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EDUCATIONAL  
STUDIES

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THINKING STRATEGIES IN EDUCATION :  
THE POLITICAL LIMITS OF PAULO FREIRE'S PERSPECTIVE

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The appeal of Paulo Freire's writings on education is strongest for people looking for a way beyond an oppressive system of state education. His interest for those in SA who are concerned with constructing a people's education is therefore considerable. Smangaliso Mkhathshwa summarised this appeal in his Keynote Address at the 'National Consultative Conference on the Crisis in Education', held at Wits University in December 1985, where the movement associated with the slogan 'People's Education for People's Power' was launched:

'From the inherent ambivalence of education, namely its capacity to bring about what is least determined in man, as well as to programme and determine this, Paulo Freire derives what I think is his fundamental thesis: that there is no neutral education. Education is either for domestication or freedom. Although it is customarily conceived as a conditioning process, education can equally be an instrument of deconditioning. This is because people are essentially capable of knowing what conditions them, capable of reflecting on their action and behavior.'(1)

Freire's thought provides a beacon in the attempts to construct alternatives in education. Most particularly he appears to give direction to the elusive quest for educational strategies that combine processes fostering individual growth, (particularly amongst the poor, the dispossessed, the peasantry, the working class) together with a substantial political efficacy (or revolutionary potential.)

Freire's critique of established schooling practices as

oppressive and technicist coincides with a growing international dissatisfaction in recent times with the effects of mass schooling, and in SA with the effects of a repressive, elitist and segregated educational system. The worst features of prevailing pedagogical practices are imaginatively encapsulated in Freire's notion of 'banking education', and this critique coincides in broad outline with the various humanist, radical and some socialist critiques of established schooling that have emerged since the late 1960's in the advanced capitalist world. The common sense view of Freire's work amongst many progressive educationists is that Freire's work has special appeal, however, in that it was constructed within the cauldron of Third World struggle, in the fight of the South American and latterly African left against local and international domination of the ordinary people, and has an immediacy and efficacy which the critiques of British and USA academics lack; that his urgent humanism shows a way beyond the dry structuralism of their accounts, and recently has been presented as showing a route out of the arid relativism of post-structuralist discourse. (Freire has encouraged this perspective, writing that he 'began as a man of the Third World to elaborate not a mechanical method .... but an educational theory generated in the womb of the 'culture of silence itself').(2) Freire is thus sometimes seen to offer a way past the 'academic' critiques of education in capitalist society which are limited to accounts and analyses of the logic and logistics of domination, and lack 'a language of possibility' and strategies for transformation.(3) In Freire's notions of

'dialogical' or 'problem-solving' education leading to 'conscientization' is seen to lie a possible future for progressive, democratic and politically effective educational practices. Freire's potential to contribute is a controversial topic, however, as Roger Dale has pointed out. Dale says that unsuccessful attempts to implement Freirean programmes on a large scale have shown that while there may be 'space' for individual action of this sort, 'it cannot be assumed that it will achieve a societal dimension.'(4)

This paper will attempt a more detailed examination of Freire's work, through both a critical reading of his writings and through a contextualization of Freirean pedagogical practices. It will be argued that at the substantive level of constructing practices in and around education in South Africa, Freire's work does not have much to offer, beyond the, to us obvious, assertion that education is not neutral. His worth remains at a rhetorical level, it is argued, rather than as a guide for thinking about practice. In criticism of his work, however, one is forced to consider with greater care what might be the potential of and constraints upon a move towards 'People's Education' in the South African context.

#### FREIRE'S PEDAGOGY

The concepts of 'banking education' and 'education for domestication' associated with Freire characterise prevailing teaching approaches as being premised on a hierarchical model of

pedagogy which sees teaching as cultural transmission, assumes a given body of knowledge/culture, and sees learners as largely ignorant 'empty vessels'. In Freire's terms, the content of education 'whether values or empirical dimensions of reality' are 'lifeless and petrified', the learners are 'passive receptacles'. The teacher 'makes deposits' which the students patiently receive. The learner is 'an empty mind passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside'. The effect of 'banking education is to serve the interests of the 'dominant minority' by making the 'dominated majority' passive and adapted to the world which the oppressors control. (5)

