

## THE CENTRALITY OF PAULO FREIRE IN CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

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In this presentation, I will celebrate the 41st anniversary of the publication of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*—a book that is not only classic and central to critical pedagogy, but continues to be relevant in the twenty-first century as it challenges us to dare, as Freire would usually say, to imagine a less discriminatory, more just, and more round world. I will discuss my tremendous good fortune in having had the opportunity to work with Freire for fifteen uninterrupted years, first translating many of his books into English and, later, collaborating with him on various book projects. I have read and re-read the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* so many times and, with each re-reading, I gain new insights in my understanding of our ever-changing world—a world that is marked by manufactured wars, expanding human misery, and obscene greed.

Without falling into false modesty, I have always felt I understood Freire's leading ideas, the subtleties and the nuances, that characterized the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. But I did not really fully capture the layered complexity of Freire's insights until his widow, Nita Freire, and I visited Morro de Saúde, an impoverished community in the outskirts of Recife where Freire's family had moved after the great economic crash of the thirties that unceremoniously yanked the middle-class rug from under Freire's family. No longer able to afford housing in Recife as the economic situation worsened, Freire's family moved to a modest house in Morro de Saúde where Paulo, his siblings, his parents, and other close family members took refuge. I immediately began to see new dimensions and the *raison d'être* of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as I began to put into perspective the traumas that must have overwhelmed Freire as he came face to face with a new form of schooling called life—a life created and sustained by a cruel system that uncaringly relegated millions and millions of people to half citizenry and subhumanity—a life that was characterized by “the problem of hunger [created by social inequality] . . . a real and concrete hunger that had no specific date of departure . . . On the contrary, our hunger was the type that arrives unannounced and unauthorized, making itself at home without end in sight. . . . Legs, arms, and fingers become skinny. Eye sockets become deeper, making the eyes almost disappear. Many of our classmates experienced this hunger and today it continues to afflict millions of Brazilians who die of its violence every year.”

It is against this form of violence that Paulo Freire angrily and compassionately wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I will argue in this presentation that the reading and re-reading of Freire's propositions in both his denunciation of dehumanizing conditions and his announcement that change is difficult but is possible even as we witness a world ravaged by wars, austerity measures, and obscene greed. I will end my presentation by embracing Freire's view of history as possibility as he challenges us to denounce the dominant forces that generate, inform, and shape discrimination, dehumanization, and human misery while

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announcing a world that is less cruel, more just, less dehumanizing and more humane.