his work. For many their first reading is philosophically and ideologically grounded in Freire’s application of Critical Theory and documentation of his methods presented in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in RN. This study reveals a sustained influence of his scholarship and lifework within the southeastern section of RS as well. Participants share how their personal beliefs are grounded in activism, and explicated how fundamental his ideas have been and continue to be in their lives and work. In addition, participants describe how their current community activism, lifework, and scholarship carries forth into the next generation.

As popular and influential as Freire’s scholarship has been fraught with controversy from the onset. Recently a controversy about the influence of his scholarship is a popular meme. First, Romano has argued that the appeal of his signature text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is “an aberration – an Americanization,” of the original work (Romao, 2015, quoted in Costa, 2015). He plans to reveal, with the permission of the Freire family, additional text that was deleted; text that explicates his thinking about and application of revolutionary social action (quoted in Costa, 2015). Second, there are politicians that believe his Marxist philosophies have no place in public school. Recall that “the Federal Senate received Legislative Suggestion 47/2017, initiated by the Brazilian Free Movement (MBL), which calls for the repeal of Law 12,612 of

April 13, 2012, which declared the educator Paulo Freire, patron of Brazilian education” (np). Senator Fatima Bezerra, the Committee on Education, Culture, Science, Technology and Sports of the Mercosur Parliament, has seeks to retain and honor the legacy of Freire:

The humanist legacy of Paulo Freire inspires the process of integration of Mercosur, which aims ultimately to build a common market based on the rights of the populations of all countries, especially the emancipatory and liberating right of the education, “the statement said. (np)

Bezerra felt compelled to make this statement although Freire holds the title as Brazil’s Patron of Education. He is a man whose life work and scholarship are embraced by academics, educators, and politicians. To his devotees, like those in this study, he remains a champion of humanity.

Future studies should investigate the connection between Fiori’s work and that of Freire as well as seek a copy of the original text with Fiori’s preface. In addition, scholars should interrogate Freire’s texts to locate connections to the work of Moraes and explain its absence among Freirean scholarship. Moreover, it is an opportune time to track the global, and Brazilian, reception of the fiftieth anniversary issue and the inclusion of additional material.

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