



## education review // reseñas educativas

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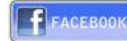
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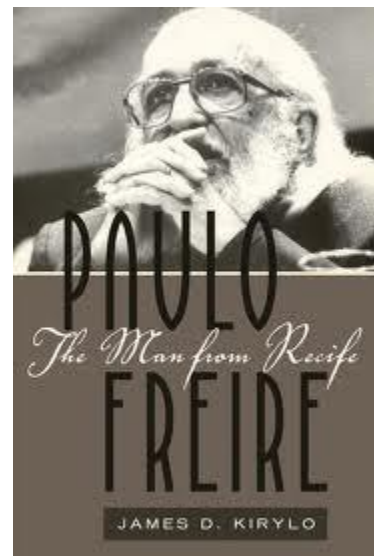
Kirylo, James D. (2011). *Paulo Freire: The Man from Recife*. NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

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James D. Kirylo has woven an artistic tapestry that reflects his quest to study Paulo Freire: the man, his life, his work, and his influence around the world. His attention to detail and scholarship bring richness to the writing. I believe Freire, who loved language, especially his native tongue of Portuguese, would have been impressed with Kirylo's written voice, presence, and ability to invite others to critical thought and dialogue.

I was working in a school in Cuernavaca, Mexico, in 2000, attempting to use my limited command of Spanish to discuss the school's approach to curriculum and instruction when I first heard the name "Freire." I was not familiar with Paulo Freire, thus, somewhat now humorously I kept trying to hear the word "Piaget" when the school director would talk about their approach to education. For after all, the words of constructing



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knowledge and hands-on learning are usually connected to Jean Piaget. When I returned to the states, I did not hear about Freire again until I was engaged in studying adult literacy and became increasingly aware of the terms like critical pedagogy and social justice. I read a few articles about Freire and a few chapters of books as I prepared my class lectures. I did not have a good understanding of the man nor his influence until I read *Paulo Freire: The Man from Recife*. Kirylo's research is so thorough and his passion so strong he presents Freire's life and work as if he had been a good friend. I am forever changed in the way I view the legacy of Freire and my role as a teacher. In the spirit of Freire, I am "becoming."

Kirylo has written a two-part, twelve chapters, account of Freire's life and writings as well as a serendipitous journey describing how he was led to conduct research and write his book. He says the book is to celebrate Freire's "birth, life, and legacy" and it becomes obvious to the reader that part of the legacy has been the influence on Kirylo as he studied, taught, and wrote with a critical conscientious embracing his own desire to become a teacher as "a desire to be an instrument of change and service." The book is noted to be for those who are new to Freirean study; however, the text has such depth that even the well-read scholar will discover new information about this influential man, liberation theology, and critical pedagogy. It is referred to as a celebratory chronology and indeed it is for it brings to light how the life course of a single man evoked emancipatory transformation around the world.

In Part I of the book, Kirylo describes Paulo's life and work. He was born in 1921 in Recife in the northeastern part of Brazil. His home was surrounded by the smell of nut and fruit trees and the sounds of birds, cats, and dogs. He learned to read under a mango tree using the ground as his blackboard and a stick for his chalk. His early learning was organic and authentic for its place in time and space. He was raised in faith-based, Catholic home; he never doubted the love or affection of his parents.



James D. Kirylo is currently Associate Professor of education in the College of Education and Human Development at Southeastern Louisiana University.

From his early schooling, Paulo recognized good teaching, proclaiming that his first teacher, rather than assigning him random words to read, had him list the words he knew and then put them into sentences for reading. His early learning had relevance. During his youth, his family fell into economic hardship, and therefore, he was introduced to poverty and hunger. Through all of the hardships of his early life, markers of an earlier more prosperous time were present in the necktie his father would wear and the piano that remained in the house. He recognized the injustice of poverty and knew it needed to be addressed.

As Paulo progressed through school, his classes had less appeal because they focused on rote memory and attempted to fill him with knowledge as one would fill an empty vessel. The resulting lack of motivation led him to think of himself as ignorant; in fact, some teachers thought he had learning difficulties. Throughout his life he opposed a banking approach to education.

