Circles of culture: Literacy as a process for social inclusion❖

Mariana Souto Manning

Abstract

Historically, illiteracy has been a reality for Brazilians. This paper describes an adult literacy program currently in practice in Northeastern Brazil from a critical theory framework. The program described is based on Freire's circles of culture and its conception is that literacy is a process for social inclusion. Along with the description provided by the author, resulting from participant observation and review of literature, this paper includes the perspective of a student currently in the program. Further, from a critical standpoint, the author acknowledges many positive things already implemented and challenges for the future of this promising literacy program.

Key words: Illiteracy, critical theory, circles of culture, social inclusion

Resumen

Históricamente el analfabetismo ha sido una realidad para los brasileños. Este artículo describe un programa de alfabetización para adultos que actualmente se lleva a cabo en el noreste de Brazil desde el marco de la teoría crítica. El programa descrito está basado en los círculos de lectura de Freire y su concepción es que la alfabetización es un proceso para la inclusión social. Al tiempo con la descripción brindada por la autora, como resultado de su participación como observadora y revisión bibliográfica, este artículo incluye la perspectiva de un estudiante que se encuentra en el programa actualmente. Además, desde un punto de vista crítico, la autora reconoce muchas cosas positivas que ya se han implementado y los retos para el futuro de este programa de alfabetización.

Palabras claves: Analfabetismo, teoría crítica, circulos de cultura, inclusión social.

Literacy as a Process for Social Inclusion

This study critically investigates an adult-literacy program based on Freire's liberatory pedagogy and circles of culture in Northeastern Brazil. The purpose of this study is to understand whether this adult literacy program, a working example of Paulo Freire's participatory approach to literacy education (Freire, 2000; Spener, 1990), secures social competence (agency) for one adult woman not previously well-served by rural schools in my home state of Pernambuco, Brazil. According to Paulo Freire (1985) literacy should be a tool for personal transformation and social change, and it can only be so if what students are learning is directly related to their lives. Freire (2000) emphasized that prior experiences and community concerns of the students are the starting points in teaching reading and writing. They employ an emergent curriculum, (Auerbach, 1992) in which learners identify their own problems and issues and look for the answers to their problems (Peyton & Crandall, 1995). This program employs the Freirean circles of culture in the particular context of Pintos[1], Brazil. Adult literacy programs based on Freire's circles of culture are functioning throughout Brazil, from Pernambuco (Secretaria de Educação e Esportes, Governo do Estado de Pernambuco, 1997) in Northeastern Brazil to Rio Grande do Sul (Brandão, 2001), the southern most Brazilian state.

The particular program investigated here provides classes that address literacy skills—reading the world and the word, as proposed by Freire (2000)—for adults who dropped-out of school to work and sustain their families or never went to school. Since children could start working as early as they could start school, school was not a priority, especially for girls. The work world and other everyday issues are systematized and become part of the circles. Its pedagogical intent is to democratize education and culture. It aims to promote the social competence of adults of low Socio-Economic Status (SES). Participants attend meetings daily at a location of their choice (Secretaria de Educação e Esportes, Governo do Estado de Pernambuco, 1997).

In these circles, studying is not only necessary to learn the letters of the

---

1 Pseudonyms have been used for the name of the city and participants in this study for ethical purposes, considering the importance of securing the protection of the place and participants' identities (Creswell, 2003, p. 66). One exception is the name of the author, Mariana.

alphabet, but also to know each person, the way they express themselves, how people are different, their different interests, and finding ways to approach a problem. Participants are not classified as illiterate, but as learners. Each one of them brings knowledge regarding themselves/their worlds. Teachers facilitate the entrance of learners into the literate world. Kincheloe et al (1998) indicate that the physical seating arrangement in circles is essential to employ dialogue and problem-posing education (Freire and Macedo, 1995).

According to Freire (Secretaria de Educação e Esportes, Governo do Estado de Pernambuco, 1997), the beauty of education is that it does not do everything by itself, yet without it, many things cannot be done. He stressed the use of literacy development for personal transformation and personal action (Huerta-Macias, 1993). Circles of culture have contributed to the agency of thousands of people since its inception in the 1960s (Freire, 2000). Recent research (Cortina, 2000) into the effect of the program on rural women of low SES is lacking in the current literature. I propose to study whether it is promoting personal transformation (agency) for one woman of low SES women in Pintos, Brazil.