Without exploring the dynamics of this model at this point, it can be said to coincide broadly at a descriptive level, but with divergences and differences of emphasis at an analytical level, with a large body of critical theory in education. This includes the work of the 'deschoolers (Illich, Reimer, Holt), the 'new sociology of education' theorists in the UK in the 1970's (Young, Keddie, Bernstein), neo-Marxist critiques based primarily on theories of economic reproduction (Bowles & Gintis, Anyon), theories of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu,), and the more recent work drawing eclectically from these traditions of Apple and Giroux in the USA, Connell in Australia, Whitty in the the UK, and an emerging tradition in South Africa as represented in Kallaway's edited collection. All these approaches, drawing in different ways from Marxism particularly, but also from Weber and Durkheim, have been concerned to show the power relations buried in the curricula of mass schooling, and, more particularly, how educational knowledge, and the transmission and distribution

thereof is an expression of a particular set of power relations associated with modern capitalism. Most of these theorists have presented accounts of the dynamics of control at a far more sophisticated level than Freire's analysis, I would argue, but have been short of concrete proposals for change.

It is not surprising, therefore at least some of these theorists (e.g. Young, Aronowitz and Giroux) have referred to Freire as outlining a non-hierarchical model of learning, and a possible way out of the impasse set up by an intractable and seemingly immovable system of mass education which serves the interests of the powerful and the rich. In African countries, as well as in South America and Asia a way out is sort from the socially debilitating effects of a burgeoning, expensive, elitist and non-functional education system inherited from the colonial powers, and as Dale suggests, the 'Paulo Freire solution' is the most well known (if, in Dale's opinion, ineffective).(6)

From Freire's critique of established teaching practices emerges his notion of 'education for liberation', or 'problem-posing' education. This is, essentially, an interactive and non-hierarchical approach to teaching. Instead of the 'bank-clerk teacher' we now have the 'humanist', 'revolutionary educator.' Instead of the 'necrophilic' tendencies which treat people as objects and thus reify individual consciousnesses, 'problem-posing education sees people as conscious beings, and consciousness as being directed towards the world'. 'Liberating

education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information'. It is a learning situation in which 'the cognisable object [the contents of the learning activity] far from being the end of the cognitive act intermediates the cognitive actors - teachers on the one hand and students on the other'. 'Problem-posing education' demands the resolution of the teacher-student dichotomy. Dialogue relations - indispensable to the capacity of cognitive actors to co-operate in perceiving the same cognisable object are otherwise impossible'...'Through dialogue the teacher - of - the - students and the students - of - the - teacher cease to exist. The teacher is no longer the - one - who - teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in their turn also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow.'(7)

Freire's problem-solving approach to education has resonances with the 'progressive movement' in education in the USA (as in Dewey's notion of schools as 'laboratories of freedom') (8) and in the UK with the 'child-centred' approach to primary-school teaching, where it is 'no longer a case of children being rigorously drilled, of inculcating "facts" regarded as sacrosanct, but of schooling being adapted to the requirements of the child'. The child is not regarded as an empty vessel to be filled by the teacher, but to a large extent as an arbiter of his own education'. 'Artificial' disciplinary barriers are removed and the curriculum is based on 'problem-solving' rather than subject areas.(9) The aim is 'to allow free expression in order to foster what is individual in each human-being', for 'the

purpose of teaching is to bring ever more out of man rather than to put more into him'.(10)

On the one hand these 'progressive' and 'child-centred' approaches to teaching and the curriculum have been kept in the margins by the hegemony of the dominant academic curriculum where learning is subject-based, knowledge is abstract and stratified, and teaching is by way of transfer of knowledge from teacher to taught. On the other hand these approaches are either regarded as 'liberal' or as having no major political significance or revolutionary potential,(11) whereas Freire's approach makes claim to being both radical and politically significant. This is clearly related to the moment of its production, its emergence from South America at a time of intense social struggle.

An attempt at making some evaluation of Freire's potential for contributing to thinking about strategies in education will clearly have to deal with the particularities of his thought before any substantive criticism can be attempted.

#### THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND INFLUENCES IN FREIRE'S WORK

Underlying Freire's work is a dialectical epistemology for interpreting the development of human consciousness in its relation to reality. This draws from Hegelian and existentialist thought, phenomenology, Marxism of the Frankfurt school particularly the work of Erich Fromm, and most particularly from Catholic theology. It runs something like this:



People as subjects relate to the objective material world by way of a dialectical process. Praxis, which is action and reflection, enables people to overcome the duality of their existence and participate meaningfully in the unfolding of history, which is the inevitable 'humanization' of people. People 'exist', as opposed to animals which 'live' when they relate to their world in a critical way. To exist is to be aware of people as subjects, and to be aware of history and time. People participate in history when they produce culture, i.e. when they critically reflect on and act upon the main themes of their times, and through the process of dialogue actively contribute to new meanings. It is the capacity for dialogue which is characteristic of the critical consciousness. It is this critical consciousness, or capacity for dialogue, which enables people to produce a culture and thus become subjects. This is people's natural vocation and is what Freire is referring to when he talks about the 'humanization' of people.

Freire's understanding of such important social categories as history, politics, culture and knowledge are located within this dialectic. Criticisms of specific aspects of Freire's pedagogy similarly need to take account of how all of Freire's thought is based on these epistemological assumptions. Crucial influences on Freire in the formulation of his thought are the theologians Teilhard de Chardin and Henrique de Lima Pe Vaz.(12) Robert Mackie summarises Teilhard's thought as follows: 'Teilhard

conceived of socialization as a process of growth among humanity which was the result of an ultimately inevitable and irreversible dynamic grounded in the biological and psychosocial nature of human beings. Teilhard stressed our final 'hominisation' as we collectively evolve to the 'point omega' which is a finality of perfect evolution'.

'Point omega' is conceived as the Man-God whose second coming will bring about the plenitude of the universe of persons'. For Henrique Pe Vaz, according to Mackie, 'historical consciousness depends upon a critical and intentional reflection on the historical process itself. The present is understood, both as a result of the past, and as a potentiality for the future. For Vaz when we look critically at our world, we become aware of the fact that by our actions we transform it. It is transformation by people themselves which not only humanizes the world but is also the specific obligation of modern history.' (13) Mackie insists that the formulations of Teilhard and Vaz are crucial for Freire: 'Their concepts of socialization and humanization underlie Freire's notions of humanity, human relationships, consciousness, praxis and conscientization.(14)

#### THE TWO STAGES MODEL

Most commentators see two distinct stages in Freire's work: The first is that of an early liberalism, before the military coup in Brazil of 1964. Freire, his fellow Catholic activists and leftist intellectuals developed a discourse of social modernization within an economic framework of national development by way of

industrialisation and land reform. Freire drew particularly on Karl Mannheim's discussion about liberty, democratic planning, fundamental democratization of society, and the theory of democratic personality. Mannheim's notion of the 'awareness process' is seen to be influential in Freire's notion of 'critical consciousness'.(15) Freire also draws on Karl Popper for his notion of Brazil as a society in the process of opening.(16) It is at this time that Freire develops in full his methods of adult literacy teaching, and his concept of 'conscientization' (conscientizacao), where people in learning groups develop critical attitudes by way of dialogue on relevant topics. Education is seen at this time to play a crucial role as a form of 'cultural action whereby the Brazilian people could learn, in place of the old passivity, new attitudes and habits of participation and intervention' to facilitate in Brazil becoming a 'being for itself'.(17) Freire at this time makes strong associations between the processes of literacy learning and the acquisition of critical consciousness. People who were illiterate were prohibited from voting at this time and Freire's programmes were given much importance. Freire did not question the legislation that denied the vote to illiterates, and approvingly quotes a learner in a literacy class who says that 'the people of Brazil are now going to solve the problems of Brazil by voting consciously'.(18)

Freire's first major work appeared at this time, published later in English as 'Cultural Action for Freedom' and was received

enthusiastically by Catholic activists as well as the left. The Goulart populist regime had a programme of modest reform at this time including agrarian reform which attempted to destabilize the power of the traditional bourgeoisie and which precipitated a 'crisis of hegemony' amongst the bourgeoisie, leading to their call for the military coup of 1964.(19) Popular belief regarding Freire's work at this time holds that it had great effect in stirring the peasantry, and perhaps contributed to provoking the coup. There is another account however, as Peter Worsley tells it:

