

Summary and Keywords

The work of the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (1921–1997) has been extraordinarily influential. Freire's ideas have been taken up not just by educationists, but also by scholars and practitioners in a wide range of other fields, including theology, philosophy, sociology, politics, women's studies, nursing, counseling, social work, disability studies, and peace studies. In educational circles, Freire is regarded as one of the founding figures of critical pedagogy. He is best known for his adult literacy programs in impoverished communities and for his classic early text: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. As a writer, he was most prolific in the last ten years of his life. His work advances an ideal of humanization through transformative reflection and action, and stresses the importance of developing key epistemological, ethical, and educational virtues, such as openness, humility, tolerance, attentiveness, rigor, and political commitment. The themes of love and hope figure prominently throughout his work. Freire was opposed to authoritarian, technicist, and neoliberal pedagogical practices. He argued that education is a necessarily nonneutral process and favored a critical, problem-posing, dialogical approach to teaching and learning. While acclaimed by many, Freire also attracted his share of criticism. He responded to some of the key questions raised by others, while also leaving open a number of areas of inquiry for further investigation.

Keywords: [Paulo Freire](#), [philosophy](#), [pedagogy](#), [politics](#), [dialogue](#), [praxis](#), [oppression](#), [liberation](#), [literacy](#), [neoliberalism](#)

Paulo Freire: A Brief Intellectual Biography

One of four children in a middle-class family, Paulo Reglus Neves Freire was born on September 19, 1921 in the city of Recife, the capital of the state of Pernambuco in the northeast of Brazil. His mother was a seamstress. His father had served in the Brazilian army and was subsequently employed by the Pernambuco Military Police but was forced into early retirement with arterial sclerosis (Kirylo, [2011](#), pp. 4–5). When Freire was ten, his family, struggling under the effects of the Great Depression, moved to Jaboatão. Freire had learned to read and write at an early age, the outdoors serving as his classroom, but hunger took its toll on his performance at school. As his family's circumstances improved, so too did his results. Freire's grasp of the Portuguese language was such that he found himself, while still a secondary school student, taking on a teaching role with others (Schugurensky, [2011](#), p. 15). While attentive to matters of linguistic structure and syntax, he was motivated more by the beauty of the written word and its connection to the lived realities of learners (Freire, [1996](#)).

Clearly predisposed to teaching as a vocation, Freire nonetheless did not take up this calling immediately. His initial university studies were in law, notwithstanding his emerging philosophical and educational interests. As a young man, Freire suffered bouts of depression, later linking these to the death of his father in 1934, among other significant events in his adolescence (Freire, [1994](#)). In his early twenties, Freire married Elza Oliveira, from whom he was to learn much that would inform his work as an adult educator. Freire's time in the field of law was short-lived, and he went on to a position with the Social Service of Industry (SESI), a role that sharpened his understanding of class differences. His political consciousness was honed further through his involvement, with Elza, in a radical Christian movement committed to the principle of social justice through the liberation of oppressed groups (Roberts, [2000](#)).

Freire returned to university, completing a doctoral thesis with a focus on adult literacy. His distinctive approach to work in this field was already gaining attention, and he was asked to lead the Cultural Extension Service at the University of Recife. In 1963 he was appointed Director of a national literacy program. He and his co-workers were highly successful in enabling adults to acquire basic reading and writing skills within a matter of weeks or months (after as little as 40–45 hours of teaching contact time), in part because Freire fostered a strong link between the written word and the world of the participants. The opening up of opportunities for the development of a more critical understanding of Brazilian society did not go unnoticed, and when the military seized power in 1964 Freire was regarded as a threat and forced into exile. He spent five years in Chile, working with adults in a cultural extension program under the auspices of the Chilean Agrarian Reform Corporation. He completed his first book during this period: *Education: The Practice of Freedom* (Freire, [1976](#)). (This work also appears under the title *Education for Critical Consciousness*.)

In 1969 Freire received an invitation to serve as a scholar in residence at Harvard University, and in that capacity completed the two essays that would become *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Freire, [1972b](#)). In 1970 he took up a role with the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, where he was to stay for a decade. With the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire's life as an educationist would change forever. The book created an almost immediate impact and would go on to become one of the biggest selling texts ever written by an educationist. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, [1972a](#)) was released at a time of growing unrest among educational and social commentators. It was one of several "subversive" educational texts published in the late 1960s and early 1970s—other examples

included Postman and Weingartner's (1971) *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, Ivan Illich's (1971) *Deschooling Society*, and Paul Goodman's (1971) *Compulsory Miseducation*—and generated much discussion and debate. Freire was in high demand as a speaker throughout the 1970s. He also served in consultancy roles for adult education programs in Guinea-Bissau and São Tomé and Príncipe. By the end of the decade, the political tide in Brazil was starting to change, and in 1980 Freire was able to return to his native country.

During the 1980s he was busier than ever, with academic responsibilities as a university professor, continuing requests to visit other parts of the world, and involvement with the Brazilian Workers' Party. Freire was a supporter of Luis Inacio Lula da Silva ("Lula"), who would later become President of Brazil. After a slower period in his writing career, with just two key works in the decade from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s (Freire, 1978, 1985), Freire gained renewed momentum in the published development of his ideas through a succession of "dialogical" books: *A Pedagogy for Liberation* (Freire & Shor, 1987), *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (Freire & Macedo, 1987), *Learning to Question* (Freire & Faundez, 1989), and *We Make the Road by Walking* (Horton & Freire, 1990). Another collaborative work based on a series of dialogues in the 1980s with a group of Mexican academics, *Paulo Freire on Higher Education* (Escobar, Fernandez, & Guevara-Niebla, with Freire, 1994), would be released in the 1990s. These works were constructed from conversations between the authors, prompted by specific educational questions and later edited and organized thematically for publication in book form. They were, in their structure, style, and substance, broadly consistent with the pedagogical principles Freire espoused, though each volume had its own unique characteristics. The book with Ira Shor, *A Pedagogy for Liberation* (Freire & Shor, 1987), was especially important in highlighting some of the educational, ethical, and political challenges faced by teachers who attempt to enact Freirean ideas in First World contexts.