Background

Knowing how to read, write, understand and interpret texts and contexts is important for advancing one's schooling or employment. This is not the most important goal of education though—knowing how to read, write and understand the words. The most important goal in education is to learn to use the tools acquired through literacy to embody and exert a critical comprehension of what happens around oneself. In this way, the word is a tool for understanding the world (Freire, 1970). Knowing how to critically use the word to understand and actively engage in changing the world is then the result of knowing how to use the tools acquired. Literacy must be a process of social inclusion; a process in which individuals learn to read and write words so as to read (or understand) and write (or engage in social change) the worlds of which they are part. Paulo Freire (1985) wrote that literacy ought to be a tool for personal transformation and social change, and to be so, what the students are learning needs to be directly related to their lives.

This is not the blueprint of education in Brazil, however. According to the

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] ("A batalha", 2003), the average Brazilian student can read, but does not show understanding of the words. This study compares Brazil to other countries, such as the United States, in terms of reading skills. Out of 41 countries, Brazil ranked 37th in 2003 in terms of the reading ability of its youth around 15 years of age. In contrast, the United States ranked 16th, and was slightly above the median.

Initially shocking, the indexicality of this functional illiteracy situation (Ochs, 2001) involves taking into consideration the context and the timing of the implementation of education for all in Brazil. The United States, for example, established universal rights to education over 100 years ago; Brazil only began implementing the law establishing this right about 15 years ago ("A batalha", 2003). This reveals a big difference in the functional literacy situation, development, and resources in both countries. As education for all only became law in 1988 in Brazil, the process of implementing this law is still under way, a significant difference from the situation in the United States where this right was granted over a century ago. Because of the lack of universal rights in education primarily due to the military dictatorship in Brazil until the beginning of the 80s, the problem is even worse with the adult population (Patai, 1988).

Written in 1988, the Brazilian Constitution requires that the government provide basic education (roughly the equivalent to elementary school education) for all children; attendance is mandatory. In addition to providing this educational opportunity for children, the Constitution also grants access to education for those who did not have the opportunity to do so at a traditional age.

In Pintos, Northeastern Brazil, according to recent data from the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (1997) or Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (trans.) roughly one fourth of the state's population is classified as illiterate. Twenty four and a half percent of all people living in Pernambuco don't know how to read or write. This small city has taken matters in its own hands and has developed a program to meet the needs of its 15,196 illiterate adults. This is a relatively small town with a population under 60,000 inhabitants.

Established in the 18th century, the city of Pintos has a large concentration of artists. The artistic and cultural production by locals is incredibly rich

and diverse. The many non-print texts (Fairclough, 2003) represented in the culture inspired the city government to think about a way to use the culture of the place in combination with education to construct a meaningful and enjoyable educational program. This interdisciplinary program has the objective of educating its illiterate youth and adults and presents a thematic relationship within their history and place. With these premises in mind, the program adopted many of Freire's ideas of circles of culture and liberatory education (Freire, 2002), combining basics (comprehension, interpretation, explanation, implications, limits, values, potentialities, and fragility) with thematic situations, such as nature and culture, sustainable human development, the relationship between culture and economy, and social activism.

They wanted to make education not only available, but meaningful to the people of Pintos. The banking system of education (Freire, 1970) had not succeeded in drawing students to and retaining them in school, according to the superintendent of education of Pintos, Pernambuco. This time they decided to try a socio-historical-political model that places the teaching of students ahead of teaching the academic subjects. As I observed while conducting participant observation in Pintos, history lessons focused on each individual's history as opposed to the history traditionally taught in Brazilian schools, a history detached from the students' realities.

Theoretical Framework

In this paper, I primarily apply critical theory to understand the relationship between circles of culture (Freire, 2002) and the location of its participants in society. In defining literacy and culture in a socially situated manner, I employ socio-cultural theory (Bruner, 1986; Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). My theoretical orientation as outlined here informs my analysis of the data collected and the description of the program in this paper, as I believe realities are socially constructed (Patton, 2002). Theoretical orientations "carry embedded messages about what and who is important" (Patton, 2002, p.130) in a study. This study is, therefore, political, and its implications are aimed at suggesting and promoting changes in the very structure of society. I use an orientational perspective, namely critical theory, which has disciplinary roots in political, cultural and economic ideologies. I look at how the situation of one participant compares to the situation generated by history, and the historical

and social construction of the human being (Prieto & Araújo, 1998). Further, I look at the circles of culture as a possibility for change, according to my observations and to the participant's accounts. Bentz and Shapiro (1998) highlight that critical theory pays attention to the historical and social context of the researcher and research topic, bringing topics such as domination, injustice and oppression into play.