The family moved to Jaboatão because his father was ill. He later died, worsening the plight of the mother and four children. Paulo's mother was dismayed by the poor quality of schooling, and the limited finances and resources. She sought to provide Paulo with the tools he needed to learn and helped him with his education. When the family returned to Recife in 1941, though only 19, Paulo was invited to teach Portuguese at Colégio Oswaldo Cruz. He had a love of his language and of teaching and therefore sought professional development activity and materials to better his skills. It was at this school that he tutored Elza Maia Costa de Oliveira for an exam. She was to become his wife in 1944. They had 5 children. He tried his hand at being a lawyer but quickly gave it up and both he and his wife acknowledged his talents as a teacher.

Kirylo intertwines history with commentary as he tracks the steps of Freire through a myriad of jobs, experiences, and acquaintances. Freire was offered and took the position of Director of the Division of Education and Culture. Through his work he learned how policy influenced education. He visited in numerous schools and homes. Throughout this period his faith and desire for justice and freedom grew. He became aware that families in urban areas and the countryside used harsh corporal punishment; however, those in fishing communities

enforced less harsh punishment. He sought to help parents understand the learning process and met with them at social centers and schools to talk about constructivism and cultural and historical forces. From these meetings he developed his art of listening and cultivated skill in dialogue.

He became Superintendent of the Division of Education and Culture from 1954-1956. Following this he had a series of positions that necessitated his travel through the Brazilian states. His interest in adult education led him to writing his dissertation on present day education in Brazil, obtaining his Ph.D. and becoming a tenured professor of History and Philosophy of Education at the School of Fine Arts in Recife. In 1961 he was invited by the mayor to develop a literacy program. It was here that he started the cultural circles and cultural centers that would be the foundation of much of his later teaching. He used pictures and slides to introduce a topic and to encourage dialogue. He was invited to develop a national literacy program, and he trained college students to help him. The plan was to teach 5 million adults to read and write; however, the perceived threat of the program kept it from functioning on a national scale. He had created an unrest and distrust among some; he was accused of being a communist and traitor to Christ, and was put into jail for 75 days. Upon release, he was even more convinced that for social change to occur, the masses must be educated.

Freire was in exile from 1964-1980 first in Bolivia and later in Chile. He became a consultant for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and was charged with helping rural workers and farmers. During his travel he set up cultural circles and encouraged dialogue that could lead to agrarian reform. Again, listening and dialogue were at the heart of his work. The people transformed from a fatalist view that their state was God's will to a more critical consciousness of opportunity.

In 1967 Paulo published his first book, *Education as the Practice of Freedom*, which told about his use of cultural circles for adult education. He traveled to the United States to talk about oppression. In 1968, he wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* telling of his work and the

conditions in Brazil and Chile, and his hope to promote democracy.

He left UNESCO, went to Harvard for short while, and then went to work for the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva. He took with him awareness that, even in the United States, there were ghettos and flagrant discrimination. In the summers of 1969 and 1970 he traveled to Cuernavaca, Mexico to work with Ivan Illich's Center for Intercultural Documentation.

Kirylo, through his skill in research and writing, helps us understand that the WCC opened doors for Freire, worldwide. He found parts of Africa had been colonized by Portugal, and he sought to help the oppressed conditions there by developing an adult literacy program. He learned the intimate connection of culture and language and learned not to make value statements about the culture of others.

After living almost 16 years in exile he and his family returned permanently to Brazil, his true love, and he returned to his other love of teaching, later being named Professor Emeritus. At age 68, in 1989, he accepted a role of Secretary of Education for São Paulo. He traveled to visit schools and talk to parents, staff, teachers, etc. There were not enough schools to serve the population and those schools that did exist were in dire need of repair. He sought to improve the conditions and to raise the salaries and professional development of teachers. He proposed an authentic, rather than prepackaged, curriculum. He started an Adult and Adolescent Literacy Movement supported by literacy centers to address the problem of illiteracy and school dropout.

Freire went back to teaching and continued his prolific writing and speaking, valuing the power of human interaction. His beloved wife and partner died in 1986; he remarried in 1988 to Nita, also widowed, who had been his student in high school, and whose father had allowed him into secondary school for free at the beckoning of Paulo's mother. Nita became committed to promoting the beliefs and publishing the works of Paulo even after his death in 1997 at the age of 75.