At the end of the 1980s, Freire took another significant step in his educational career, accepting a role as Secretary of Education in the municipality of São Paulo. This was a major undertaking, with run-down schools and grinding poverty in many of the urban educational communities for which Freire was responsible. Some substantial gains were made during Freire's tenure as Secretary (O'Cadiz, Wong, & Torres, 1998; Torres, 1994a; Weiner, 2003), but Freire was by this stage keen to return to his writing, and he resigned from his position in 1991.

The productivity that had characterized Freire's scholarly output in the late 1980s continued in the 1990s, with a flurry of writing activity. Freire's second marriage, to Ana Maria Araujo (after Elza had died in the 1980s), was significant in allowing him to enhance and extend his intellectual work. Ana Maria was a formidable intellectual in her own right, and her notes in some of Freire's later publications provide a valuable resource for other scholars. *Pedagogy of the City* (Freire, 1993) reflected on Freire's work as Secretary of Education; *Pedagogy of Hope* (Freire, 1994) was a revisiting of ideas, questions, and criticisms raised in response to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1972a); *Letters to Cristina* (Freire, 1996) fleshed out elements of Freire's educational biography and philosophy; and *Pedagogy of the Heart* (Freire, 1997a) addressed connections between pedagogy and politics. Freire's views were also captured in a number of notable shorter pieces, including a dialogue with Donald Macedo published in *Harvard Educational Review* (Freire & Macedo, 1995) and a chapter in *Mentoring the Mentor* (Freire, 1997b), an edited collection devoted to his work.

Seemingly at the height of his intellectual powers, Freire died of heart failure on May 2, 1997. He had been a smoker for much of his adult life, regretting this greatly in his later years as he contemplated the consequences his habit would have for his health and longevity. Freire's work continued to live on, with the posthumous publication of several books over the next decade: *Pedagogy of Freedom* (Freire, 1998a), *Teachers as Cultural Workers* (Freire, 1998b), *Politics and Education* (Freire, 1998c), *Pedagogy of Indignation* (Freire, 2004), and *Daring to Dream* (Freire, 2007). These publications, together with others from the 1990s, were pivotal in allowing Freire to address pressing questions relating to teachers and teaching, the process of inquiry, educational virtues, politics, and neoliberalism, among other key themes. In the last decade of his life, Freire had deepened, extended, and reworked aspects of the theory first developed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and had pushed his thinking in new directions with the prompting of his intellectual collaborators. Interest in his work has shown no signs of diminishing, with numerous books, chapters, and articles on Freirean themes having been published in the years following his death (Roberts, 2010).

The Ontological, Epistemological and Ethical Basis to Freire's Thought

Freire's approach to education is underpinned by a complex ontology, epistemology, and ethic. Over the course of his writing career, Freire drew on the work of writers from a range of different intellectual traditions—liberalism, humanism, phenomenology, existentialism, Marxism, radical Catholicism, critical theory, and postmodernism—in

developing his ideas (Mackie, [1980](#); Mayo, [1999](#); Morrow & Torres, [2002](#); Peters, [1999](#); Roberts, [2000](#); Schugurensky, [2011](#); Webster, [2016](#)). He was an eclectic but systematic thinker, weaving insights from others with his own ideas to build a coherent educational theory. He demonstrated a willingness to listen to others, modifying, reinterpreting, and adding to his ideas over time. He was prompted by his own reflections, by constructive criticism, and by changes in Brazilian and world politics. There would, he discovered, be no shortage of new problems to address as policies and practices changed.

If Freire's work is examined holistically, it is not difficult to identify a number of key principles that remained consistent across his corpus of published writings. At the same time, and in keeping with his ontological position, there is a certain "unfinished" quality to his work, an openness that allows others to continue building on his legacy. There is no one best way to characterize his theoretical orientation, but Stanley Aronowitz's ([1993](#)) description of Freire as a "radical democratic humanist" provides a helpful starting point. This implies a synthesis of different bodies of work and in particular signals the integration of the philosophical with the political in Freirean pedagogy. The concept of humanization lies at the heart of Freire's work, linking the different elements of his philosophy, politics, and pedagogy together.

Humanization as Freire understands it is a process of becoming more fully human, and this has both ontological and historical dimensions (Freire, [1972a](#)). It is ontological because it is essential to what it means to *be* human. It is a "vocation," something we are all meant to pursue. But humanization takes place in a social context; it is pursued not in isolation, or merely as an intellectual process, but through our actions, with others, in the world. Humanization is thus also an historical vocation. Humans have a distinctive ability to see themselves in an historical light. As temporal beings, we can look back at the immediate or more distant past, ponder the present, and imagine possible futures. We are fundamentally *creative* beings, shaping history and culture while also being shaped by the structures, policies, practices, and ideas of the past and present. As human beings, we also have the ability to reflect on our activities in ways that are not evident, to the same degree or in the same ways, elsewhere in the animal kingdom (Freire, [1976](#)). We can ask questions, pose problems, and consider consequences. We can wonder how the world might be otherwise and take steps to change what we see and experience. From a Freirean perspective, we remain unfinished beings, always in a process of becoming. We never reach a point where we can say we are "complete" as human beings; there will always be more work to do.

Freire's concept of humanization was informed by his reading of Hegel and Marx, by phenomenologists such as Husserl and humanists such as Erich Fromm, by the Frankfurt School of critical theory, and by elements of existentialist thought (Mayo, [1999](#); McLaren, [2000](#); Morrow & Torres, [2002](#); Roberts, [2000](#); Webster, [2016](#)). From Hegel and Marx, Freire adopted a dialectical understanding of the nature of reality. He accepted the key Hegelian notions of contradiction, negation, and change, but emphasized, following Marx, the relevance of these ideas not just for the realm of consciousness but also for the material world (Torres, [1994b](#); McLaren, [2000](#)). For Freire, it is the dialectical relation between consciousness (thinking, feeling, and willing) and material reality (both "natural" and "social") that is crucial from an educational perspective. Through the constant interaction between these two spheres, change occurs. We form ideas, or experience emotions, or will ourselves to do something, and act on the basis of these inner promptings to change material reality. But the reality we create, and constantly recreate, also "acts back" on us, shaping patterns and possibilities for thought. Freire is clear, however, that while we may be "conditioned" by material structures, policies, and practices, this does not mean we are ever fully *determined* by them (see Freire, [1997a](#), [1998a](#)). He wants to retain a notion of critical human agency, while also acknowledging (with Marx) that some groups play a more powerful and prominent role than others in shaping how we understand ourselves, others, and the world.