It is essential to consider that "each theoretical framework is a miniparadigm with its own internal logic and assumptions" (Patton, 2002, p.134). Critical theory "focuses on how injustice and subjugation shape people's experiences and understandings of the world" (p. 130). It focuses on " power and justice and the ways that…race, class and gender, ideologies, discourses, education,…and other social institutions and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system…[C]ritical [inquiry] must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a…society" (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000, p.281). This theoretical framework aligns with the very nature of Freire's circles of culture, of emancipation, of promoting change in society. The theoretical orientation is informed by Marx and the importance of class matters in understanding structures of oppression in society (Crotty, 1998).

I am drawn to this particular framework because I want to help those with limited literacy skills recognize society's oppressive conditions and acquire agency to liberate themselves through Freire's pedagogy, also called liberatory pedagogy. In the culture of silence and dehumanization, the oppressed have been denied a critical meta-awareness. Critical theory will allow me to analyze the degree of agency and the process of conscientization among the women in the study. Critically analyzing the narratives of one representative member of this program may offer insight into whether the program promotes agency (as defined by Freire in Crotty, 1998) for adults not previously well-served by rural schools in Pernambuco and if it is a possible venue for educational/cultural democracy and freedom from oppressive conditions. Furthermore, it will help assess which discourses are constructed in and constructive of social institutions and aid the assessment of methods for implementation articulated in the Círculos de Educação e Cultura program. Because this program is aimed at implementing dialogic methods (Freire, 2000) and equal participation, I will look at how power may or may not be signaled by a person's control of a situation. The use of critical theory will impact the study because it will clarify whether the program changed the life of one woman by rendering her conscious

of her condition (Crotty, 1998) and provided critical conscientization (Freire, 1970) leading to the acquisition of agency.

Auerbach (1992) writes about the importance of social context as a resource that informs literacy development. According to Barton et al (2000) "*literacy is a social practice*" (p.7). They define literacy practices as the "basic unit of a social theory of literacy" (p.7). Literacy is both embedded in the social structures and helps shape them. "Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others" (p.8). "[L]iteracy is best understood as a set of social practices, these are observable in events which are mediated by written texts" (p.9). Considering different contexts, Barton and Hamilton assert that literacies vary across contexts, as "practices in different cultures and languages can be regarded as different literacies" (p.10). James Gee talks about these literary practices and events in terms of Discourse (with capital D), which he defines as "ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions and clothes" (1996, p.127). For the purposes of this paper, we will use the term culture to encompass Discourses, literacy practices and events. "Culture itself is about the way we make meanings…is an outcome of people's histories…and it also shapes histories" (Hall, 2003, p.135). According to Bruner (1986), mind could not exist apart from culture, as meanings originate in the culture in which they are created. Learning is influenced by previous social contexts in which the reader has been—by his/her previous experiences (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000).

Methodology

The overall investigation involved eighteen women between the ages of 18 and 78 in Pintos, Brazil who were participants in the program described in this paper. Data was collected over nine weeks in June and July, 2003. Critical ethnographic components of data collection make use of data resultant from participant observation, field notes, interviews, life history and analysis of documents, coupling "the focus on culture with the commitment to use findings for change" (Patton, 2002, p.131). Interviews allowed the participants of the circles of culture to "describe what is meaningful and salient without being *pigeon holed* into standardized categories" (Patton, 2002, p. 56). I employed participant observation as it allowed me to have "a special interest in human meaning and interaction as viewed from the perspective of people who

are…members…of particular settings" (Jorgensen, 1989, p.13). Of course, these descriptions are colored by my own biases and beliefs that education is a venue for social and economic change. As mentioned above, I use critical theory to look at this research problem. But ultimately, I employ "a very practical side to qualitative methods that simply involves asking open-ended questions of people and observing matters of interest in real-world settings in order to solve problems, improve programs, or develop policies" (Patton, 2002, 136).

