

# PAULO AND NITA: SHARING LIFE, LOVE AND INTELLECT – AN INTRODUCTION

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This Special Issue of the International Journal for Critical Pedagogy (IJCP) follows in the wake of the 90th birthday celebrations for Paulo Freire (September 19, 1921 – May 2, 1997). These celebrations reached a zenith with the Congresso Internacional 90 Anos de Nascimento de Paulo Freire in Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil, the birthplace of Paulo, from September 17 – 20, 2011. Prior to these celebrations, Paulo also received the official political amnesty from the Brazilian Federal Government on November 26, 2009. This Special Issue is especially timely since it is not only bracketed by Paulo's 90th birthday celebrations but also by the 80th birthday (November 13, 2013) of Nita Freire. Appropriately, this Special Issue of IJCP focuses on one particular aspect of Paulo's legacy: the connection between Paulo and Nita, their sharing of life, love and intellect. The contributions to this Special Issue emphasize memories, reflections and anecdotes, illustrating the relationship between Paulo and Nita, but also the connection of the individual authors to both Freires. The authors, all of whom worked with Paulo to some degree and know both Paulo and Nita personally, were invited to address in their contributions (a) what did you learn from your professional interaction with and/or your study of the works of the educator of liberation and autonomy, Paulo Freire? and (b) what is the importance of Nita Freire in the life and work of Paulo Freire? The contributions, therefore, are personal testimonials chronicling the intersection of the authors with the work and life of Paulo and Nita Freire, they

add to portray the Freires from a personal vantage point, and preserve a record of a segment of the life-history of Paulo and Nita.

This Special Issue makes real one of the visions of Joe Kincheloe, the Founding Editor of *IJCP* and Project Founder of The Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical Pedagogy. During the last phone conversation I had with Joe in late Summer 2008 he shared with me his desire to see *IJCP* embracing foreign language contributions in order to strengthen an international critical pedagogy network and to foster a worldwide critical community committed to social justice. This Special Issue, then, is the first one that publishes articles in a language other than English: the reader will find essays written in English and in (Brazilian) Portuguese. Joe, this Special Issue now fulfills one of the goals you had in mind for *IJCP*!

The inclusion of articles written in (Brazilian) Portuguese is highly appropriate since this is the language of Paulo Freire, the language he used for most of his publications, not all of which have yet been translated into English (or other languages). Paulo loved his mother tongue and his writing style reflects his ‘Brazilianess’: “I write in Brazilian and not in Portuguese” (Borg & Mayo, 2000). Nita Freire further states, in the interview with Borg & Mayo (2000),

Since he mastered the Portuguese language with such a precision and beauty, he had the ability to recreate words, give them new meanings and even create new words. Paulo’s language is so rich, strong and radical ... [he] says a lot through his language, which is completely his own and is, at the same time, poetic and precise ... the language he used is deeply Brazilian. (p. 110)

Translations of Paulo’s work, despite the great work done by translators, often cannot do justice to Paulo’s rich language (Borg & Mayo, 2000) and often do not convey the flow and beauty of the original words,

He used words of such beauty and plasticity, organized in phrases and these in turn in the context of the totality of the text, with such aesthetic and political force that, I repeat, they cannot be transposed so easily into other languages because a language cannot be translated literally. (p. 110)... There are emotions whose meaning can only be well perceived, understood and felt inside a certain culture. And we Brazilians are unique in this way. (p. 111)

This Special Issue would not be completed without long conversations with Nita Freire. Her pieces of advice were invaluable, especially her providing the guest editor with introductions to potential authors. Nita has provided me over the years with the opportunity to ‘meet’ Paulo on a personal level, since I know Paulo ‘intimately’ through his work, but was not fortunate enough to meet him in person. Nita’s humbleness, ability to talk to and reach across generations, great sense of humor, and thoughtfulness brings Paulo back to life any time one has a

chance to talk to her. Her love for Paulo and continuous dedication to Paulo's work clearly come through especially during a conversation over an elaborate meal and a glass of wine – truly in the spirit of Paulo! I recall a time in Baeza, Spain when we had one of these long conversations in a very busy tapas restaurant, only to be politely reminded by a waiter several hours later (but what felt more like a few minutes) that the restaurant was closing; we were deeply immersed in our Portuguese conversation and laughter and did not notice that we were the only ones left; with a smile Nita remarked “I believe it is time for the Cinderellas to go home.” As I look back to that night in the tapas restaurant, I know that I was not alone with Nita, but that Paulo was with us – through the magical powers of that remarkable person who can bring him to life – sharing conversation and laughter!

