

Authority Through Freedom. On Freire's Radicalisation of the Authority-Freedom Problem in Education

Jones Irwin

e-mail: jones.irwin@dcu.ie

St. Patrick Collage, Dublin. Ireland

Abstract: Paulo Freire's approach to the question of 'authority and freedom' in education and teaching (as well as in the political sphere), takes its cue from his early and radical approach to literacy education in Brazil in the 1960s. However, the radical democratic thrust of this educational vision meets very significant political resistance in Brazil and Freire spends 30 years in exile. This essay explores how this Freirean approach needs to be contextualised in the specifically Brazilian context. However, it also explores his original contribution to the wider problematic of authority and freedom in the Philosophy of Education. In Freire, there is a simultaneous critique of traditionalism and progressivism (not dissimilar to Dewey's in *Experience and Education*) and this allows Freire to reconceptualise the relation between authority and freedom in education. We explore how Freire's 1968 text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* articulates this understanding very clearly and from a very strong conceptual-philosophical perspective. In the latter part of the essay, we look at how Freire's later work, in for example *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, represents a return to a more experiential analysis of the question of authority and freedom in education. Nonetheless, while recognising the need for a philosophy of education to develop «in a manner in keeping with the times», there is also a very strong continuity between the early and later work in this understanding. In brief, in both his earlier and later work, Freire develops an understanding of an «authority through freedom», a co-dependent relationship between these two variables in pedagogy, as also in political life.

Keywords: Authority; Freedom; Literacy; Freire; Dewey; Radicalisation; Sectarianism; *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, *Pedagogy of Hope*; *Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Recibido / Received: 14/05/2017

Aceptado / Accepted: 11/11/2017

1. Introduction

The philosophical and educational question of «authority and freedom» goes back to the earliest thinkers. Whose authority, if any, should we listen to and, in seeking to assert our own individual (or collective) liberty, what exactly is such freedom

constituted by and does such freedom allow for the acceptance of authority? Plato's *Republic* (Plato, 1990), for example, offers a critique of democracy and its twin ideals of equality and individual freedom in the name of the authority of knowledge. This innate, originally Platonic suspicion of the value of freedom and the simultaneous emphasis on the value of authority is commonplace in the history of philosophy up to the modern period, although not completely dominant. One might cite Cynicism as a counter-example in the ancient world of a radical conception of freedom, with Diogenes as a paradigmatic case (Diogenes, 2012). When Descartes postulates his *Cogito, Ergo Sum* (Descartes, 2000) as a fundamental and originary principle of philosophy, he seems to shift the balance back towards individual freedom. However, closer inspection of the Cartesian philosophy reveals a continuing dependence on authority, most revealingly a dependence upon God to overcome doubt and a potential Evil Deceiver in the *Meditations*, which ultimately provides the foundation for the *Cogito's* clear and distinct ideas. The concept of «authority» is thus one of the most influential of all philosophical ideas when we look back on the history of thought.

The history of educational thought is no exception. Indeed, many of the appeals to authority in philosophy often simultaneously look to provide such authority as a foundation for educational and pedagogical processes and relationships (Dewey, 1973; Freire, 1996). When we come to the emergence of a more distinct branch of «philosophy of education» in the twentieth century, it is no surprise that this perennial question of «authority and freedom» returns to centre stage (Biesta, 2006; Igelmo, 2013; Irwin, 2012). But we also see, in this return to the problem, new and novel ways of understanding this relationship. In this essay, I will explore one such re-evaluation of the question of authority, in the work of the Brazilian educator and philosopher, Paulo Freire (Freire, 1992, 1996; Irwin, 2012). Freire's critique of authority allows us to look at this issue theoretically and practically and this ground-breaking work very clearly develops from socio-political and educational crises in his native Brazil (Gadotti, 1994; Irwin, 2012). These crises, in which Freire is very much personally engaged, allow his educational philosophy to articulate what he terms a «praxis», a symbiotic relation between theory and practice, which is constantly having to re-evaluate its terms of reference. This re-evaluation becomes particularly important with regard to the relation between the respective values of authority and freedom. Having explored some of the key nodes of Freire's interrogation of this question, in his work early to late with especial reference to two texts, first *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (originally 1968; Freire, 1996) and second, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1992), I will conclude the essay with some brief contemporary contextualisation of the issue of the authority and freedom in education, with regard to recent emergent issues in the socio-political and educational spheres.