The rationale for selecting women is that in Brazil, neither governmental nor nongovernmental adult literacy nor basic education prioritizes women's education (Rosemberg, 1993). In Pintos, women with limited literacy skills "continue to be a large group, the majority of Brazilian women possess limited schooling, and discrimination persists in terms of educational access for the subgroups of low-income women, and especially…[those] who live in rural areas and the North and Northeastern regions of the country." (Cortina, 2000, p.66). The sample selection was based on the following inclusion criteria: all female participants (students) of this program in Pintos, Brazil. The women who participated were further selected by their willingness to volunteer, as there was no financial or other kind of compensation for their time. The individual narrative excerpted below is representative of other women in the study.

Analysis and Discussion

The literacy curriculum of this program is continuously developed from themes/problems experienced by the participants. In trying to understand the implications, impacts, and possibilities of developing solutions to these personal and societal problems, reading and writing skills are learned along with mathematical skills and local cultural problems. Program objectives align with those set by the *World Declaration on Education for All* that resulted from the World Conference on Education for All (UNESCO, 2001), promoted by the World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF in Thailand in March of 1990. Through this program, students learn in a meaningful manner. The organization of the curriculum and method being taught adapts to the students as opposed to students being subjects obliged to comply with pre-established rules. In addition, students undertake responsibilities as agents (Freire, 1970) not only of their own education but of their lives as social agents of change in the community.

According to the United Nations Basic Document (UNESCO, 2002, p.7-8), 2003 to 2012 is the Literacy Decade. This document recognized that the notion of literacy as a simple and elementary ability has been replaced by a dynamic and complex concept. Literacy is not only knowing the words, but using the words in the context of the world (Ochs, 1993). The process of literacy development is then understood as a lifelong process, a process of acquiring and learning how to use the tools for personal and social development and change.

This program takes place from Monday through Friday, two hours each evening (40 hours per month) ten months per year. Each group includes approximately 25 students. Specific starting and ending times vary according to the convenience of those in the group. As the program name suggests, circles of culture participants and the teacher/facilitator sit in a circle. Classes meet in educational and non-educational buildings all over Pintos. They are located close to participants' homes or workplaces. Rather than traditional schools, these are spaces in which learning how to read and write is embedded in societal and personal problems and issues. They establish a place for groups to form to discuss and understand situations that are meaningful to them, such as work-related issues, and even social actions per se (Freire, 2002). Social actions became part of the curriculum as a result of the collectively-constructed understanding and the problematization and dialogue happening in the circles of culture. "[D]ialogue is the opportunity available to me to open up to the thinking of others and thereby not wither away in isolation" (Freire, 1998, p.250). "Within a dialogical educational practice, students…reflect on that which they know, their lived experiences, and on how these impact the way they read their world" (Darder, 2002, p.103). The political importance of dialogue in creating learning communities and on changing historical locations is conveyed by Freire and Shor (1987), "[d]ialogue does not exist in…political vacuum. It is not a 'free space' where you may do what you want. Dialogue takes place inside some kind of program…To achieve the goals of transformation, dialogue implies responsibility, …determination, discipline, objectives" (p.102). Becoming aware of their oppression and problem-solving together, social actions become the solution to many social problems faced by participants through the practice of problem-posing (Freire, 1990).

Problem-posing, key to critical dialogues, is fundamental to the development of literacy, of reading the word and the world according to the Freirean

approach, and also present in this program. Participants "develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in the process of transformation" (Freire, 1990, p.171). Life is seen as a process of becoming, as opposed to static and therefore unchangeable (Aronowitz, 1993). "Problem posing education…corresponds to the historical nature of man [sic]…[I]t identifies with the movement which engages men [sic] as beings aware of their incompletion—an historical movement which has its point of departure, its subjects and its objective" (Freire, 1990, p. 72). It is through recognizing ourselves as historical beings and seeking to change our conditions that Freire's emancipatory pedagogy is enabled. This is "developed within a praxis,…link between knowledge and power through self-directed action" (Aronowitz, 1993, p.12). Problem posing invites critical dialogue with the goal of problem-solving, of changing the institutional structures and conditions in place. In *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau* (1978), Freire defends that the culture of the masses, the common people, "must develop on the basis of science and that emancipatory pedagogy must be aligned with the struggle for national reconstruction" (Giroux, 1993, p.181).