How do we become more fully human? For Freire, it is through engaging in critical, dialogical *praxis* (Mayo, [2004](#); Roberts, [2000](#)). The classic account of praxis in Freire's work is to be found in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, [1972a](#)). There, Freire speaks of praxis as reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it. Reflection is a form of inner cognitive activity that is more than mere conscious apprehension. Reflection may be prompted by curiosity, or by a troubling incident, or via a deliberate effort to address a problem. Reflection is never a completely solitary process; it is always, even if only indirectly, social in nature. We learn to reflect through our interaction with others and the world. Our existence as social beings bears on both the content and the manner of our reflection. As a concept, reflection integrates two apparently opposite tendencies: movement and stillness. To be reflective demands a certain calmness, an ability to wait patiently, and to pay attention. Reflection is a kind of contemplation, and yet, for Freire it is more than that. We can remain calm in the middle of a literal or metaphorical storm (the latter might include situations of great distress, social discord, violent verbal or physical clashes, the pressure of workplace demands, or any number of other turbulent scenarios). In a world that never fully sits still, reflection can anchor us, direct us, and focus our intellectual and emotional energies. But reflection must be constantly renewed. As we act on our reflections, changing the world in doing so, we are faced with a transformed reality that itself demands further reflection. This is not a linear, mechanical process but a dynamic one, with a continuous, often subtle and unnoticed, interplay between reflection and action. Reflection, then, is also a form of movement.

Action is pivotal to our development as human beings and is an essential element in the process of transformation. To act is to harness the capacities we have as physical, intellectual, and emotional beings. Action, like reflection, sets us in motion. It allows us to test ideas, express our creativity, and become agents of historical change. Given the circumstances with which he was dealing in his work as an adult educator, action for Freire was closely connected with politics (see Freire, [1972a](#), [1972b](#), [1976](#)). In the northeast of Brazil, Freire witnessed malnutrition so severe that children suffered permanent damage to their cognitive faculties. For many communities, access to healthcare was severely restricted. Safe drinking water would often be in short supply. Educational opportunities were limited. Those who were deemed illiterate could not vote and were thus denied the most basic form of political participation. In both urban and rural areas, workers were often exploited and mistreated. Merely talking about these problems was not enough; this, Freire said, would amount to nothing more than “verbalism” (Freire, [1972a](#)). Political action was needed, and this, Freire recognized, would pose enormous challenges.

Freire advocated not mere reform, which would leave the underlying political structures intact, but radical, revolutionary change. He was a radical in the sense that he wanted to go to roots of the problems he observed and experienced. He was not naïve about the obstacles that stood in the way of this kind of change. In rural communities, landowners would fight to maintain their control over peasant workers. In urban environments an emerging class of corporate elites would push aggressively to keep wages low. The conservative wing of the Catholic Church would also seek to preserve the status quo. Political change would, he realized, involve a long-term, multifaceted process of struggle.

To impede others in their pursuit of humanizing praxis is dehumanizing. Evidence of dehumanization was all around Freire as he lived and worked in Brazil. He argued, however, that while dehumanization was a historical reality it was not something we had to accept as inevitable (Freire, [1972a](#)). Dehumanization is manifested, in concrete terms, through oppressive structures, policies, practices, relations, and ideas. Addressing oppression requires an act of *liberation*. Liberation, Freire made plain, is never simply given; it emerges through critical, reflective, dialogical action. Liberation demands struggle and sacrifice. It is politically difficult and existentially draining; indeed, liberation is often intimately connected with suffering and despair (Chen, [2016](#); Roberts, [2016](#)). Liberation is not an endpoint to be reached by individuals; it is an ongoing, social process.

While the struggle against oppression is one of the defining features of Freire’s approach to liberation, this on its own does not capture adequately what he means by the term. Liberation also entails the development of key virtues, the most important of which is *love*. It is possible to see Freire’s entire life’s work as a pedagogy of love (cf. Darder, [2002](#), [2003](#); Fraser, [1997](#)). Freire’s particular interest is in a kind of “armed” love that grapples with the complexities of social, cultural, and political change. From Che Guevara, Freire adopted the principle that love is a revolutionary virtue (see Freire, [1972a](#); McLaren, [2000](#)). Love is commitment, care, and respect in our relations with others. It arises from our recognition that we are all engaged, each in our own ways, in a process of trying to make sense of ourselves and the world in which we live. In the field of education, love is significant in other ways as well. Teachers demonstrate love in the way they work with students, and scholarly activity demands a love of our domains of study.

Other virtues of importance for the Freirean notion of liberation include humility, openness, tolerance, trust, hope, and political commitment. Humility arises from the recognition that there is always more to learn. It is also connected with our ability to see in ourselves, as in others, frailties and weaknesses, and to accept these imperfections as part of the human condition. Openness is necessary if we are to make the most of the learning opportunities that present themselves to us. To do so, we need to be able to trust those with whom we work. Tolerance, which does not mean giving up the right to express one’s own views, is required if we are to hear what others have to say and respond with a sense of fairness and equanimity. Hope is an expression of the human capacity to struggle and to strive, to imagine and build better worlds. A world characterized by oppression and despair does not cancel out hope; it gives it its reason for being. Without political commitment, the dream of social transformation cannot occur. (See further, Freire, [1972a](#), [1997a](#), [1998b](#), [2007](#); Roberts, [2010](#), [2015](#), [2016](#); Rossatto, [2005](#).)

Freire’s epistemology builds on his ontology and ethic. Knowing for Freire is not a form of isolated, individual, abstract, purely cognitive activity. It is social and practical in nature, and it involves not just the intellect but feelings and the body as well (see Borg & Mayo, [2000](#); Freire, [1996](#), [1998a](#)). Knowing emerges and continues to develop as we interact with an ever-changing world. Knowledge thus remains necessarily incomplete (Roberts, [2000](#)). In addition to the virtues discussed above, Freire identifies a number of attributes specific to the process of knowing. Knowers are curious, restless beings, always open to further learning. They adopt an investigative and inquiring frame of mind when addressing a question, issue, or problem. Knowing takes effort; it requires discipline and persistence. Knowers probe and prod, often in places neglected by others or in ways that are novel and creative. Knowing is a risky process. It can be destabilizing and upsetting. It can throw up contradictions and tensions that hitherto had remained submerged or unacknowledged. As knowers, we must be able to pay attention, maintaining our focus on the object of study while also

retaining a certain distance from it (see Freire & Shor, [1987](#)). Knowing involves a willingness to not only accept, but actively embrace, a degree of uncertainty in our lives. Those who are, as Freire liked to put it, “too certain of their certainties,” often impede the process of knowing not only for themselves but for others as well (cf. Freire, [1997a](#)).