2. A Context for Understanding Freire

From the very beginning, Freire's texts develop organically from existential and political situations, often of significant crisis and danger, such as that of the military coup in Brazil in 1964. While his most famous text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 1996) tends to opt for a more abstract perspective, it is clear from a reading

of *Education as The Practice of Freedom* (Freire, 2005), that Freire developed these ideas and concepts very much out of the crucible of a Brazilian society struggling with the damaging legacy of Portuguese colonialism, and with its own complex internal politics. The influence of the relatively new Liberation Theology of, for example, Hélder Pessoa Câmara (Gadotti, 2004) or Gutierrez (Gutierrez, 2001) is also significant. A critique of authority is at the heart of this revolutionary approach, with regard to how authority is used (and abused) both educationally and politically. Here, Freire's work is part of an emergent tendency in the philosophy and sociology of education, away from an approach focused almost exclusively on conceptual and analytic issues to a perspective much more grounded in the socio-political lifeworld (Irwin, 2012; Biesta, 2006; Biesta, 2013; Igelmo, 2013). But in this paradigm-shift, Freire is also developing an emphasis which we can trace in the earlier work of John Dewey (Dewey, 1973) although the latter is not an explicit influence on Freire. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey addresses head-on the question of authority in education and teaching, arguing for a defence of a reconstituted concept and practice of authority and arguing very much against what he sees as the over-simplification of a progressivist approach to pedagogy. *Neither traditionalism nor progressivism in education, both authority and freedom in education*, Dewey is clearly and polemically saying, and in this his new articulation of the problem, Dewey can be seen as anticipating the direction of Freire's succeeding work. Freire seems to have come to similar conclusions to Dewey through a different route entirely, under the influence of Liberation theology in Latin America, and in dialogue with the radical educational theories of Ivan Illich, Erich Fromm and John Holt most especially (Gutierrez, 2001; Igelmo, 2013; Irwin, 2012).

Freire's conception of philosophy as such is also quite specific and owes a great debt to Marx's account of «praxis». As Frederic Jameson (Jameson, 2001) notes, Marx inaugurates a revolutionary conception at a meta-level of philosophy, and this new disciplinary perspective is «unlike any other contemporary mode of thought, what I will call a unity-of-theory-and-practice» (Jameson, 2001, p. ix). This can be spoken of as Marx's complete *reconceptualisation* of philosophy which Etienne Balibar has so powerfully described (Balibar, 2007, p. 1ff). For Balibar, while the early Marx starts out in a very philosophical mode, his mid-to-late work signifies a critique of philosophy's self-understanding as a kind of master discipline. Instead, Marx reinscribes philosophy in a process of life much greater than human thought, which determines or at least conditions what philosophy and philosophers are capable of. The most obvious instance of this is in Marx's text *Theses on Feuerbach* (Marx, 1992a), where he outlines that whereas previous philosophy had primarily sought to interpret the world, that the point is «rather to change it» (Marx, 1992a, p. 423). This is also clearly the Freirean position.

Freire's critique of authority and freedom is articulated from the perspective of this highly engaged understanding of philosophy's vocation in the world; to seek to transform oppressive situations. Here, we can note that Freire's original socio-cultural context is initially so different, for example, from that of Dewey. Whereas the latter works in a mostly middle-class, First World North American situation, Freire's work begins from the position of the «oppressed», in what he refers to as a «Third World» context of 1950s/1960s Brazil and Latin and South America (Gadotti, 1994;

Freire, 1992). Perhaps the key philosophical and political moment in Freire's early life is his development of a new method of adult literacy education, which he first presented at Pernambuco in 1958 (Gadotti, 1994, p. 8). This new approach to literacy serves as the theoretical and practical foundation for Freire's theses in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, although the latter text is not published until ten years later in 1968.