The contributors to this Special Issue show a deep respect and friendship for both Paulo and Nita Freire. In addition to referencing the work of Paulo and of Nita they also reveal many facets of the more personal side of the Freires. The reflections and memories of **Ramón Flecha** provide an example of the influence Paulo Freire had internationally, in this case Spain. Ramón first shares with the reader his encounter with Paulo's work when he was a young adult and then his meetings in person with Paulo and later Nita and their enduring friendship. He also recounts how he introduced Jesús Gómez (Pato) to Paulo and how a very strong and lasting friendship grew between them. Ramón elucidates the influence of Paulo's work on his own ‘Theory of Dialogic Learning’ and highlights Pato's work on radical love and the interest Paulo (and later Joe Kincheloe) took in it. From his interaction with Paulo and Nita, Ramón could clearly see the mutual love, friendship and devotion between the Freires. Ramón Flecha was strongly influenced by Paulo as a person and by his work, which he describes as “always aimed to promote hope, and the possibility of change and transformation. [Paulo's] work does not try to find recognition, nor status, but universal values and trust in humankind's will for improvement.”

**Alípio Casali** reminisces about what he learned from Paulo Freire, starting with Freire's early works (Education as the Practice of Freedom and Pedagogy of the Oppressed) and continuing with personal encounters when they were both colleagues at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo: PUC/SP). He also sheds light on the significance of Nita in bringing Paulo back from the disaster that was Elza's (Paulo's first wife) death, the importance of the love Paulo and Nita shared, the immense support Nita provided in the life and work of Paulo, and Nita's fundamental work to rescue and publish works of Paulo following his death in 1997.

**Olgair Gomes Garcia** recounts the role of Nita in the life of Paulo Freire from their first encounter in Recife, through their diverging life paths, and their meeting again after Paulo's return to Brazil. Olgair posits that ‘enamoramento’ was rekindled which reached back to a young Nita when she was a student in one

of Paulo's Portuguese language courses. She further elaborates on the importance of Nita in rescuing Paulo from despair with "drinking and smoking too much" after he became a widower and Nita's continuing role as 'regent' of Paulo's work after his death. Olgaair also addresses the sometimes difficult situations encountered by Paulo and Nita after they became a couple, situations which were addressed diligently by Paulo, and difficult situations again for Nita as she was caring for Paulo's estate. Olgaair also reflects on her becoming a Freirean educator and on her work with Paulo, then Secretary of Education of São Paulo. She elaborates on the struggles and successes of two projects: the municipal school EMEF Mauro Faccio Gonçalves – Zacaria and PROVE (Project of Educator Appreciation and Improvement of Quality of Education) conceptualized in a Freirean vein and inspired by the teachings of Paulo Freire.

**Marcos Reigota**, in a warm and heartfelt personal account, reminisces on his encounters with Paulo and Nita. He recalls with fondness the time when he attended a course at PUC/SP taught by Paulo and other times when he met and interacted with Paulo and especially Nita. The recollections of their encounters provide interesting historical facets regarding the life of Paulo and Nita Freire.

**Ivanilde Apoluceno de Oliveira** reflects on the influence of Paulo Freire on her work as a university professor and on Paulo's contribution to the origin of intercultural education in Brazil.

**Ana Maria Saul**, a colleague of Paulo's at PUC/SP and at the Secretariat for Municipal Education of São Paulo, recounts what she learned with regard to policy, pedagogical theory and practice, and general life lessons by interacting with Paulo. In the second part of Ana's contribution she shares some personal memories of the time when Paulo and Nita became a couple and Paulo 're-entered life' again, and of the influence of Nita on Paulo's latter work, especially the notes to some of his books, a collaboration that was clearly appreciated by Paulo.