Freirean Pedagogy

The critical and dialogical elements of humanizing praxis come to the fore in Freire’s integration of educational theory with pedagogical practice. The reflective, critical character of Freirean praxis is embodied in the complex and controversial notion of *conscientization*. Freire first employed this term (in its original Portuguese form as *conscientização*) in the late 1960s. He did not invent the word, but he was the most prominent thinker to adopt it.

In *Education: The Practice of Freedom* (Freire, [1976](#)) Freire explains conscientization by reference to different modes of consciousness that had prevailed among particular groups at given times in Brazil’s history. Magical (semi-intransitive) consciousness, dominant in rural peasant communities, was associated with a kind of resigned acceptance of social problems. The focus was very much on hand-to-mouth survival. Among such communities, difficulties experienced in daily life would often be attributed to “God’s will” or fate or destiny. Naïve consciousness, common among the new urban populations that emerged in Brazil in the 20th century, accepted the importance of change, but only of a reformist kind. The emphasis among these groups was on polemics, performance, and appearances rather than careful historical or structural analysis. Critical consciousness, the mode of thought to which Freire himself was committed, is characterized by depth in the interpretation and addressing of problems, a willingness to engage in dialogue, and a readiness to accept the new without rejecting the old simply because it is old, among other qualities (Freire, [1976](#)).

Freire did not intend these different modes of consciousness to be seen as fixed, sequential steps or stages in a linear process of individual change (Roberts, [1996a](#)). Nor did he want conscientization to be regarded as a kind of educational silver bullet that could somehow solve all social problems. Frustrated by what he regarded as frequent examples of misunderstanding, Freire stopped using the term *conscientização* for some years, but retained the ideas of cultivating an informed conscience (Liu, [2014](#)) and developing a critical orientation toward the world as fundamental aims of education.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, [1972a](#)), Freire draws a distinction between two opposing approaches to education. Banking education relies on a one-way, monological process of transmission from a teacher to students. Students are expected to listen passively and to receive and accept the content of the teacher’s narration without question. Knowledge is seen as a gift possessed by teachers, to be bestowed upon—banked into—ignorant students. Freire was strongly opposed to banking education and offered an alternative in the form of problem-posing education (sometimes called authentic education or liberating education). Problem-posing education begins with the assumption that both teachers and students have something important to contribute to an educational situation. It builds on, but does not rest with (i.e., endorse uncritically), the knowledge and experience students bring with them to any educational setting (cf. Shor, [1980](#)). Knowledge is regarded not as a neutral, static body of information and skills to be passed on from an all-powerful teacher to waiting students; rather it is seen as something that is actively constructed and contested. The focus is on the posing and addressing of problems rather than the issuing of answers. Questioning, critique, and debate are encouraged. Dialogue becomes central to the pedagogical process.

Problem-posing education is not the same as problem-solving education. Freire’s support for the former had an ontological, epistemological, and political grounding. In seeing human beings and knowledge as necessarily incomplete, as always in a process of becoming, Freire recognized that while one problem was being addressed, others would arise. Moreover, the deep social injustices that provided the backdrop for Freire’s work in Brazil did not lend themselves to easy, quick-fix “solutions”; they required long-term, ongoing political work. Freire also wanted to signal the educational importance of the very act of seeing something as a problem to be investigated. This process is itself a subversive act in a world where some ideas have become so deeply entrenched that they are seldom questioned. This does not mean all things—all implied or overtly expressed ideas—must be questioned all the time. This is, of course, an impossibility, in both theoretical and practical terms. For some ideas to be questioned, others must simultaneously be accepted. And in day-to-day pedagogical practice, there is only so much time that can be devoted to given activities. Teachers and students will always need to prioritize their efforts, deciding which areas of study warrant deeper investigation than others.

Problem-posing or liberating education is not a “method” but an approach or orientation to education built on a distinctive understanding of human beings and the world (Freire, [1987](#), [1997b](#); Macedo, [1997](#); Roberts, [1996b](#)). It is

possible to identify key principles or features or themes in Freirean pedagogy—e.g., the development of certain virtues, or the commitment to dialogue, critical consciousness, and humanizing praxis—but these cannot be reduced to a “method” or a list of methods. Freire warned repeatedly against the dangers of attempting to transport ideas uncritically from one context to another. Methods, he insisted, should not become universal prescriptions but must be determined according to the particulars of a given situation. What methods are selected will depend on who is being taught, by whom, for what, when, where, and why.

The defining feature of banking education is not “teacher talk” but its authoritarian nature. Freire stressed that banking education forms part of a wider oppressive social system, where the interests of some groups are favored over others (see further, Beckett, [2013](#); Jackson, [2016](#); Roberts, [2000](#)). In explicitly or implicitly suppressing difference and dissent, and in denying the possibility of critical agency in the co-construction of knowledge, banking education dehumanizes both the teacher and the students. Banking education treats students as objects rather than knowing subjects in the learning process. It is manipulative and controlling in character. It is not, however, the presence of a teacher who speaks and students who listen that in itself makes banking education oppressive. A university lecture need not be an example of banking education (see Escobar et al., [1994](#); Freire & Shor, [1987](#)). Listening does not have to be passive acceptance. The key is active engagement with the ideas, whether this is via speech or quiet critical reflection or writing, or in some other way. Liberating education is not an “anything goes” affair; it must, Freire argues, have a strong sense of structure, direction, and rigor (Freire & Shor, [1987](#); Horton & Freire, [1990](#); Roberts, [1996b](#)).

While Freire did want to break down traditional barriers between teachers and students, this did not mean he saw no differences between them in their respective roles and responsibilities. He was emphatic that he was a teacher and not merely a facilitator (Freire & Macedo, [1995](#)). A teacher, he pointed out, can exercise authority, and *be* an authority, without becoming authoritarian. Teachers have a responsibility to know their subject domains well. They need to prepare thoroughly for classes, provide an organizational structure for the courses they teach, and give some guidance on reading material. Teachers also need to know when to intervene in an educational dialogue in order to allow further productive dialogue to proceed (Freire & Shor, [1987](#)). Teachers should alert students to competing perspectives in addressing complex topics, and they should always be open to having their own ideas challenged by the students with whom they work. This does not mean, when addressing contentious problems and issues, that teachers cannot hold a view themselves. What should be avoided, Freire maintains, is the imposition of the teacher’s view, or any other, as if there is only one legitimate position that can be adopted (Escobar et al., [1994](#); Freire & Faundez, [1989](#); Roberts, [1996c](#)).