We can trace a direct line from Freire's early attempts to develop a radical literacy method and his articulation of the distinction between banking and problem posing education (Freire, 1996). In both, we see a refusal of authoritarian and hierarchical approaches to teaching. As with Dewey, however, this critique of authority is nuanced in several aspects. First, as with Dewey's analysis in *Experience and Education*, Freire is not outruling authority as such, of teaching or of politics, but rather resituating it in a more accountable and organic setting. Second, Freire is not advocating a pure freedom but rather a freedom which is contextual; in this, both Freire and Dewey vehemently reject the extremes of a progressivist position in education, which is seen as a kind of utopian philosophy of freedom. Third, and perhaps most crucially of all, Dewey and Freire especially point to the hollow and contradictory rhetoric of much emancipatory education. In Freire's case, he focuses on supposedly emancipatory perspectives and methods in literacy and development education in the Third World (Freire, 1996, 2005a). For Freire, although much of this type of education lays claim to being a «problem-posing» method, in effect it is often a banking education in disguise. Thus, much of the educational talk concerning the freedom of the student and the empowerment of the student masks an insidious form of the very authoritarianism this type of education is supposedly countering. This is both the great insight of Freire's educational philosophy but also the stark paradox with which it confronts the reader (Freire, 1996; Irwin, 2012).

To simplify a little, we might say that Freire's early and later work takes two distinctive approaches to this problem of authority. In the earlier work, and here we can explore *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in some detail, the approach is more strictly philosophical and conceptual. Drawing on what John Elias refers to as his «eclectic» series of theoretical influences, Freire employs various philosophies (including Marxism, Existentialism and Psychoanalysis) to examine what he sees as a dialectical relation between authority and freedom (Elias, 1994). In the second case, Freire's later work approaches similar questions and problems but with a distinctly more experiential perspective, drawing on examples of his own encounter with authority and freedom in teaching and political life. Here, we can explore *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1992) in some depth. Not the least interesting question to pose here is to what extent these early and later methodologies denote a change in philosophical perspective on authority and freedom? Certainly, Freire's own meta-level assessment would suggest that we should read his work with an eye sensitive to context; «If you were to ask me, "are you attempting to put into practice the concepts you described in your book [*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*]?"», of course I am, but in a manner in keeping with the times» (Freire and Torres, 1994, p. 106). Freire has thus always sought to evolve his own work and challenge his own presuppositions in the name of a radically historicised understanding of the nature of philosophical dialogue and dialectic (close, we might argue, to the Platonic Dialogue wellsprings of *elenchus* or «refutation», constantly

putting one's own position under interrogation [Plato, 1990]). With such historicisation in mind, let us first look at Freire's earlier conception of authority and freedom.

3. Critiquing the Authority/Freedom Binarism – Freire's Earlier Perspective

Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1996) is an extraordinary text, both philosophically and educationally. Its influence has been immense on educational systems worldwide and also on political movements on the Left, especially in Latin and South America (Gadotti, 1994). While it is often viewed as emerging *ex nihilo*, a closer inspection of Freire's trajectory from the late 1950s to 1968 shows it to be a text which constitutes a powerful distillation of insights from a decade of work (Elias, 1994). Whereas Freire's first texts from the early 1960s, such as *Education as the Practice of Freedom* (Freire, 2005b), show many similar thematics, there is nonetheless in *Pedagogy* a more systematic and theoretically coherent philosophy of education outlined. This philosophy also does not simply emerge *ex nihilo*. Freire's thinking is self-admittedly «eclectic» (Elias, 1994) and we can trace strong influences from Marxism, Existentialism and Psychoanalysis on Freire, as well as an underlying and radicalised understanding of Christian thought, especially under the aspect of Liberation theology (Gutierrez, 2001). At the heart of this thoroughgoing philosophical exploration stands the perennial question of authority and freedom in education that goes back all the way to the origins of philosophy in early Greece (Plato, 1990).