> [T]he oppressed are not "marginals," are not men living "outside" society. They have always been "inside"—inside the structure that made them "beings for others." The solution is not to "integrate" them into the structure of oppression but to transform the structure so that they can become "beings for themselves"…If men are searchers and their ontological vocation is humanization, sooner or later they may perceive the contradiction in which banking education seeks to maintain them and then engage themselves in the struggle for their liberation. (Freire, 1990, pp.61-2)

The teaching method of this program is grounded in critical dialogue, problem-posing, and problem-solving, which is at the core of "[t]he psychological development of humans [as]… part of the general historical development" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.60). It aims at conscientization, or critical meta-awareness of each participant's condition. The importance of the three components that ground this program is conveyed by Antonia Darder (2002),

> "It is virtually impossible to speak of a revolutionary practice of problem-

posing education outside the dialogical process, since dialogue is truly the cornerstone of the pedagogy. Central to Freire's concept of education is an understanding of dialogue as the pedagogical practice of critical reflection and action, which nurtures students' curiosity and imagination toward a greater critical capacity to confront dialectically the content of their study and the task of constructing new knowledge. This process of problem-posing serves to [promote]…the emergence of critical consciousness in the learning process as students grapple critically to better understand the past, present, and future in making sense of the world." (p.102)

Freire invited educators to adopt a "problem-posing education which accepts neither a 'well-behaved' present nor a pre-determined future. [As an alternative, it] roots itself in the dynamic present and becomes revolutionary" (Freire, 1970, p. 72). According to Freire, "whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-solving education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain submersion of consciousness; the latter strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention of reality" (Freire, 1970, p.68). Students bring real-world problems to the classroom and the group of about 25 students problematizes and reflects on possible solutions/outcomes. "Problem posing contains a cycle of listening-dialogue-action that enables all participants to engage in continuous reflection and action" (Glanz, 1997, p.290). Their background knowledges are valued. The roles of student and teachers merge as they problem-pose, dialogue and problem-solve together. In reality, "[t]hrough dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers" (Freire, 1971, p.67). Within these discussions, students-teachers develop skills related to oral language, writing, reading and linguistic dimensions of language. Mathematics, social studies, science, and cultural studies are also embedded in the curriculum. While addressing academic skills "Freire's problem-posing method of instruction…arranges classrooms around problems of democracy" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 75).

Teacher-students merely have a curricular proposal, such as in the area of Portuguese language (Prieto and Araújo, 1998) which is a starting place rather than a set curriculum in any of the interrelated academic areas. They participate in continuous staff development that follows the same format focusing on critical dialogue, problem-posing, and problem-solving as defined

by Freire and widely recognized throughout the world (Shor, 1992). They discuss situations happening in their practice, which makes the attendance rate extremely high; they become students-teachers. When talking to one of the teachers, Ana, I learned that she felt her situated knowledge was valued and that the staff development sessions helped develop her as a person and as a professional.

According to Kathy Hall (2003) if we employ a socio-cultural perspective to literacy:

> [R]eading shifts the emphasis from individual per se to the social and cultural context in which literacy occurs. We shift our perspective from personal skill to cultural practice or towards the study of the social group and its history. It means that literacy is discussed in relation to culture, to context and to authentic activity. And it means that culture is treated, not merely as a variable contributing to meaning-construction, but as the key to meaning making. (pp.134-5)

Given this understanding of the program and its socially-situated context, I introduce the perspective and words of Josi, one of the participants of circles of culture who described her perceptions of this program in an open-ended interview we had on the afternoon of July 16, 2003 in Pintos, Brazil[2]. At the time of the interview, Josi was 34-years old, married, and had one daughter who was three. She is a native of Pintos and went to school until third grade as a child but does not consider herself a functional reader. In the transcription below, she talks about her experience with this program set-up by the city of Pintos. The text below is a result my double translation from oral to written and from Portuguese to English. For more information on the issues surrounding double translation, see Ruth Behar's *Translated Woman* (1993/2003). Pauses and turn-taking utterances were omitted as they are not relevant to the analysis undertaken in this paper.