For Freire, the idea of “neutral” education is an impossibility; teaching and learning are always ethical and political activities (Benade, [2012](#); Freire, [1985](#), [1987](#), [1998a](#), [1998c](#); Giroux, [1983](#), [2010](#); Horton & Freire, [1990](#); Mayo, [1997](#), [1999](#); McLaren, [1999](#); Roberts, [2000](#), [2010](#)). This is so in multiple respects. At a global level, international organizations such as the OECD and ranking systems of the kind exhibited by the PISA process play an important role in shaping national educational agendas. Multinational corporations mold patterns of behavior and consumption that bear on everyday educational life (e.g., in the use of digital technologies, the Internet, and social media). Within individual countries, the political nature of education is evident in the laws that govern what can and cannot be done in institutions such as schools and universities, in the decisions made and actions taken by politicians, and in the policies that are produced.

Questions about what to include and exclude from the curriculum, what should be read, how students should be assessed, and how they should be taught are all political in nature. The physical environment of an educational setting can also have an important influence on what becomes possible in pedagogical terms. At an individual level, teachers and students will always bring with them a set of assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, and ideas about how the world is structured, what it means to be a human being, what we should strive to achieve, and so on, all of which will play a part in giving each educational setting its distinctive character. For Freire, education does not just have political “aspects”; it *is* a form of politics (Freire & Shor, [1987](#); Shor, [1993](#)). Claims that education is or can be or should be “neutral” or “apolitical” are, he suggests, either naïve or disingenuous. Indeed, such claims often play a key political role in battles over curriculum content and pedagogical practice.

Freire’s work as an adult literacy educator played a pivotal role in shaping these ideas. When he was making his mark in this field in Brazil, the dominant pedagogical approach was banking education and the content that formed the heart of most literacy initiatives was largely disconnected from the everyday realities of the students. Freire offered an alternative way of thinking about literacy and the purpose of education. His starting point was to learn as much as he could about the lives of the adults who would be learning to read and write. From this initial research, a rich picture would be built up of family and working life for participating communities. Freire was interested not just in what people did to make their way in the world but how they did it and why. He wanted to know how people understood themselves and their relations with others. He listened to expressions of hope and despair, conveyed in distinctive ways by different participants.

With these key themes and features of daily life in mind, Freire and his coworkers developed a set of 15–18 generative words. The first word would always be trisyllabic. Thus, in an urban area, participants might begin with a word such as *favela* (slum) or *tijolo* (brick). By breaking the word down into its syllabic parts and recombining the consonant with other vowels, a host of new words could be generated: *loja* (store), *juta* (jute), and so on. Dialogue between participants on nature, culture, human relationships, reflection, and learning was encouraged. This element of the program was regarded as an integral part of the process of learning to read. The intent throughout was to maintain a close connection between “word” and “world,” enabling participants to not only acquire basic reading and writing skills at a rapid rate but also to deepen their understanding of the society in which they lived (see further, Bee, [1980](#); Freire, [1976](#); Lankshear, [1993](#); Roberts, [2000](#); Taylor, [1993](#)). Freire was open about the politics involved in this process, noting that other approaches were similarly nonneutral, but paid a heavy price for this when the military swept to power in Brazil.

In later work, Freire continued to develop the idea of a critical integration of “word” with “world,” applying the principles that had underpinned his Brazilian and Chilean adult education initiatives to other contexts. In discussing university reading requirements, for example, he spoke of the importance of allowing a text to both challenge and be challenged. We should, with due humility and openness, be prepared not only to ask questions of what we are reading but also to allow the author’s ideas to question us. An author may prompt critical reflection by offering new ideas, or by disrupting our usual patterns of thought and categories for understanding. Freire’s position was one of “fighting” with a text while “loving” it (Freire & Shor, [1987](#)). He encouraged readers to link the texts they engage with social, political, and cultural concerns in their own time and place. Freire acknowledged the importance of balancing breadth with depth in reading (Roberts, [2010](#)). Breadth is necessary if we are to grasp how and where the ideas in one text might be placed in relation to a broader intellectual tradition. But depth is vital if we are to make the most of what a book can offer to us. Developing depth in reading can involve, among other things, processes of searching, reflecting, analyzing, discussing, comparing, and applying. In his teaching, Freire would sometimes spend several weeks on just a few pages of text, and in his own reading he would often become utterly immersed in a book for hours at a time (Freire, [1996](#); Freire & Shor, [1987](#)).

From an early age, reading opened up new worlds for Freire, and the outdoor environment of his immediate childhood was, quite literally, his classroom. He learned to read under the shade of the mango tree at his home (Freire & Macedo, [1987](#)). Freire supported the reading of works by a diverse range of authors, including many that would often be marginalized in university courses, but he also believed it was important for students to encounter the “classics” in their field. He speaks, for example, of the need to read Marx’s work, regardless of whether one accepts or rejects a Marxist theoretical framework (Freire & Shor, [1987](#)). Well-written, rigorous scholarly texts offer an opportunity for dialogue, not just with those who study them in groups (e.g., in a university class), but, indirectly, between the reader and author of a work and with the others with whom one associates elsewhere in life. Texts should, Freire showed, live with us, informing the way we think about ourselves, the decisions we make, the way we interact with others, and the actions we take. Reading critically and well is demanding but rewarding. It is both a political process and an aesthetic experience and it plays an important role in our formation as ethical beings.