The misuse of authority in education and wider society is described by Freire in *Pedagogy* under the example of what he refers to famously as «banking education». In looking at banking education, Freire pays particular attention to what he calls the «Teacher-Student contradiction» and the «A-J of Banking Education» (Freire, 1996; Irwin, 2012; Cowden and Singh, 2011). Thus, traditional forms of education set up an opposition or «contradiction» between the omnipotent power of the teacher as authority and the passivity and powerlessness of the student. This represents the value of authority as *authoritarian* – authority is only itself when it is one-way; «the teacher presents him or herself to the students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he or she justifies his/her own existence» (Freire, 1996, p. 53). We can all recognise this aspect of Freire's critique of traditional methods of education and his poignant portrait of the psychology of such oppression in his own society in Brazil is extremely powerful and moving. And yet we can say that perhaps this is also the least philosophically interesting of Freire's points in the book for, to the extent that Freire is critiquing traditional forms of authority, he is saying little that is relatively new. This critique of traditional forms of authoritarianism

in education and the socio-political sphere is a mainstay of the aforementioned Marxist tradition which we spoke of above as being Freire's inspiration.

But there is another dimension to this critique of authority which is more original in Freire.

We already can discern this aspect in Freire's «A-J» of banking education. In the first principles of this conception, we can see the traditional authoritarianism clearly evident.

- (a) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing
- (b) the teacher talks and the students listen - meekly
- (c) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined (Freire 1996).

Here, the authority is all-encompassing and unquestioned, students reduced to powerlessness and meekness, and the suggestion of force or even violence is present in the descriptions of discipline (one thinks of the usage of corporal punishment in traditional education and of the use of violence in colonial society, the latter described vividly by Freire here). But in the developing principles of banking education, one also sees a different emphasis, on what might be considered a more hidden or ideological form of authoritarianism.

- (d) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher
- (e) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students (Freire, 1996)

Here, the concept of «illusion» is used for the first time, and we see Freire's foregrounding of a certain kind of deception or «ideology» which can be at work in the use of authority. Freire's own conception of «ideology» owes much to Gramsci's conception of *hegemony* (Eagleton, 1994, p. 197), which allowed for the notion of ideology to become more subtly connected to «lived, habitual social practice» (Eagleton, 1994, p. 197). In this context, the situation itself under capitalist society and education was no longer simply false but *subject to contestation*. It is the latter view which is most influential on Freire, and which leads him to also address some complicities between progressive education and politics and more traditional authority.

In the case of principle (d), Freire is suggesting that nonauthoritarian or progressive forms of teaching, ones where the students are supposedly given freedom to «act», can sometimes mask a more hidden authoritarian aspect; there is just the «illusion» of freedom, of the possibility of action. Here, Freire seems intent on focusing on residual aspects of the banking mindset in education and politics which can continue to determine even attempts to move beyond and transform traditional approaches. In his later work, for example in *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1992), we will see how this critical analysis of progressivism turns into an unsparing self-critique, but here his critical analysis is more at the conceptual level. Freire makes an important distinction between what he

refers to as «sectarianism» on the one side, and «radicalisation» on the other. The «rightist sectarian» attempts to domesticate the present and hopes that the future will simply reproduce this domesticated present. The «leftist sectarian», in contrast, considers the future pre-established. Both are caught within a fatalistic position or a «circle of certainty» and both «negate freedom» (Freire, 1996, p. 19). Thus, such «sectarian» approaches are not sufficient to go beyond traditional forms of education and politics but rather simply reinforce and repeat them.