Mariana: What was your experience when you started this program?

---

2   Number of tape and exact time are omitted for ethical purposes according to the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines to secure confidentiality and minimize risks. All transcripts used in this paper are excerpts of the same interview with Josi (pseudonym). Same date and time applies.

Josi:	I was very excited but afraid. It was good, but because there had been many years since I had been in school. I thought, I thought things were a little strange. The teacher didn't-didn't write things on the board for us to copy. She talked to us. We talked to her. She asked us what we would like to learn. It was strange. Things today are not the same as when I went to school. It was strange.
Mariana:	Strange?
Josi:	Yes. Strange but good. The activities are very much different. They are better because I can understand and I can already use what I am learning.
Mariana:	How?
Josi:	Now I know how to know if my money will be enough to buy something when I go to the store. And when we have homework we do things that are important for us.
Mariana:	Like what?
Josi:	The first homework was to get a birth certificate to learn more about myself.
Mariana:	Did you learn more—[3]
Josi:	—I did because that's where you can find your full name, where you were born, your birthday, and a lot of other stuff. I learned about my history. When I went to school before I didn't learn about my history. I learned about the history of Brazil. It's better now.

In this section of the interview, Josi constructs her own view of the program. While her views start with the anxiety of returning to school and classification of the program as strange, she provides a linear narrative of her experience. When I ask her about her valence (Ochs, 2001) of the word strange, she shifts to a more non-linear narrative style. In doing so, she clearly articulates this program's curriculum, and gives examples of ways the curriculum is relevant to her life. She contrasts this program to the traditional school, and states her preference for dialogic pedagogy developed from Freire's ideas and concepts. As expressed by Josi, the strangeness of a dialogue interaction as opposed to lecture is quickly replaced by her evaluation of the structure as good. The applicability of the concepts learned in the program is exemplified throughout. She recasts the teacher's role as taking part in the dialogue and talking as

---

3   The double dash (—) means interruption by Josi as Mariana (the author) paused between words.

opposed to lecturing. Josi's description of the program provides us with great insight about a students' perspective of this method. Josi illustrates here the possibility of literacy as a lifelong process, as inherent in lives, as a complex concept.

The objective of this program is that as it continues, it will foster critical meta-awareness of oppressive conditions in society of which these participants are part. Through dialogue, they will construct new realities through the process of problematizing; they will construct ways to intervene in their realities as social actors to find solutions to these problems. After problematizing, and coming up with possible solutions, participants go further and implement these solutions outside of the circle. The dialogue and problem-solving that goes on in the circles of culture, affects their lives as they become aware of their conditions of oppression, but also aware that, as hooks (1990) highlights:

> Living as we did—on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of margin and center. Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between the margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgement that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole (p. 149).

Articulating their positionality on the margins and recognizing the margin as a position for social action is one of the aims of this program. To place individuals within history and context and to allow these individuals to recognize how intertwined personal and political problems are is the challenge ahead of this program. At this point, problems discussed are of a more personal nature—the link to the political is still developing, as in every human being, according to Freire (1970).

Going back to the first days in the program and her feelings about it, Josi illustrates how the group is dealing with problems on a more personal level.[4]

Mariana: Well, when-when you started coming to the circle, during the first

---

4   Same interview date and time as previous excerpt.

days, how did you feel?

Josi: I don't know, I felt like, so childish, afraid. You know, to go to school after so many years, I didn't know what I was going to see. I felt like I shouldn't be in school because I felt I should have learned to read and write when I was young. I felt ashamed and afraid.

Mariana: And now?

Josi: Now I like to come. I like to talk with my group. Even when I have problems at home, they help me solve them. One day Maria said she was very sad because she was selling sandwiches that she made, but-but she was losing money. We helped her figure it out. She learned how to sell the sandwiches and started making money. That's what we learn. Real stuff. It is not like, this letter is A. We learn that the letter is A, but the teacher doesn't make us uncomfortable or make us feel dumb. I want to come every night. I was only absent once when I was sick. I felt so sad. It's a group of friends, really. A group of people who don't judge me. Who understand me and who help me grow and learn.