True to his own ideas, Freire remained a restless soul right up to the time of his death. As is clear from his later publications, Freire was, in particular, deeply troubled by the destructive impact of neoliberal policies in Brazil (Freire, [1994](#), [1996](#), [1997a](#), [1998a](#), [2004](#), [2007](#)). Neoliberalism, whatever form it takes in a given context, stands opposed to almost every aspect Freirean pedagogy. Neoliberals focus on individuals as self-interested, competitive, choosing consumers. Freire stresses that we are social beings. He argues against actions motivated purely by self-interest, and he is heavily critical of cultures of relentless consumption. He favors cooperation, communication, and collegiality over competitive individualism. Under neoliberalism, knowledge becomes a commodity, with the same properties as other goods and services in a market. Knowledge becomes important not for its own sake, or for the role it can play in addressing social injustices, but for its exchange value (Roberts & Peters, [2008](#)). There is, from a neoliberal perspective, no need to distinguish between knowledge and skills or information. Indeed, for neoliberals, there is a separation of the “knower” from “knowledge”; the latter can exist without the presence of the former. For Freire, knowing is part of the wider process of humanization, and the idea of reducing knowledge to a figure that can be listed on a balance sheet is an absurdity.

In institutions governed by neoliberal principles, there is an obsession with measurement and performance. From a Freirean point of view, the very act of trying to measure everything is itself dehumanizing. Freire’s work shows that when we reflect deeply on what matters most in education, the language of measurement is unable to help us. How, Freire might have asked, can we “measure” love, care, courage, commitment, humility, and hope? Any attempt to do so diminishes the pedagogical possibilities in these terms and denies their philosophical complexity. Neoliberals support “free” trade, and education is expected to adhere to that principle; Freire would have wanted to have seen *fair* trade, ultimately under a different mode of production, with education playing a key role in preparing people to critically evaluate the structures that might facilitate or impede this. In a neoliberal world, economic goals dominate; for Freire, prosperity and individual or corporate advancement should be secondary to the cultivation of human virtues and the

struggle to overcome oppression. In the West, neoliberalism has emerged as a form of late capitalism, interwoven with the broader process of globalization. Freire saw capitalism as intrinsically “evil” (Freire, [1998a](#)) and held on to a dream of democratic socialism that would render the world less discriminatory, exploitative, unequal, and unjust (Freire, [1993](#), [1996](#), [2007](#)). Freire saw neoliberalism as a fatalistic discourse: a way of thinking that denied the possibility of alternatives to global capitalism and denuded education of its humanity and hope (Freire, [2004](#); Roberts, [2010](#)). Through his writing, speaking and other activities, he fought hard to resist the tide of neoliberal reform, aware that this would be a long-term battle to which many would have to contribute.

Criticisms, Responses, and Possibilities

While acclaimed by many, Freire has also attracted his share of his criticism. Over the years, he responded to many of the key questions raised by others, while also leaving open a number of areas of inquiry for further investigation. In his dealings with critics, he worked hard to apply the principles he espoused in his writings. When faced with a view contrary to his own, he would try to avoid a defensive or reactionary posture and instead, in a spirit of equanimity, pay careful, respectful attention to what was being said. He reserved his sense of moral outrage and indignation (Freire, [2004](#)) for the brutalities of neoliberalism. Regardless of the problem under investigation, he was committed to the ideals openness and humility, and he sought to learn more through engaging the critiques of others. At times, tensions emerged even with friends and colleagues (see, for example, Freire & Faundez, [1989](#)) but these were for the most part productive in allowing Freire and his partners in dialogue to work through complex, contested ideas.

In the early years following his rise to international prominence, critics focused principally on Freire’s openly political approach to education, his style of writing, his manner of dealing with the process of class struggle, and his concept of conscientization (see further, Roberts, [2015](#)). Freire’s response to the charge that he was making education political has already been signaled; he would draw attention to the ways in which it has always been thus, demonstrate the value of clarity and honesty in understanding and declaring one’s politics, and reinforce the importance of allowing and fostering alternative points of view. He would also show that commitment to a specific political goal or group or movement should never override the need for rigor and balance in the teaching of curriculum content (cf. Freire, [1987](#)).

Freire’s style of writing also did not please all. Some saw the language employed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as too abstract or too “revolutionary” in flavor. Freire was aware, however, that a degree of abstraction was necessary if he was to give complex philosophical ideas their due. The notion of seeing something as “revolutionary” in the content and style of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was consistent with Freire’s intentions (even if his concept of revolution might have differed from that embraced by some of his critics) and also reflected the contexts that had shaped the book. But Freire was also at pains to point out that he was not interested in a kind of sloganizing where rhetoric would stand in for sound argument and theoretical substance (cf. Freire, [1985](#), [1994](#), [1997a](#); Freire & Faundez, [1989](#); Freire & Shor, [1987](#); Horton & Freire, [1990](#)). Freire’s use of the male pronoun in his early works, with “he” standing in for “he or she,” was also criticized. This practice was common at the time, but Freire could see that it was problematic and, in the dialogical books of the late 1980s and throughout his writings in the 1990s, adopted more inclusive language (see further, Freire, [1997b](#)).

Frequent references to Marx and Marxists can be found in Freire’s earlier publications. Even so, Freire found himself under attack from some who saw his emphasis on dialogue and the virtues associated with it (love, care, tolerance, a willingness to listen, and so on) as naïve when dealing with the realities of class struggle (see Freire, [1985](#)). Freire, while attentive to and respectful of these criticisms, was at the same time disturbed by any suggestion that a process of revolutionary change should, in the interests in overthrowing class oppression, ride roughshod over human communication and voices of difference.

A well-known early critique of conscientization was mounted by the sociologist Peter Berger ([1974](#)), who saw Freire’s depiction of different levels of consciousness as patronizing and paternalistic. Berger argues that Freire was committed to a process of “consciousness raising,” where an elite group of intellectuals would lift the oppressed masses from their ignorance. He claims that Freire’s approach to conscientization relies on the flawed idea that one person can be “more conscious” than another. The problem with Berger’s argument is that it attributes to Freire an understanding of consciousness, conscientization, and education that is inconsistent with the views conveyed in the Freirean texts available at that time. Freire supported the idea of people becoming more *critically* conscious, not “more conscious” in general. Freire’s early writings convey a much more nuanced, dynamic, dialectical view of consciousness than that implied by Berger’s account. The epistemology that underpins Freirean pedagogy is premised on the idea that no one is fully ignorant nor fully knowledgeable. Knowing is never complete and our consciousnesses are always changing as we interact with others and the world. Conscientization is better understood not as a matter of “consciousness raising” but as a continuous, subtle, ever shifting reflective process (Roberts, [1996a](#)). Others participate in shaping us as conscious

beings, but no one can “raise” someone else’s consciousness as if mechanically lifting it up from one relatively fixed, stable state to another. Freire’s emphasis on the importance of humility, listening, and respect, his condemnation of the authoritarianism of banking education, and his support for dialogue as a fundamental pedagogical principle also do not square with Berger’s implied portrait of an arrogant, all-knowing group of educationists or intellectuals intent on converting others to their truth.