Certainly, the critique of the more obvious forms of banking education and politics must be made, where a clear binarism exists between teacher authority and student passivity – thus, (a) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing (Freire 1996). However, such an objectifying and authoritarian mindset and politics can also be present when we seem to have gone beyond such authority completely. The banking mentality and ideology may also be a hidden component of a progressive education and politics. Of course, here in a very different context, we see Freire connecting with Dewey's critique of progressivism in *Experience and Education* (Dewey 1973). But if we critique the traditional authority of education while simultaneously critiquing the emphasis on a supposed freedom in progressivism, what is our third alternative and what happens to the value of authority per se? Here, the last principle cited above of Freire's analysis of banking education becomes important: (e) «the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students» (Freire, 1996). This statement from Freire is significant because, as with Dewey, Freire is seeking to defend a conception of «authority» in education and politics – «the authority of knowledge» – while eschewing the simple identification of this authority with professional authority. It is this latter which must be far more suspiciously critiqued. But the danger of this professionalization of authority («the circle of certainty») applies not simply to traditional forms of banking education but also to forms of supposedly emancipatory education, where its repressiveness may be hidden.

For Freire, as later for a thinker such as Jacques Rancière (Rancière, 1991; Biesta, 2013; Igelmo, 2013), this tendency to a hidden authoritarianism can thus be fatal for the progressive educator, or at least the one who wishes to be radical rather than sectarian: «the radical, committed to human liberation, does not become the prisoner of a “circle of certainty” within which he also imprisons reality. On the contrary, the more radical he is, the more fully he enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he can better transform it. He is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. He is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them» (Freire, 1996, p. 21). Freire adds here a reference to Rosa Luxemburg: «as long as theoretic knowledge remains the privilege of a handful of academicians in the party, the latter will face the danger of going astray» (quoted Freire, 1996, p. 21).

Crucial to this notion of radical education, then, is the notion of authentic communication and a critique of the paternalism which destroys all authentic communication. This was a paradigmatic theme of Freire's work even before *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In his early text *Extension or Communication* (Freire, 2005b), he demystifies all aid or helping relationships. He sees an implicit ideology of paternalism, social control and nonreciprocity between experts and «helpees», and refers to the oppressive character of all nonreciprocal relationships (Freire 2005b). Of course, this sets up a major dilemma for radical education or education and politics which seeks to go beyond banking education and beyond oppression. Too often, the previously oppressed can become the future oppressors, where there is simply a role reversal rather than any authentic transformation of the oppression into real freedom and hope. The question thus becomes: *how can a more authentic practice of authority emerge in radical education which does not simply return us to a newer form of oppression, a more subtle version of authoritarianism and misuse of power?* This is the dilemma which Freire's later work seeks to resolve.

4. Later Freire On Authority and Freedom – «In A Manner In Keeping With The Times»

In *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 1992), Freire addresses this problem head-on. The subtitle gives us his methodology here – we must «re-live» the task of emancipation, it must remain a process and must never become objectified or turn into a formula. Earlier, we quoted Freire when he was asked to consider whether he continued to adhere to the framework of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in his later work, into the 1990s (the interview is from 1994): «If you were to ask me, “are you attempting to put into practice the concepts you described in your book [*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*]?”, of course I am, but in a manner in keeping with the times» (Freire and Torres, 1994, p. 106). But what does Freire mean exactly by such a call for a suitable contextualization?

In *Pedagogy of Hope* (Freire 1992), the subtitle of «re-living» certainly suggests the need to reflect again on one's previous presuppositions from a different time, but in the «re-» there is also the sense of continuity, of return and a certain need to go back to source. This would suggest that in relation to our primary focus in this context, the question of authority and freedom in Freire, that there is much that can be maintained from the earlier conceptual analysis in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1996). Freire makes this clear from the outset of the later, revisionist text. In the first case, he is updating the call to reflection to the early 1990s, saying he will attempt to «explain and defend progressive postmodernity» (Freire, 1992, p. 4), saying his book «will reject conservative, neoliberal postmodernity» (Freire, 1992, p. 4). But he also makes clear that this represents a continuity with his earlier work: «The debates in which I shared in the 1970s are as current today...fear of freedom...the tyranny of liberty and the tyranny of authority...the urgency of the democratization of the public school» (Freire, 1992, p. 14). The respective concepts of «authority» and «freedom» remain crucially foregrounded. And also in continuity with his earlier distinction between «radicalisation» and «sectarianism», he clarifies

that only a radical politics, not a sectarian one, can truly provide the conditions for an authentic democracy (Freire, 1992, p. 14).