'In 1964, when the military seized power in Brazil, the nightmare of the bourgeoisie that the favelados would come down from the hills had it seemed come true. But the poor had not come to loot, to riot or to protest against the dictatorship. Exasperated by inflation and chaos under Goulart's populist regime, they descended from the hillsides and marched alongside businessmen and housewives in support of law and order, tradition, the family, and private property. For many left-wing intellectuals the double shock of the coup and its popular celebration pushed them into psychic breakdown. Others were to suffer prison and torture.'(20)

#### The second stage

Freire experienced brief imprisonment followed by exile. These experiences, together with the permeating effect of the successful Cuban revolution precipitated the radicalisation in Freire's work, as exemplified in 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'. In this work 'conscientizacao' and awareness-raising through dialogue, the same strategies as before are presented as

important strategies in the struggle of oppressed against oppressor. Freire's basic framework remains unchanged, but for him 'the main themes of the time' have changed. To appreciate what this means for him it is necessary to dip briefly into his understanding of history:

Human history for Freire is characterised by epochs. These are dynamically interrelated units of 'historical continuity characterized by a complex of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values and challenges in dialectical interaction with their opposites, striving towards fulfillment'. The concrete representation of these ideas, values etc. constitute the themes of that epoch, and the complex of interacting themes of an epoch constitute its 'thematic universe'. Given this situation people take up contradictory positions, some working to maintain the situation, others to transcend it. Conservative tendencies react by mythicizing reality, to reduce its dynamism, whereas the 'critical and dynamic view of the world strives to unveil reality, unmask its mythicization and achieve a full realisation of its human task : the permanent transformation of reality in favour of the liberation of men'. Generative themes are seen to be located in 'concentric circles' moving from the general to the particular, from universal themes to continental, regional, national, local.(21) In his earlier work the broadest epochal theme is seen to be the 'opening up' of society, the democratisation of social practices; for South America, the processes of modernisation and autonomous national development

and at a local level, for the peasants that of land reform. In his later work the epochal themes are seen to be those of domination and liberation, and for South America the phenomena of dependency and underdevelopment, and the struggle to transcend these.(22) In this work Freire assimilates a broad range of ideas, from Marx, Fromm, Che Guevara, Memmi, Fanon, Mao Zedong, Castro, and presents the action of such revolutionaries as Amilcar Cabral and the martyr-priest Camillo Torres as exemplary. But his fundamental theoretical attitude remains unchanged. Walker makes the same point rather differently : 'Freire stands in the broad Catholic tradition of syncretism, of synthesizing Christianity with various other theoretical and practical elements'.(23) The changes in Freire's work then are largely to do with a shift in the dominant paradigm amongst social theorists in his society, from modernisation to dependency.

#### THEORY AND PRACTICE

This next section attempts to construct a critique of some key Freirean constructs :

An overarching analytical point that needs to be made is that Freire's dialectical mode of theorising places a dichotomous and sociologically empty grid over all of human activity. Rather than being a warm humanism Freire's thought is constrained by an excessive structuralism that leads him to theorize the concrete in terms of dualities. For example, Freire has two basic categories, 'critical consciousness' and 'naive consciousness' to deal with the complexities of cultural and ideological practices.

Conscientization is the process whereby people move from naive to critical consciousness, and dialogue is the means. Along these lines, people are either 'submerged in reality' or else 'transform the world', either have a 'mythical' conception of the world or a 'real' conception of the world. Culture is the preserve of critical consciousnesses. In his brief resume of Brazilian history in 'Cultural Action for Freedom' he makes no attempt to reread the very traditional view of Brazilian history. There is not a word about the slave and peasant revolts, the struggles for freedom. These are ignored as being fanatical and isolated events carried out by people submerged in reality who did not even know they could know!