Josi reflects on her feelings of inappropriateness regarding schooling, as she had not done well in school during the past. Her schooling life involved grade retention and dropping out in third grade. She also displays the incorporation of societal expectations that reading and writing are skills to be acquired in childhood. In Josi's perspective the program in place is incorporating problem-posing, dialogue, and problem-solving. It is motivating her to go to school and it is granting agency to women, as conveyed by her narrative about Maria. She indeed portrays herself as an agentic subject as she helps Maria solve her problem. The concept of a learning community is mentioned throughout. According to Josi's perspective, this program seems to be working well; literacy skills are embedded in real life situations. The participants are articulating change from their position in the margins, and engaging in social inclusion.

Possible Implications

As discussed above, the challenge for adult literacy programs is to bridge personal and political issues and foster the understanding that personal problems are under the umbrella of larger societal and political issues; to foster conscientization and social inclusion through problem-solving, dialogue, and problem-posing. To implement literacy programs aimed at social inclusion, it is necessary to address the relationship between the micro and the macro issues

as discussed by Fairclough (2003). In an interview[6], the coordinator of this program reports the program is relating personal problems to societal problems and reaching its goal of literacy as a process for social inclusion. We can also verify this by looking at Josi's words above. I asked the program coordinator how social inclusion will be accomplished. She responded that teachers as a group will problem-pose, dialogue, and problem solve to find the best way to do so, "and probably there will not be one way, because each student is different and each situation is different". This was likely the best answer she could have given me as I looked for a universal answer. Freire himself "refus[ed] to spell out alternative solutions that enable his work to be reinvented in the contexts in which his readers find themselves" (Steiner et al, 2000, p.13). "It is impossible to export pedagogical practices without reinventing them" (Freire, 1998, p.xi). In reinventing these circles of culture, it is important to remember their objectives and consider, as Freire and Macedo (1987) put it:

Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world...In a way, however, we can go further and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of *writing* and *rewriting* it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work...[T]his dynamic movement is central to the literacy process. (p.35)

> "[A]s learners dialogue and transact with a wide range of texts and come to make meaning for themselves, that newly constructed meaning enters into dialogue with the mainstream and other cultures." (Fecho, 2004, p.47) This is the hope. This is what this program is seeking to do.

References

A batalha pela qualidade: As lições do estudo mundial sobre educação que põe o Brasil

---

5   The interview with the program coordinator took place in Pintos, Brazil on the afternoon of July 28, 2003. Name, time and tape number are omitted for ethical reasons.

na lanterna. (2003, July 9). Revista Veja. p. 53.

Aronowitz, S. (1993). Paulo Freire's radical democratic humanism. In McLaren, P. & Leonard, P. (Eds.). Paulo Freire: A critical encounter. London: Routledge.

Auerbach, E.R. (1992). Making meaning, making change: Participatory curriculum development for adult ESL literacy. Washington, DC and McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems.

Barton, D., Hamilton, M., & Ivanic, R. (2000). Situated literacies: Reading and writing in context. London: Routledge.

Behar, R. (1993). Translated woman: Crossing the border with Esperanza's story. Boston: Beacon Press.

Behar, R. (2003). Translated woman: Crossing the border with Esperanza's story: Tenth Anniversary Edition. Boston: Beacon Press.

Bentz, V., & Shapiro, J. (1998). Mindful inquiry in social research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Brandão, C. R. (2001). De Angicos a ausentes: 40 anos de educação popular. Porto Alegre, Brazil: MOVA-RS.

Bruner, J. (1986). Actual minds, possible worlds. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Carol D. Lee & Smagorinsky, Peter. (2000). Vygotskian perspectives on literacy research. Cambridge: University Press.

Cortina, R. (2000). Distant alliances: Gender and education in Latin America. New York: Garland.

Creswell, J. (2003). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Crotty, M. (1998). The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process. London: Sage Publications.

Darder, A. (2002). Reinventing Paulo Freire: A pedagogy of love. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Fairclough, N. (2003). Analyzing discourse: Textual analysis for social research. London; New York: Routledge.

Fecho, B. (2004). "Is this English?" Race, language, and culture in the classroom. New York: Teachers' College Press.

Freire, P. (1970/1990/2000). Pedagogy of the oppressed. New York: Continuum.

_____. (1971). Pedagogy of the oppressed. New York: Seaview. (1978). Pedagogy in process: The letters to Guinea-Bissau. New York: Seabury Press.