But what does such a radical politics involve in practice, in the detail of its approach, in its everyday existence? It is perhaps here that we can locate something of a distinctive change in Freire's «manner of the times». Whereas *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* represented the philosophical distillation of Freire's concerted practical and political-educational work since the late 1950s into an extraordinary textual and conceptual approach (moving beyond the more experiential approaches of, for example, earlier texts such as *Education as The Practice of Freedom* (Freire, 2005a), the reverse is the case with *Pedagogy of Hope* (Freire, 1992). It is as if having outlined such a rich and systematic philosophy of authority and freedom, Freire now seeks to return to experience and to the specificity of practice. Here, we can focus on two examples from *Pedagogy of Hope* (Freire, 1992), situations which Freire describes in detail and which he uses to reinforce but also to re-evaluate conceptual positions he had taken in the earlier work. To conclude, we will also refer to Freire's later vision of education as he put it into being on his return to Brazil in the 1990s, as a Minister for Education (Irwin, 2012).

The first example is from a lecture which Freire was asked to give to a rural and poor fishing community in North-Eastern Brazil and which related to the question of «corporal punishment». It was rumoured that many of the working class families were employing harsh methods of discipline on their children and Freire's task in his lecture was to discourage them from doing so. Having given a passionate lecture on just this topic, Freire was surprised to find one of the parents standing before him and remonstrating with Freire – «have you ever, Professor Freire, visited our homes? Have you ever taken account of the conditions in which our families must live?» (Freire, 1992). Shocked and disappointed at this negative response from the community, on his way back home with his wife Elza, Freire recounts what he said and the response of the audience with a certain disbelief: «I thought I'd been so clear I said. I don't think they understood me» (Freire, 1992). But Freire also is honest enough to record Elza's response; «I think they got the main point of your talk; they understood you but they need to have you understand them; that's the question» (Freire, 1992).

The second example concerns the related question of Freire's teachings to the marginalised, his efforts to warn the «oppressed» people of their ideological condition. Freire quotes from an apparently complimentary letter which he receives from one of these marginalised groups, reasserting on the surface the insights of his educational work. It is, Freire tells us as readers, «an excellent letter from a group of workers in São Paulo»; «Paul» they said, «keep writing – but next time lay it on a little thicker when you come to those scholarly types that come to visit as if they had revolutionary truth by the tail. You know, the ones that come looking for us to teach us that we're oppressed and exploited and to tell us what to do» (Freire, 1992).

The irony is not lost on Freire. In recounting these two episodes, the one in Recife and the other in São Paulo, Freire is also holding up his own supposedly emancipatory pedagogy to critical inspection and self-critique. Is Freire's own authority as a teacher justified? As Elza suggests, it is radically put in question: «they need to have you understand them; that's the question». Freire's initial response

was to try to reassert his authority as teacher and radical sage – but both Elza and the letter from São Paulo challenge Freire to reflect on the hidden authoritarianism in his own politics and pedagogy, how his own supposedly problem-posing education can all too easily congeal into a residual banking form of power in education and politics. Again, it is not a question here of giving up on authority as progressivism would have suggested – rather, as both Freire and Dewey have demonstrated, it is rather a question of keeping the dialectic between «authority and freedom» open, and a question of challenging this relationship between authority and freedom to keep faithful to the «manner of the times» (Freire & Torres, 1994).