In some of the work Freire published following Berger’s critique, notably his book *Pedagogy in Process* (Freire, [1978](#)), there are perhaps more serious grounds for concern. There, Freire leaves himself more exposed to charges of intellectual vanguardism (see Walker, [1980](#)). He also adopts, from Amilcar Cabral, the highly problematic notion of “class suicide” (see Mayo, [1999](#)). But the importance of contextualizing an author’s work must again be stressed. The substantive heart of *Pedagogy in Process* is a series of letters from Freire to influential figures in Guinea-Bissau in a situation of revolutionary change. It is true that Freire does seem to imply, in a number of publications, that there is a “correct” way of thinking. But when that language is examined in its appropriate contexts, it is clear that being “correct” in those cases means being *critical* (Roberts, [1999](#)). Applying his own ideas on the impossibility of neutrality, Freire would be happy to admit that he does have a preferred ethical position and that he favors some modes of thinking and being over others. When invited to serve as a consultant in a country such as Guinea-Bissau, or to lead a literacy program in a country such as Brazil, he cannot begin from a “blank slate”; his work will be shaped and informed by his existing knowledge and experience, his hopes and dreams, his limitations. All organized forms of education, whether in kindergartens, schools, universities, or other contexts, involve *intervention* in the lives of others. But a crucial distinction can be drawn between intervention and *imposition*, and Freire’s opposition to the latter is clearly evident in his work (cf. Escobar et al., [1994](#); Freire, [1994](#), [1997b](#), [1998a](#), [1998b](#), [1998c](#); Freire & Shor, [1987](#); Roberts, [1996c](#), [1999](#), [2010](#)).

This point has particular relevance in responding to claims that Freire’s pedagogy, if applied in non-Western or traditional societies, would constitute an act of “cultural invasion” (Bowers, [1983](#)). Freire had no intention of entering such contexts uninvited, let alone of imposing a narrow “Western mind-set” on the inhabitants of these societies. There is no one Western way of thinking or living or being, just as there is no single “Eastern” worldview, culture, or system of social organization. Freire accepted some ideas advanced by Western thinkers but rejected others. He valued dialogue and the posing of problems, for example, but rejected the ethos of individualism associated with some bodies of Western thought. He was not “against” tradition but rather sought to uphold what was best in both established cultural practices and new forms of social life (see further, Freire, [1976](#); Roberts, [1996c](#), [2003](#), [2015](#)).

Questions have also been raised about the concept of love advanced by Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, [1972a](#)). Nel Noddings ([1991](#)), for example, problematizes Freire’s account of the different roles played by oppressors and the oppressed in the process of liberation. She notes that Freire sees a certain power in the weakness of the oppressed, and that he believes the oppressed must, through an act of love, liberate both themselves and their oppressors. Noddings asks: “What in the history or the experience of the oppressed leads us to suppose that they will be loving? Or is liberation an act of love simply by virtue of its result?” (p. 161). In response to Freire’s urging of oppressors to take a radical stance and join with the oppressed in solidarity, she says: “[C]learly the oppressor can only approximate this solidarity. The oppressor will of necessity have a different consciousness from the oppressed and different instruments to express outrage” (p. 161). Freire’s call for an “act of love” instead of “pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures” on the part of the oppressor (cited in Noddings, [1991](#), p. 162) leaves Noddings dissatisfied: “A full description of this ‘act of love’ is not forthcoming, nor does Freire justify his belief that men can or will produce such acts” (Noddings, [1991](#), p. 162). A danger in rejecting “individualistic gestures,” as Noddings sees it, is that the oppressed will be reduced to an abstract category. “[B]y failing to treat in any depth the whole range of loving human activity,” Noddings argues, Freire “risks the success of his project” (p. 163).

This line of argument is connected with a broader concern expressed by some theorists about Freire’s approach to questions of difference. Weiler ([1991](#)), for instance, argues that Freire does not pay adequate attention to the multiple layers, tensions, and contradictions that characterize relations of oppression and liberation. Freire, it is said, relies on a universalist account of oppression, with a binary opposition between “oppressors” and “oppressed.” This ignores the fact that a man may, for example, be oppressed by a landowner or a capitalist but also *be* an oppressor in the way he treats his wife and children. When such criticisms were raised with Freire, he accepted that he may have said less about oppression along ethnic and gender lines, while explaining that his principal focus was class oppression (cf. Freire, [1997b](#); Freire & Macedo, [1993](#)). Where Freire did comment on matters of gender, he sometimes did himself no favors, and this remains a weakness in his work (cf. Mayo, [1999](#); Jackson, [2007](#)). While Freire himself said relatively little about questions of ethnicity, race, and indigenous education, other scholars have found much of value in his work in addressing these areas (see, for example, hooks, [1993](#); Murrell, [1997](#); Smith, [1999](#)).

Noddings is right that in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire's account of love leaves some unanswered questions. But Freire urged his critics to read beyond *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and to recognize that his ideas had evolved and developed over time. In later books, he spoke at some length about love from an ethical, political, and educational point of view. He reinforced his abhorrence of sexism and racism—indeed, all forms of discrimination (see Freire, [1993](#))—but also noted that people were not *just* characterized by their differences. He argued for a position of unity in and through diversity (see Freire, [1996](#), [1997a](#), [1997b](#), [1998a](#)), primarily on ethical grounds but also for pragmatic reasons. He was aware that while differences often exist among those on the political Right (e.g., between economic liberals and moral conservatives), such groups would often forge a strategic unity when facing opposition from the Left. Achieving this kind of unity would sometimes prove difficult if not impossible for those on the Left, who would be unable to work productively with their differences and would (figuratively speaking) tear themselves apart through theoretical infighting.