————. (1985). The politics of education. New York: Bergin & Garvey.

————. (1990). Education for critical consciousness. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

————. (1998). Pedagogy of freedom. Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield.

————. (1998). Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare teach. Oxford: Westview Press.

————. (2002). Educação como prática da liberdade. São Paulo: Paz e Terra.

Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). Literacy: Reading the word and the world. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

————————————. (1995). A dialogue: Culture, language, and race. Harvard Educational Review, 65 (3), 377-402.

Freire, P., & Shor, I. (1987). A pedagogy for liberation: Dialogues on transforming education. New York: Bergin & Garvey.

Gee, J. (1996). Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses. London, UK: Routledge/Falmer.

Giroux, H. (1993). Paulo Freire and the politics of postcolonialism. In McLaren, P. & Leonard, P. (Eds.). Paulo Freire: A critical encounter. London: Routledge.

Glanz, K. (1997). Health behavior and health education: Theory, research and practice. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hall, K. (2003). Listening to Stephen read: Multiple perspectives on literacy. Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Hooks, b. (1990). Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics. Boston: South End Press.

Huerta-Macias, A. (1993). Current terms in Adult ESL literacy. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse on Literacy Education.

Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. (1997). Analfabetismo. Retrieved February 22, 2004 from http://www.ibge.gov.br/ibgeteen/pesquisasedu_taxa_de_analfabetismo.html

Jorgensen, D. L. (1989). Participant observation: A methododology for human studies. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kincheloe, J. L., & McLaren, P. (2000). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Kincheloe, J. L., & Steinberg, S. R. (1997). Changing multiculturalism: New times, new curriculum. Bristol, PA: Open University Press.

Kincheloe, J. L., Steinberg, S. R., Rodriguez, N. M., & Chennault, R. E. (1998). White reign: Deploying whiteness in America. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Ochs, E. & Capps, L. (2001). Living narrative. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ochs, E. (1993). Indexing gender. In B. Miller (Ed.), Sex and gender hierarchies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Patai, D. (1988). Brazilian women speak: Contemporary life stories. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). Qualitative research & evaluation methods. Thousand Oaks, CA:

Sage Publications.

Peyton, J. and Crandall, J. (1995). Philosophies and approaches in adult ESL literacy instruction. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education.

Prieto, S. & Araújo, M. (1998). Educação de jovens e adultos. Língua portuguesa. Modulo I: A historicidade do ser humano. Recife, Brazil: NUPEP.

Rosemberg, F. (1993). Subordinação de gênero e alfabetização no Brasil. In Fundação para o Desenvolvimento da Educação (ed.). Alfabetização: passado, presente, futuro (pp 125-148). São Paulo: FDE.

Secretaria de Educação e Esportes, Governo do Estado de Pernambuco. (1997). Círculos de educação e cultura. [Motion picture]. (Available from TV VIVA, Rua de Sao Bento, 344, Olinda, Pernambuco, Brazil).

Senado Federal. (2003). Constituição federal 1988. Retrieved March 13, 2004 from http://www.senado.gov.br/bdtextual/const88/const88.htm

Shor, I. (1992). Empowering education. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Spener, D. (1990). The Freirean approach to adult literacy education. Washington DC: National Clearinghouse on Literacy Education.

Steiner, S. F., Krank, H. M., McLaren, P., & Bahruth, R. E. (2000). Freirean pedagogy, praxis, and possibilities : Projects for the new millennium. New York: Falmer Press.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2002). Segundo rascunho do documento básico de convocação para uma década de alfabetização nas Nações Unidas. Brasilia: UNESCO Brasil.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2001). Education for all. Retrieved March 8, 2004 from http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

THE AUTHOR

Mariana Souto Manning is Research Assistant and Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Language Education at the University of Georgia, United States. She has taught first and second grades in U.S. public schools and English as a Foreign Language in Brazil. Her research interests include democratic classrooms, participatory education, feminist pedagogy, socio-cultural theory, qualitative research, languages, cultures, and literacies. Her publications include an entry in the *Encyclopedia Latina* published by Grolier and reviews in press with such journals as *Language and Society* and *Linguistics and Education*. She has presented at professional conferences throughout the United States, Europe, and Australia.
E-mail: MarianaManning@aol.com