5. Conclusion – Authority Through Freedom: Freire as Minister for Education in Brazil

To conclude this essay, I will refer to how Freire's extraordinary story and life eventually seems to come full circle and how this final stage is also most revealing for our philosophical problem. Having emerged as a literacy educator in North Eastern Brazil in the late 1950s and having developed the most simple (but *also the most radical* method for literacy education – more an epistemology than a method *per se*) [Gadotti, 2004; Irwin, 2012], Freire finds himself as a perceived mortal enemy of the Brazilian middle and upper classes and especially of the conservative Brazilian military, seeking to keep control of the illiterate poor. Rather than being seen as a success, the literacy revolution introduced by Freire is seen as a destabilisation of the socio-political equilibrium (itself built on massive inequalities of wealth and power). Gadotti draws out the story of how this evolution of Freire's method began to engender political conflict in Brazil – this was «the method which took Paulo Freire into exile» (Gadotti, 1994, p. 15). Directly or indirectly, this leads to a military coup, and Freire finds himself being expelled from his own home and native country. This enforced exile lasts for 30 years (Gadotti, 1994; Irwin, 2012).

When Freire is finally allowed to return to Brazil in the early 1990s, he takes up a position as a Minister for Education in São Paulo. He faces extraordinary educational challenges in this new position, but for our purposes what is especially noteworthy is how the choices he makes as Minister, and how his vision of education for this region of Brazil, both speak to his abiding concern with the problem of authority and freedom in education (and politics) (Gadotti, 1994; Irwin, 2012). We might describe Freire's approach in this context as an example of *Authority Through Freedom* – developing an authority which is constantly accountable and open to critique, just as Elza critiques Freire's approach to the rural fishing community in Recife and just as the letter from São Paulo ironically undermines Freire's problem-posing method.

In brief, Freire's approach as Minister for Education represents a radical return to the early literacy approach he had developed in the late 1950s, except in this instance the revolution is aimed at the centralised school curriculum. A vast project of education reform for the whole city of São Paulo is operationalised by Freire where each school is encouraged to reinvent its own curriculum, just as in the early literacy approaches, the students «generated» their vocabulary from their own existing language, culture and interests (Freire, 2005a). In order to undertake such radical curricular change, based on «generative themes» (Freire, 2005a; Irwin,

2012) just as with the early literacy epistemology, teachers are given significant agency and authority – against the banking model which is top-down, teachers are here viewed as central agents of change and what was a predetermined curriculum is now a curriculum developed from scratch with «generative» themes with students. Moreover, far from this being an isolated educational reform, Freire's proposals are developed from within a whole macro-vision of political change and transformation with the coalition of Left wing parties brought together under the political manifesto of the Workers' Party, led by Lula (Irwin, 2012). These changes, radical as they were politically and educationally, were seen by some as extraordinarily progressive and positive, and by others as near to catastrophic. This is not the place to enter into a discussion on the merits or demerits of these opposing ideologies as there is not the space to do justice to the complexity and detail of the question (in Irwin, 2012, I seek to evaluate some aspects of these attempted transformations). But in this particular context of a philosophical analysis of Freire's understanding of authority and freedom, we can derive some tentative points in conclusion.

First, there is a great consistency between Freire's early and later views of authority. His critique of traditional authority in education and politics is unequivocal – his own literacy methods are set up in opposition to such authoritarianism in education but have the knock on effect of a backlash from authoritarian politics in Brazilian society. Could anything be more symbolic of the inherent violence of vulgar notions of educational and political authority than Freire's own enforced exile from Brazil?

Second, alongside this critique, Freire is keen to offer warnings against progressive conceit in education and politics. All too often when we consider ourselves to have transcended oppression, and to have freed ourselves and others from oppression, we can find ourselves blinded to the oppressive aspect of our own practices and supposedly emancipatory approaches. As we have seen, and especially under the influence of Gramsci, Freire's work takes certain reified notions of ideology in Marxist and Leftist thinking to task, in the name of returning a respect to ordinary consciousness and ordinary life. While *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* articulates the complexity of this new perspective from a conceptual point of view (and it is an extraordinary and rhapsodic text, hugely influential on liberatory movements that follow), we have seen that it is in Freire's later and more personal work that we also see a constant return to experience for a testimony in relation to these questions of authority and freedom.