In his contribution to the Special Issue, **Peter McLaren** characterizes the current politico-economic situation, especially in the U.S., which is driven by neoliberal designs and reflects on how Paulo Freire would view this state of affairs. Peter provides a poetic and heartfelt portrayal of Paulo Freire and of the relationship between Paulo and Nita; he describes this relationship as "revolutionary love, recognizing that love can only exist between free and equal people who share similar ideals and a commitment to serving the poor and the oppressed." Peter elaborates on one issue where Paulo exerted a very strong influence on him: the role and purpose of the university professor; his exposition is worth pondering (again) for those in academia to maybe re-evaluate their role inside and outside of academia. Peter concludes by calling for an "ecological sustainable socialist alternative to the barbarism of capitalism," a modern socialism which is informed by indigenous communities, and he emphasizes how Paulo Freire's pedagogy of liberation is fitting for our modern times.

**Venício A. de Lima**, a long-time friend of the Freire family, draws particular attention to the work of Nita in publishing some of Paulo's works posthumously and to her role in keeping the memory of Paulo and his oeuvre alive. Venício then discusses the influence of some of Paulo's ideas on the field of communication and culture.

**Walter Ferreira de Oliveira** emphasizes the huge influence Pedagogy of the Oppressed had on his career as a clinical psychiatrist and later in his academic career. He recalls a memorable evening in Minnesota when he had the chance to personally meet Paulo and Nita, the beginning of a long-lasting and intense friendship, which included an unforgettable road trip through part of the U.S. Midwest. Walter mentions that Paulo insisted on this trip by car so that he could experience more of the day-to-day life of U.S. Americans, instead of being limited to fancy hotels and restaurants.

In the last contribution to this Special Issue, **Donaldo Macedo** makes a very strong case for the influence of Nita Freire on the late work of Paulo Freire. He revisits the moving observations he made earlier (Macedo, 2001) to illustrate how Nita reinvigorated Paulo after Elza's death, thereby inspiring a very productive intellectual period tragically cut short by a heart attack. Donaldo also harks back to Paulo's *Pedagogy of Indignation* (2004) – brought to publication through the tireless efforts of Nita – to reiterate that for Paulo anger or indignation was “the appropriate response to obscene violation of human rights and social injustices.” Donaldo's vantage point is a very personal one as he is a close family friend of the Freires. He had a very close personal and professional relationship with Paulo, being responsible for bringing some of Paulo's major works to an English-speaking audience and being an ‘advocate’ for Paulo's thoughts and ideas challenging those who read Paulo but did not understand, those who twisted Paulo's thoughts into directions never envisioned.

From the contributions becomes clear the profound impact that Paulo Freire had on many as a human being, scholar, mentor and friend. People touched by him will not forget. Equally apparent is the role Nita Freire played during Paulo's and Nita's “third age” marriage (Borg & Mayo, 2000) and following Paulo's death in 1997. Besides being a wife, companion and friend, Nita was a confidant, sounding board, a supporter of Paulo's research and, lastly, the ‘keeper of the flame,’ seeing that Paulo's work remains at the vanguard of pedagogy through her articles, book chapters, commentaries, public speaking engagements and organizer of conferences dealing with Paulo's work and legacy, as editor of posthumously published works of Paulo, and as author of a book that contains chronicles of their shared life (A. Freire, 1998; 2001) and, most of all, as author of a 655-page biography of Paulo (A. Freire, 2006), which won a Prêmio Jabuti (the most important literary award of Brazil) for 2007.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The guest editor would like to thank all the contributors who made this Special Issue possible. Special thanks go to Nita Freire for her continuous support and advice. Thanks also go to Shirley Steinberg for providing a forum to honor Paulo and Nita Freire through IJCP. I also would like to thank Teresa Cristina Cruz for her support and Joachim Dorsch for his help and tireless assistance with the editing of this Special Issue.

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