Because Freire's thought cannot adequately take account of the specificities of social practice, he does not have a theorisation of power which is equal to the social complexities he faces. His notions of oppressor and oppressed are empty and abstract categories and there is no sense of the dynamics of their conflict, beyond an attempt at a dualistic social pathology which draws from Erich Fromm. The revolutionary educator as well as the revolutionary are untheorised entities, except that they are from the bourgeoisie, have had an 'easter experience', committing class suicide to rise again on the side of the oppressed. Like dialogue and conscientization they are crucial entities, however, for it is they that resolve the dualities of being.

As described earlier, in 'problem-solving' education the teacher - student dichotomy is dissolved through dialogue and they all become student and teacher. What happens to the authority of the

teacher in this context? Does it disappear entirely? Freire is ambivalent on this : 'In this process arguments based on 'authority' are no longer valid; in order to function authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it!'(24) On the material relations between teacher and learner Freire remains largely silent. By way of comparison, in passing, we can compare Gramsci's attempt to account for the complexities of the relationship between 'intellectuals' and peasants : 'in the countryside the intellectual (priest, lawyer, notary, teacher, doctor, etc.) has on the whole a higher or at least different living standard from that of the average peasant and consequently represents a social model for the peasant to look to in his aspiration to escape from and improve his condition... The peasant's attitude towards the intellectual is double and appears contradictory. He respects the social position of the intellectuals, and in general that of state employees, but sometimes affects contempt for it... One can understand nothing of the collective life of the peasantry and of the germs and ferments of development which exist within it, if one does not take into account and examine concretely and in depth this effective subordination to the intellectuals'.(25)

In this regard the comments of Steurman, who worked in and observed Freirean learning groups in South America are interesting. She says that she 'was surprised to see the participants still relating to the co-ordinators as their teachers, i.e. not coming out with their own ideas but repeating



the same political slogans the co-ordinators themselves favoured.' She quotes Vanilda Paiva the major researcher on Freire working in Portuguese in South America as interviewing learning group co-ordinators who had worked with Freire, one of whom said : 'The discussions in class were thoroughly prepared by us in advance. Thus we already knew more or less what we were going to discuss in class, no matter what the students wanted. And later on, we said thousands of times that the vote should be free. But when elections came they still went to the mayor or the landowner to ask them for whom they should they vote, because the mayor and the landowner gave them medicines, took them to hospitals. Or, even worse, they asked us, the co-ordinators, for whom they should vote'.(26) It is also notable that in Freire's writings when he gives account of some interaction in a learning group the learners address him as 'You, doctor', 'a traditional and respectful way of addressing one's superior in Brazil'.(27)

How does the Freirean learning group survive the hostile attentions of the 'oppressor'? There is no way it can. The 'pedagogy of the oppressed' only operates under the benevolent or tolerant eye of some authority. Freirean programmes have nowhere survived in a pre-revolutionary situation, the dismantling of several programmes in South America and the assassination of 'militants' due to their public exposure as example.(28) In South Africa similar programmes have been both very small and very vulnerable to state disapproval. By contrast Freire's own adult education work has always taken place from a position of at least partially institutionalized authority, either that of the

state or the church, and has faced criticisms of 'reformism' from some of the left in South America.(29)

In his writings with reference to revolution and post-revolutionary society Freire never questions the distribution of power, or considers that the people should have any power over the leaders. The essence of the relationship between the leaders and the people for Freire is dialogue initiated by the leaders, and he says it is such dialogue which distinguishes a revolution from a military coup.(30) He does not talk about the different relations a revolution might bring as opposed to a military coup, such as control of production, and his concern with dialogue conceals that the crucial questions to do with revolution are power, and who has it.

**Knowledge : The content of the learning process**

Freire's antimonies of 'banking education' and 'problem-solving education' lead to a greatly circumscribed notion of what 'real' learning is about : Learning which involves 'transferrals of information' is bad, and learning which involves 'acts of cognition' is good. Knowledge comes from reflection on the self experience of the teacher-students/students-teachers. The discursivity of knowledge, the extent to which it is located within culturally and historically specific practices is not part of Freire's pedagogy. That this leads to a pedagogy that is impoverished and self-contradictory can be seen by a look at Freire's own discourse. While claiming it as a 'Third World' discourse forged in the crucible of struggle, its origins are as

much located in 19th century German metaphysics as anywhere else. From this basis Freire constructs an 'essentialist' discourse which denies its own discursive location.