Third and finally, Freire tells us that this process of self-critique is unrelenting and unfinished. In line with the radically historicized nature of the understanding of truth, the very historicized emergence (and «reemergence») of such truth(s), we must constantly seek to reinterrogate our educational and political commitments and presuppositions. In this we must keep our understandings faithful to the «manner of the times». We must be wary of false dawns most especially. Remembering that Freire's own *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is published as a text in English at the very moment that the «1968» events begin to unfold (with Freire euphorically noting this in a footnote on the first page [Freire, 1996; Irwin, 2012]), we should perhaps finish with just such a resolute warning from the '68 graffiti artists concerning the ruse of

freedom vis-à-vis authority - *La participation, c'est pour mieux vous croquer mes enfants! [Participation, it is all the better to eat you with, my children!]*.

6. References

- Balibar, E. (2007). *The Philosophy of Marx*. London: Verso.
- Biesta, G.J.J. (2006). *Beyond Learning. Democratic Education for a Human Future*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm
- Biesta, G.J.J. (2013) Receiving the gift of teaching: From «learning from» to «being taught by». *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 32(5), 449-461
- Bingham, C. (2009). Under the Name of Method: On Jacques Rancière's Presumptive Tautology. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 43(3).
- Cowden & Singh (2012). *Acts of Knowing: Critical Pedagogy in Against and Beyond the University*. New York and London: Bloomsbury
- Descartes, R. (2000). *Meditations*. London: Penguin.
- Dewey, J. (1973). *Experience and Education*. Collier Books: New York.
- Diogenes et al. (2012). *The Cynic Philosophers from Diogenes to Julian*. London: Penguin.
- Eagleton, T. (1994). Ideology and its Vicissitudes in Western Marxism. In Žižek, S. (Ed.), *Mapping Ideology* (pp. 179-226). London: Verso.
- Elias, J. (1994). *Paulo Freire: Pedagogue of Liberation*. New York: Teacher's College.
- Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (1985). Education, Liberation and the Church. In Freire, P., *The Politics of Education. Culture, Power and Liberation* (pp. 121-144). Massachusetts, USA: Bergin and Garvey.
- Freire, P. (1985). *The Politics of Education. Culture, Power and Liberation*. Massachusetts, USA: Bergin and Garvey.
- Freire, P. (1992). *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by R. Barr. London: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (2005b). *Education as the Practice of Freedom* in Freire, P. (2005a) *Education For Critical Consciousness*. London: Continuum.
- Freire, P., & Torres, C.A. (1994). Twenty Years After Pedagogy of the Oppressed: Paulo Freire in Conversation with Carlos Alberto Torres. In Laren, Mc P., & Lankshear, C. (Eds.), *Politics of Liberation: Paths from Freire*. London: Routledge.

- Gadotti, M. (1994). *Reading Paulo Freire: His Life and Work*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Giroux, H. (1985). Introduction. In Freire, P., *The Politics of Education. Culture, Power and Liberation* (pp. xi-xxvii). Massachusetts, USA: Bergin and Garvey.
- Gutierrez, G. (2001). *A Theology of Liberation*. New York: SCM Press
- Igelmo, J. (2013) Paulo Freire y John Holt: de la educación liberadora a la libertad más allá de la educación. *Educació i Història: Revista d'Història de l'Educació*, 21, 13-35.
- Irwin, J. (2012). *Paulo Freire's Philosophy of Education: Origins, Developments, Impacts and Legacies*. London/New York: Continuum/Bloomsbury.
- Jameson, F. (2001). Introduction. In Althusser L., *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays* (pp. vii-xiv). New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Marx, K. (1992a). The Theses on Feuerbach. In Karl Marx, K., *Early Writings* [translated by R. Livingstone and G. Benton] (pp. 421-423). London: Penguin.
- Marx, K. (1992b). Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1844). In Marx, K., *Early Writings* [translated by R. Livingstone and G. Benton] (pp. 279-400). London: Penguin.
- Nikolakaki, M. (2012). *Critical Pedagogy in the New Dark Ages: Challenges and Possibilities*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Plato (1990). *The Republic*. London: Penguin.

página intencionadamente en blanco / page intentionally blank