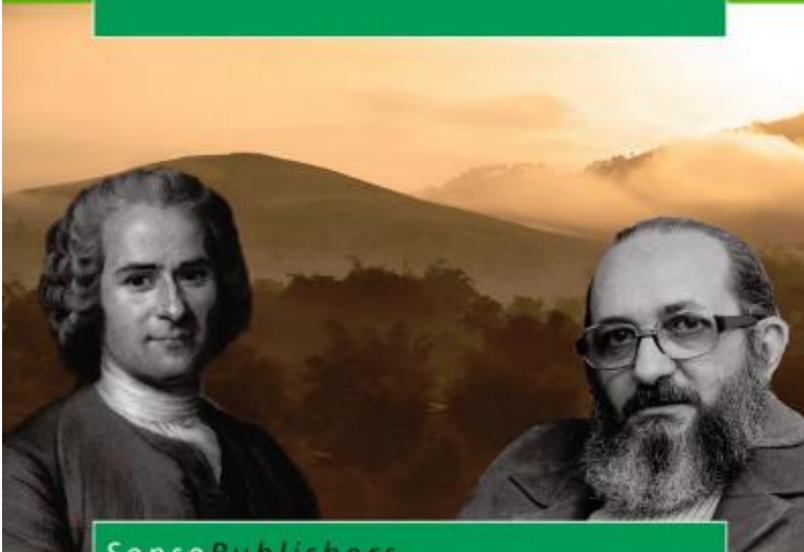


INTERNATIONAL ISSUES IN ADULT EDUCATION

Paulo Freire

Rousseau of the Twentieth Century

Asoke Bhattacharya



Sense Publishers

Trechos que citam Grundtvig...

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Prof. Asoke Bhattacharya

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PREFACE

Throughout the last long years of my life I've been involved with history of educational ideas, I have often returned to Immanuel Kant, who, in his book 'On Pedagogy' from 1803, argues that the art of governing and the art of education are among man's most important social inventions. According to Kant, certain structural similarities exist between the formation of a society and the formation of a human being. To act politically is to shape a society; to act educationally is to shape an individual. Formation of a society and formation of a person are therefore closely related - without being the same. The relationship can be described as an egg-or-chicken paradox: what comes first, the good and proper community or the good and proper citizen.

It is therefore no coincidence that some of the great political philosophers are included in the canon of major educational philosophers; Plato, Martin Luther, John Locke, Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Wilhelm Humboldt, N.F.S. Grundtvig, John Dewey, Rabindranath Tagore, and others. Their educational philosophy can not be isolated from their political philosophy. In much educational thinking, however, the connection between political philosophy and educational philosophy drops out of sight, and pedagogy is reduced to methodological and didactic matters.

With this voluminous book on Paulo Freire, Professor Asoke Bhattacharya reminds us of the close relationship between politics and pedagogy. Professor Bhattacharya's book clearly illustrates that Paulo Freire, in the latter half of the twentieth century, re-established the connection between educational philosophy and political philosophy. Freire established a conductive connection between politics and pedagogy based on his own experiences. Paulo Freire was born into a prosperous middle-class family in Brazil, but the family lost everything in 1929. As a young man, Freire experienced poverty and even hunger, and he learned that the Brazilian upper class had little interest in the problems of the lower classes, and so he soon became involved in the fight against poverty and oppression through education.

Paulo Freire has been hailed as one of the founding fathers of critical pedagogy, which is not wrong, but not very precise either. For who among the major educational philosophers were not critical? Rousseau was extremely critical to his contemporary pedagogy and school system, and Luther, Kant, Grundtvig, Dewey, and Tagore all formulated their pedagogical philosophies in critical opposition to contemporary educational theory and practice. The same can be said of Paulo Freire. Therefore, it is not Freire's critical attitude, but his political activism that sets him apart from some (but not all) of the canonical educational philosophers.