The claim is made for Freire's pedagogy that it is enabling, i.e. that it enables people to take control of their own situation and change things, that it is a pedagogy of praxis. But what is the theory of action underlying Freire's pedagogy, and to what extent is it a theory of social action? One seeks in vain through Freire's work for a clear exegesis of the dynamics whereby reflection leads to action, conscientization is party to praxis. When faced with this issue Freire asserts an Hegelian tautology : 'If it is <sup>in</sup> speaking their word that men, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which men achieve significance as men .... Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed, even in part, the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus to speak a true word is to transform the world.'(31)The following passage shows how clearly he is following Hegel here :

'existence and self-consciousness are the same being, the same not as a matter of comparison, but really and truly, in and for themselves. It is only a one-sided unsound idealism which lets this unity again appear on one side as consciousness, with a reality per se against it on the other.'(32)

As a a basis for theorizing the concrete, the specific and the political, this perspective is clearly vacuous, as Marx pointed out. In his last book, 'The Politics of Education'. Freire admits to this weakness in his pedagogy: 'Actually, one of the weakest points of my work, on which I've done an autocritique, is the process of conscientization .... especially in my first theoretical works I made no - or almost no reference to the political character of education and I neglected the problem of social classes and their struggle ...'(33)

One has to ask how the Freirean pedagogy would locate itself in a programme of practical political struggle. How would it articulate with the nurturing of specific politic practices? How would it contribute to the systematic elaboration of a popular knowledge, where knowledge is located within a context of social struggle? The adult educators with whom Freire has conversed have repeatedly asked Freire for more guidance on the design of programmes of learning and teacher training, and particularly on the issue of post-literacy work. Freire has responded in vague generalisations. Under pressure from Guinea Bissau he gives the following schema for post-literacy work:

1. Development of reading, writing and mathematics
2. A systematic introduction of basic rudiments of grammatic categories and arithmetic
3. Continue to 'read reality' with texts of more varied and rich themes.
4. Develop a capability for critical analysis of reality and oral expression of this reality
5. Prepare the learners for a following stage, of technical training (34)

While this scheme is not without merit it retains Freire's commitment to learning as reflection, while allowing for the

acquisition of basic forms of knowledge which are regarded as socially useful. But there is no attempt to reaffirm, revitalise or elaborate on the specific cultural values and cultural identity of the learners.

The Freirean curriculum is not located with any sense of facilitating group formation, and group identity in the context of struggle. In contrast, by way of example, organised workers' movements in SA, have found the active expression of culture, by way of song, dance and plays to be a unifying and strengthening educational experience and supportive of other learning that occurs through the processes of organizational activity.

In a different vein, Richard Johnson has described the lively popular educational traditions of the working class in England in the early 19th century. These drew from the resources of family, neighbourhood and even place of work. They had a sense of 'really useful knowledge' which included 'political knowledge', theories of society, and analyses of inequality, poverty and exploitation.(35)

In both these cases learning is given a much more direct relation to people's lived experience than Freire's proposals despite his good intentions.

#### FREIRE AND ORGANISED SCHOOLING

The Freirean proposal does not deal with the established schooling system except in passing, in schematizing its oppressive features en route to outlining 'education for

liberation'. In practice Freirean programmes have happened on the edge of the state schooling system, dealing with the excluded, and offering a 'compensatory' or 'second chance' experience of education. As Torres expresses it, An 'important characteristic of this strategy is that with few exceptions its representatives have avoided working out this pedagogy within capitalist state institutions and are accustomed to working professionally in universities or private institutions, often closely connected with churches.' (36) But People's Education in South Africa clearly cannot avoid the issue of what to do about state education.

It can probably be assumed that it is one of the features of state control of the mass education system that alternatives will be attacked which threaten the hegemony of the state system, as illustrated by the restrictive legislation controlling independent initiatives in schooling, and state hostility to initiatives in People's Education has already been seen. The credibility of the schooling system has been shaken by the fierce offensive against it in recent years, but it has by no means been destroyed. The schooling system remains firmly linked to 'high status' knowledge, via the universities on the one hand, and to the labour market on the other.