From providing an amazingly detailed chronology of Freire's life, filled with facts, quotations and citations, Kirylo takes the reader to a deeper understanding of what influenced Freire. He gives a clear overview of concepts such as: existentialism, phenomenology, humanism, liberalism, Marxism, praxis, banking education, authoritarianism, etc. and shows the connection with the work of Freire. He takes liberty to offer multiple definitions and explanations of a concept to facilitate the reader's understanding.

In Part II, Kirylo covers liberation theology, critical pedagogy, and legacy. Freire promoted a more liberated humanity, but did not condone violence. In 1962, the world saw a major shift of the Catholic Church that took it from a conservative and authoritarian position to one supportive of human right, social justice, political pluralism, and democracy, thus denouncing an oppressive history.

Freire understood the process of conscientization, when people can recognize and evaluate their reality, thus providing opportunity for growth and transformation. For liberation to occur there must be recognition of conflict. Freire was influenced by James Cone, who is often referred to as the father of a black theology of liberation. He met Cone. They both recognized the interwoven culture of poverty and race.

Kirylo recognizes there are a myriad of ways to define critical pedagogy, a term often associated with Freire's work. The concept is rooted in theories that use education to promote social justice and reflects a state of becoming and being in the world. It demands that people question their roles; and it recognizes that there is no neutral education. Kirylo helps the reader understand the varied explanations of critical theory and how it informs critical pedagogy.

At this point in the book, Kirylo shares a personal connection with his graduate students as he tries to help them understand critical pedagogy. He provides several reflective statements by them as they process their initial and transformed view of his class on diversity and critical pedagogy. The responses are organic and raw, reflecting and awakening and understanding not held before.

Next, the author provides an impressive list of scholars Freire influenced and how they were changed by the works of this insightful man: Jerry Aldridge, Michael W. Apple, Stanley Aronowitz, Leonardo Boff, Cynthia Brown, Fernando Cardenal, Antonia Darder, John Elias, Ramón Flecha, Henry Giroux, Gloria Jean Watkins (a.k.a. bell hooks), Joe Kincheloe, Jonathan Kozol, Peter May, Peter McLaren, Daniel Schipani, Ira Shor, and Cornel West. These scholars responded to a query by Kirylo to tell how Freire influenced them, and the resulting comments are quite interesting. Of particular note was a response by Cynthia Brown who, when asking Paulo why he was not more specific in his teaching methods of Recife, explained that he did not want others to copy his approach as he did not think that would be an effective strategy. His work is described as always changing and not static. In conversation with Kozol, Freire shares that education domesticates or liberates, it is never neutral. He also shared that a young man may have to experience, to even die in certain ways, if he is to become the man he needs to be to evoke change. This is a powerful thought for anyone who has emerged a phoenix from the clinging depth of failure or oppression.

Kirylo and his wife, Anette, traveled to Recife in 2009 and later to São Paulo where they met with Nita, Paulo's second wife. They saw her again in New York City in May 2010. During these visits he and his wife had an opportunity to interview and dialogue with Nita. The conversations were in Portuguese, Spanish, and English. Though Kirylo spoke English and had limited use of Spanish, he was able to rely on the translations by his wife Anette who spoke all three languages and used them in conversations with Nita.

Nita's insight into the life and personality of her husband is invaluable. She said that Paulo did not believe we are born "made" but make ourselves based on our desire and social circumstance. He felt that no one is above another. She described her husband as a happy man with a great sense of humor. He had humility, virtue, and an ability to love. She considered Paulo a philosopher, educator, and critical and radical thinker who believed in the goodness of people. He had a weakness in saying no and setting limits, thus often overextending himself. She considered



*Pedagogy of Freedom* to be his legacy that most reflected his wisdom.

Donaldo Macedo wrote the Foreword and Peter McLaren wrote the Afterword, contributing to the richness of this comprehensive book. Both help us realize that Freire matters because he helped others transform rather than be reformed; he was a great teacher.

Kirylo provides the reader with sketches by Francisco Brennand of illustrations that were used in cultural circles. These discussion starters and dialogue encouragers were representative of the people and their culture, of things with which they were familiar and that were important to them. Though simple in appearance they evoked thought and conversation.

*Paulo Freire: The Man from Recife* is a skillfully researched and organized account of the life and influence of a man small in stature yet enormous in his love of justice and freedom. His lessons are timeless and offer hope that some of the great social injustices of our world can be transformed as people are liberated. Kirylo has created a critical lens through which we can view how to become what is possible.

### About the Reviewer

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