Professor Asoke Bhattacharya provides a thorough description of Paulo Freire as a political activist. Freire was one of the founding members of The Movement for Popular Culture, which was the first of a series of political educational movements that emerged in Brazil in the 1960s. The purpose was to empower the

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poor to lift themselves out of poverty without alienating them through an education that did not take their culture and their own experience into account. Therefore, the movement put great emphasis on preserving the people's cultural traditions, their histories, their mythical characters and their religiosity - a philosophical approach that resembles Grundtvig and the Danish folk high school movement, which from the mid-1800s was set up to educate the rural population.

In his masterpiece 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed', Freire gave his definition of the political nature of education and the relationship between knowledge, power and language. In that book, which was based on his own experience from fighting illiteracy in Brazil, Paulo Freire formulated his famous pedagogical method to make agricultural workers aware of their social situation and to contribute to their emancipation.

A wealth of literature has been published about Paulo Freire, but nothing as comprehensive as this book. This book distinguishes itself by a detailed account of the historical, economic and social context, and on this basis Professor Bhattacharya draws a fascinating and comprehensive picture of one of the most famous and influential educational philosophers from the last half of the twentieth century.

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At the peak of his career, when Paulo Freire was given the responsibility to make millions of people literate he was the Chairman of the National Literacy Mission. At this time, he suffered enormous reverses. Following the coup by the armed forces, Freire was imprisoned and kept in detention for 70 days and physically and mentally tortured until he was allowed to go into exile. Though this tragedy influenced adversely the scheme of things in Brazil, it also ushered in a new era of creativity for Paulo. He was able to work in a new land, with a new people, and among new subjects of his experimentation. What was field-tested in Brazil proved equally effective in Chile. Thus local became global, what could perhaps have remained restricted within the geographical confines of Brazil, became objects of experimentation on a wider scale. In the language of Grundtvig, what was lost internally was redeemed externally. Says Paulo Freire, "No one goes anywhere alone, least of all into exile – not even those who arrive physically alone, unaccompanied by family, spouse, children, parents or siblings. No one leaves his or her world without having been transfixed by its roots or with a vacuum for a soul. We carry with us the memory of many fabrics, a self soaked in our history, our culture; a memory, sometimes scattered, sometimes sharp and clear, of the streets of our childhood, of our adolescence; the reminiscence of something distant that suddenly stands out before us, in us, a shy gesture, an open hand, a smile lost in a

situations or seek action arising from that clarification. The topics of these debates were offered us by the groups themselves. Nationalism, profit remittances abroad, the political evolution of Brazil, development, illiteracy, the vote for illiterates, democracy were some of the themes which were repeated from group to group. These subjects and others were schematized as far as possible and presented to groups with visual aids, in the form of dialogue.⁹¹

From this premise of knowledge, Freire developed his methods of literacy based on the dictum, "from the known to the unknown". The adult-illiterates were knowledgeable people in the sense that they survived on the basis of their knowledge, skill and labour in a highly competitive and cruel world. What they lacked was alphabetisation. So Freire tried to remove this gap so that alphabets could be used as a weapon in their struggle: from the knowledge of the world to the word and then again clarification of the knowledge of the world on the basis of acquired knowledge.

After six months of experience with the culture circles, 'we asked ourselves if it would not be possible to do something in the field of adult literacy which would give us similar results.'⁹² It is from the organisation of culture circles that the idea of adult literacy evolved. Literacy was a further instrument in the hands of those who discussed their own plight and that of society in the culture circles. Literacy was not the end but the means towards clarification of human life, to borrow a phrase from Grundtvig.⁹³

Freire writes, 'From the beginning, we rejected the hypothesis of a purely mechanistic literacy programme and considered the problem of teaching adults how to read in relation to awakening of their consciousness. We wished to design a project in which we would attempt to move from the naivete to a critical attitude at the same time we taught reading. We wanted a literacy programme which would be an introduction to the democratization of culture, a programme with people as