Freire felt that differences should become not antagonistic to dialogue but essential for its existence. For without something to provide contrast or tension there is no movement in an educational conversation. It is not a matter of “overcoming” differences but rather of working constructively with them (cf. Rozas Gomez, [2007](#)). The very existence of complexity, tension, and conflict between groups in educational situations can itself become an object of critical inquiry. This is not to deny imbalances in the way power can be exercised in given situations. To the contrary, Freire maintained: relations of power (including those between teachers and students) must be confronted and addressed. But this, for Freire, does not mean dialogue between individuals and groups who differ along class, gender, ethnicity, and other lines is impossible (cf. Ellsworth, [1989](#)). Just as no group gathered for an educational purpose (or for any other reason) can be without differences, so too will there never be a situation where those present have nothing in common. Quite apart from any specific features that bind a group together (e.g., all being committed to learning in a particular subject domain, or all having been present during a significant event, or all feeling dissatisfied in some way with their work), there is, from a Freirean perspective, something that unites us all as human beings: our vocation of humanization—our universal human ethic, as Freire referred to it in his later work (Freire, [1998a](#)).

Freire's appeal to a position of unity in diversity remained an inadequate response from the point of view of many of his critics. Indeed, the term “diversity” might be seen by some as indicative of the shortcomings in his approach. “Diversity” is not the same as “difference.” Many who had serious misgivings about Freire's work on oppression and liberation drew on postmodern, poststructuralist, and postcolonial currents of thought. In his later books Freire does refer to postmodernism, speaking of it as an attitude of openness and linking it with his idea of not becoming too certain of one's certainties (see Freire, [1994](#); Peters, [1999](#)). He aligns himself with “progressive” postmodernism, emphasizing the importance of remaining committed to the process of political struggle and social transformation, whatever our differences, in the face of the enormous challenges posed by neoliberal policies and practices. But he did not address questions of postmodernism and postmodernity in a detailed way.

There are other bodies of work that could have been helpful in fleshing out some key elements of his pedagogical theory. Freire speaks frequently of the importance of feelings, as well as reason, in our educational development, and the theme of care is clearly important in his approach to teaching. Drawing more overtly on scholarship in the philosophy of emotion and the ethics of care could have enhanced these aspects of his work (see further, Roberts, [2010](#)). Freire has a great deal to say about epistemological, ethical, and educational virtues, but there is little direct engagement with the wider philosophical literature in this area (e.g., virtue ethics). Freire also said little about the world ecological crisis that emerged as a problem of great significance in the last quarter of the 20th century, though he was, it seems, beginning to write in this area near the end of his life (Schugurensky, [2011](#)).

Paulo Freire was a thinker who invited ongoing reflection and critical engagement from his readers. He actively encouraged educators to “reinvent” his work in their own contexts. He should not be seen as an educational “guru” or “hero” with “followers” or “disciples,” and attempts to construe Freire and/or those who engage his work in this way often say more about those applying such labels than those to whom they are applied. Freire's work has weaknesses and omissions, as is true, of course, of all significant figures in the history of educational thought. In the last decade of his life Freire was, in some respects, *too* productive, and the publication of fewer books, with more time to refine his ideas and to comment on the work of other scholars, might have addressed some of the shortcomings that remain in his educational theory (Roberts, [2015](#)). He was, in keeping with his own understanding of humanization, an “unfinished” writer, and there is considerable scope for further inquiry in building on the openings he provides.

Putting his ideas into conversation with other thinkers, East and West, is one way of pursuing this agenda. Among the many thinkers, teachers, activists, and writers with whom he has been compared are Lao Tzu, Confucius, Plato, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Maria Montessori, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, G. W. F. Hegel, Karl Marx, John Dewey, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Mikhail Bakhtin, Antonio Gramsci, Ernst Bloch, Simone Weil, Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas, Hannah Arendt, Che Guevara, Lorenzo Milani, Julius Nyerere, Jürgen Habermas, Hans-Georg Gadamer,

Michel Foucault, Ivan Illich, Maxine Greene, Nel Noddings, bell hooks, and Jacques Ranciere. This is by no means an exhaustive list. (Many of the names that appear here have been drawn from Schugurensky, [2011](#), pp. 188–191. See also Mayo, [1999](#); McLaren, [2000](#); Morrow & Torres, [2002](#); Roberts, [2010](#), [2012](#), [2016](#); Shim, [2007](#).) Such analyses often focus as much on differences as similarities, but the range of people invoked in these comparisons is itself significant and indicative of the reflection prompted by Freire's work. Critical comparative scholarship need not be limited to those who publish nonfictional texts. A Freirean framework can, for example, lend itself well to an educational reading of novels and short stories, and productive connections can be made between Freire and literary figures such as Mary Shelley, Hermann Hesse, and Fyodor Dostoevsky, among many others (Roberts, [2010](#); Rozas Gomez, [2015](#)).

Neoliberal ideas, policies, and practices continue to evolve, and the concerns Freire raised in the last few years of his life (Freire, [1994](#), [1997a](#), [1998a](#), [2004](#), [2007](#)) provide starting points for other scholars in addressing the problems posed by these developments. Several aspects of Freire's ontology, epistemology, and ethic are worthy of further reflection, including his concept of the human subject, his notion of knowing as a holistic process (involving the body, mind, and feelings), his approach to the pragmatics of political change, his theory of social class, and the nature and significance of key virtues in the process of liberation. Educators in a variety of pedagogical settings can build upon, critique, and apply ideas from Freire on the roles and responsibilities of teachers and students (see Peters & Besley, [2015](#)). Freire's link between "word" and "world" (Freire & Macedo, [1987](#)) has much to offer in theorizing literacy practices in a range of contemporary contexts. His comments on higher education (in Escobar et al., [1994](#), and elsewhere) have ongoing relevance for debates over university goals and priorities.

Paulo Freire has left an indelible mark on the theory and practice of education over the last half century, and it seems likely that his work will continue to generate wide-ranging interest, inquiry, and debate in the decades that lie ahead of us. Freire was deeply committed to education and social justice in his homeland of Brazil, but he was also a pedagogue who, in a certain sense, transcended national boundaries. In the years following the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he became one of the best known and most influential educationists in the world. His legacy lies not just in the books he published but also in the actions he took as a teacher, the decisions he made as an administrator, the feelings he expressed in his relationships with others, and the intellectual problems he posed for himself and others. When Freire's contributions are examined holistically, it is clear that his espousing of a "universal human ethic" did not prevent him from paying close attention to particulars. The myriad small moments of love, joy, anger, curiosity, pain, and persistence mattered greatly to Freire. He relished life in all its fullness and tried to encourage others to do likewise. Taking up this invitation, in whatever ways are appropriate for different groups, in specific contexts and at given times, is a task many educationists will embrace enthusiastically.