

Freire at the flaxroots: analysis and action in Aotearoa

Kotare Trust and AWEA



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Dedication

To the memory of Te Kuia (Toots) Peeti and Father Terry Dibble who were interviewed for this series and passed away before completion.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge Paulo Freire and Filip Fanchette for their wisdom and inspiration.

We thank the organisations and people who supported their visits to Aotearoa.

We gratefully acknowledge the interviewees for sharing their wisdom.

We acknowledge the length of time that has passed between the interviews and their publication. This project was shaped by pragmatic issues of funding scarcity and competing demands on time. To gather the interviewees Catherine met with people within Kotare's networks—the people whose stories are included are those who could be reached and were willing to engage. We acknowledge there are many others who also hold valuable stories and who have not been included.

We thank all those who contributed to finalising the interviews particularly Betsan Martin and Kay Robin. Thank you also to Gwyn John for her role in the original interviews and Susan Adams for her contribution on Structural Analysis.

Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou katoa.

Catherine Delahunty from Kotare Trust

Jen Margaret, Deborah Radford, Christine Herzog from AWEA



Introduction

'In New Zealand, I held more discussions about Pedagogy of the Oppressed...I was impressed by my discussions with indigenous leaders—with their insight, their awareness of their position of subjection and their rejection of that position, their thirst for the struggle, their non-conformity.'

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. p.159.¹

This series of interviews explores the influence of Paulo Freire—one of the most significant educators of the twentieth century—on people working at the flaxroots² for social change in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Indigenous and non-indigenous grassroots activists talk about their social justice work, how they have been influenced by Freire's ideas and how they have used and adapted them in the contexts in which they live and work.

Through gathering and sharing these stories we wish to honour both the work of Freire and the vital contribution of grassroots practitioners working for social justice. The people interviewed are community leaders who have influenced many others through their work and the spread of their ideas. We hope their stories demonstrate the influence of Freire in nonacademic settings and contribute to the understanding of critical pedagogy. We hope they encourage praxis and provide some practical examples of the ways in which theory can contribute to effective education and action for social justice.

Throughout these interviews there are many references to Structural Analysis—tools which were influenced by Freirean thought and introduced to Aotearoa in the early 1980s through workshops facilitated by Father Filip Fanchette. The series begins with a paper on Structural Analysis to provide context. This is followed by the interviews, which are presented as edited dialogue. We used this structure mainly because we wanted to retain the voice of the participants but also because it links on several levels with Freire's own ideas and work. Rather than provide a conclusion we have left it open to each reader to analyse the content of the interviews and draw conclusions in relation to their own context/s. To support this, we provide questions to prompt reflection.

This series is for you if you are committed to education for social justice, interested in the work of Freire, or in the particular stories of social justice workers engaged in using Structural Analysis, Treaty education and/or Māori initiatives.

It was developed by Kotare Trust and published by AWEA, organisations committed to education for social justice. Each organisation outlines its own journey of engagement with Freire's ideas below.

¹ Freire, P. (1994). *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Continuum.

² This term refers to those at the 'grassroots' in the context of Aotearoa. The reference to flax rather than grass localises the term and holds relevance to both indigenous and non-indigenous New Zealanders.

The Influence of Paulo Freire on Kotare Trust

In the mid-1990s some people involved in resistance to neoliberal policy in Aotearoa identified the need for activist education. The group included the trade unions, unemployed unions, women's movement, adult educators, church people, community economic development leaders and other individuals from the activist traditions. Over time this group included Te Tiriti workers, gay liberation activists, and environmental activists.

Their very particular response to the state of the nation was the formation of an education and research trust to support activism for social change. This model was strongly influenced by several key institutions overseas and some key political education thinkers. Kotare Trust, as the group named itself, consciously examined models such as the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, the liberation struggles in Asia and the methods of South American educator Paulo Freire. The influence of Freire in particular was linked to the broader concept of Structural Analysis and the tools of popular education.

During the 1980s and 1990s, some of the Kotare trustees had been exposed to key ideas from Paulo Freire. National workshops had been held under the leadership of Father John Curnow, Filip Fanchette, Sister Makareta Tawaroa and indeed Paulo Freire during his visit to Aotearoa in 1974. Structural Analysis for Aotearoa was developing in both the Māori sovereignty movement and the women's liberation movement. Kotare was strongly influenced by the Auckland Unemployed Workers' Rights Centre which recognised not only activism but community economic development as a key part of social change. Although the churches, Marxism and protest action were key influences, Kotare, from the outset, had an antifundamentalist approach and a commitment to education rather than leading front line action.