There are fundamental contradictions within this situation, which are ongoing. State education is on the one hand a system of containment and control; on the other it is 'a positive space for building opposition'; state education is a positive thing as a source of skills which are enabling, not least of all for

purposes of building organized resistance : state education is a bad thing as an instrument of domination, stratification and legitimation. These contradictions are real and reflect the contradictions of the social formation, as Frith & Corrigan point out. It is not surprising then that the politics of education in their daily practice are confused.(37) (Resistance in education in South Africa has recently seen strategies of 'non-collaboration' -Liberation Now! Education Later!-, and 'reformist' strategies looking for piece-meal changes in the system.) But to turn to notions of 'non-formal' education, which Freirean thought might encourage as a major strategy seems to be a bad option. It is precisely because organised education is a socially powerful institution that it is a site of contestation. To vacate this site is to relinquish this struggle. The political problem in education is not how to evade the power of the state, nor even how to best use what is available in the state system, nor how to resist state power in education; it is, ultimately, how to take control of the education system.(38)

The process towards this end will arouse not just the opposition of the state's repressive forces, it will produce much conflict over appropriate strategies, around the two key areas of content and control. The major area of conflict is likely to be between those who seek to democratise education within a framework of equality of opportunity and those who seek to construct a form of mass education that contributes to socialist practices. At a more immediate level the fight to get SRC's recognised, expansion of teacher autonomy, and so on, will be greatly influenced by these

larger concerns. But the point is that this conflict will have to be largely fought within the context of the state system.

#### ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Alternative education, i.e. education outside the system of state provision, under the name of 'People's Education' and other names is a significant feature in education at present. Non-state initiatives have mushroomed in the wake of the extensive disturbances in state education particularly since 1984. Large numbers of students are being attracted to alternative ventures, many of which are echoes of state schools, but seeming to offer greater chance of educational success. Some of these claim to be 'progressive', but they are clearly only progressive by reference to the conditions prevailing in the state system.

Obviously a concern facing people working within the ambit of People's Education is : When does 'alternative education' become oppositional, and when does it remain simply 'alternative', riding along next to the state system as best it can without contributing to the consolidation of an effective and organised oppositional movement?( )

People who are involved in the development of alternative methods and materials sometimes construct an account of their work by referring to the iniquities of Bantu Education on the one hand and by allusion to a radical or progressive pedagogy on the other. Thus newly developed methods and materials are presented as being good because they don't contain the shocking ideological distortions of the prescribed materials and because they are



designed to operate within a 'learner-centred' and 'problem-solving' framework, and contribute to 'conscientization'. This is the same move that Freire makes, of constructing a dichotomy (education for domestication / education for liberation) and justifying the 'good' by reference to the 'bad'. It is not surprising then that Freirean terminology forms part of the lexicon of progressive educational practice. He seems to offer the solution of an approach to curriculum and pedagogy that is in itself politically meaningful, without reference to its articulation to the world of organised politics. This paper has tried to show that Freire's <sup>thought</sup> provides no direction at the level of specific educational practices. If this is so, then his use must be seen as providing a language of accounting, as providing a framework for accounting for practices which are informed by something else, perhaps the common sense of the educators, but which are given meaning by their location in an acclaimed theory of pedagogy. (Of course the educational practices might well be 'oppositional' in the sense outlined above despite the limits of the 'language of accounting' used.)

People's Education has been presented as a process and the National Education Crisis Committee as a 'movement'. Seen in this light it is clear that what happens within this process and this movement will be both contested and political. One way that people working in this area meet the challenges of the situation is that they take the politics of education seriously. This necessitates their thinking about educational practices in a way that does not hark back to the debates within the organised system of

state provision but attempts to locate educational work by way of reference to the context of organised politics. Such an effort aims to foster organised and democratic socialist practices. It seeks to foster cultural growth and engage in ongoing analysis of social institutions.

Valuable work in this direction has been going on for some time, as reflected in organisational and student documents. This discussion of Freire's work has tried to show, however, the danger of rhetoric displacing specificity in this work.

## NOTES

1. Father Smangaliso Mkhathshwa, 'Keynote Address', Report on National Consultative Conference on the Crisis in Education, SPCC, Johannesburg, 1985, p. 5
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