It was and is the role of Kotare to provide a safe place for activists to strategise, organise and develop their campaigns. The key Freirean ideas of conscientisation, praxis, identifying the internalised oppressor, and challenging 'banking' ideology in education were consciously introduced in the workshops that Kotare initiated. The emphasis on creative cultural work, although influenced by Filipino popular educators, also encompassed the central Freirean idea of working with the concrete experience of the group. The early Kotare workshops were characterised by song, art work, role play and dialogues and were focused on developing an ethical approach to education for social change. Supporting the oppressed groups and key community leaders by developing analysis and organising skills were, and are, key goals.

In 1999 Kotare hired its first paid education organiser and began to run programmes. When I took on the job I was not a theorist but a practitioner who used my activism experience in my education work. It was only when I read Freire and discussed

method with Kotare Trustees that I recognised I had in fact been working from the same basic tenets. Like many others in Aotearoa I found that Freire named and developed my instincts as a radical educator.

Trying to maintain this approach contains some inherent contradictions for Kotare. As mainly Pākehā from a relatively privileged background we find ourselves working more with allies of marginalised groups, and sometimes with marginalised people, especially youth. The questions of, ‘Who is appropriate to work with whom?’ and ‘What structural models apply to groups in different power positions?’ continue to be relevant. We have never been orthodox or literal in our relationship with Freire’s ideas, especially as a group committed to feminism and the unique political issues in Aotearoa.

Freire’s analysis came from working with oppressed people. Kotare, working more broadly with community workers, activists, youth, women leaders and others calls on broader strands of popular education thinking. Structural Analysis which includes models such as ‘The Wave’ has been a core part of all the programmes. We have changed and adapted the models from Freire and related sources into tools relevant for working with our own people in this country.

Catherine Delahunty, Kotare Trust

The Influence of Paulo Freire on AWEA

Auckland Workers' Educational Association was formed in 1914 by representatives from all the major trade unions in Auckland, along with other interested educators. Over the decades many aspects of the organisation have changed but promoting social justice has remained its core purpose; so engagement with Freire's ideas was natural. The first application of Freirean principles in AWEA's programmes occurred in the adult literacy programme established by Martin Harrison in the mid-1970s. It was founded with people's own context and their motivation to learn as its major tenets. As Kaye Green, AWEA tutor-organiser explained, "The object of the exercise was that a person learnt to read what they wanted to read—what impelled them to come to the movement. If, for instance, what you wanted to be able to do was to read your child a bedtime story at night, that's where they started. Maybe someone wanted to read Best Bets, that's where they started. They started with the motivation to read and what people wanted to read. They were entirely flexible in their orientation and how they taught."³

This approach was also characteristic of the women's studies courses first offered by AWEA in 1974. Claire-Louise McCurdy, AWEA Women's Studies tutor said, "Over the 1970s and 1980s documentation of the reality of peoples' lives, particularly women's, was really important. It connects to the Freirean principle that if you know and understand what makes up your context this knowledge can be your ground for making change. ... Much of what Freire articulated was felt to be familiar and relevant to those working within AWEA. Those involved with the organisation discussed his ideas and adapted them to the local context; however while the ideas of Freire were influential, attributing to theorists that which is essentially found knowledge of individuals was seen as problematic. There was a resistance, informed by feminist and other political contexts, to the idea of setting up gurus."⁴

Since the 1990s AWEA's constitutional purpose has been to encourage and provide community education that promotes a just and equitable society in accordance with Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Two central frameworks inform our work, Structural Analysis and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. We use Structural Analysis tools such as The Wave—which illustrates that what we see depends on where we are standing—as a central part of our educational workshops. We believe that it is important to recognise that people see things differently because they are standing in different places. In our Treaty work we prioritise our role as allies with mana whenua ahead of our own projects.

We support initiatives of those marginalised and believe that those experiencing injustice should make the decisions about priorities for change. Through a community development approach we support others (for example, Māori, Pasifika

³ See the interview with Kaye Green here: <http://awea.org.nz/our-stories>

⁴ See link above

and migrant groups; organisations trying to implement Treaty and cultural diversity responsiveness) both to develop their own capabilities and to undertake specific projects because they will be able to meet their own needs better than we can.

Jen Margaret, AWEA