

une

University of  
New England

# Learning from History

Associate Professor Bob Boughton

University of New England

NSWALNC Fortieth Anniversary Conference

UTS, Sydney

December 2017

“Adult education historical inquiry is tangled up with contemporary debates about the nature of adult education as a discipline.....

The struggle over the meanings of the past is tied to the kind of world we want to build tomorrow.”

Welton, M. R. (1993). In search of the object: historiography and adult education. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 15(2), p.146.

# The Argument

- The ‘official history’ of the Australian adult literacy field overstates the role of academics, policy makers and professionals as a ‘social force’ for change
- As a corollary to this, it understates the leading role which was played by radical social movements in the Global South in the 1960s- 1980s in putting adult literacy on the world agenda
- It also fails to highlight the negative role played by international actors, especially the World Bank and the OECD, who, from the 1960s on, set out to neutralise this radical global literacy movement
- It also presents the role of ‘policy activists’ and ‘new literacy studies’ academics in a too uncritical light, in part because of a 1980s & 1990s ‘post-modern turn’ in academia
- To move forward, we need to re-connect with our radical past, and, in particular, with mass adult literacy campaigns and the theory & practice of ‘popular education’.



***Sam Bowles and Herb Gintis at the Sydney Radical Education Conference.***

1976

# The Long View



Jose Marti  
1853-1895  
'Founder' of Latin American  
Popular Education  
(Streck 2008)

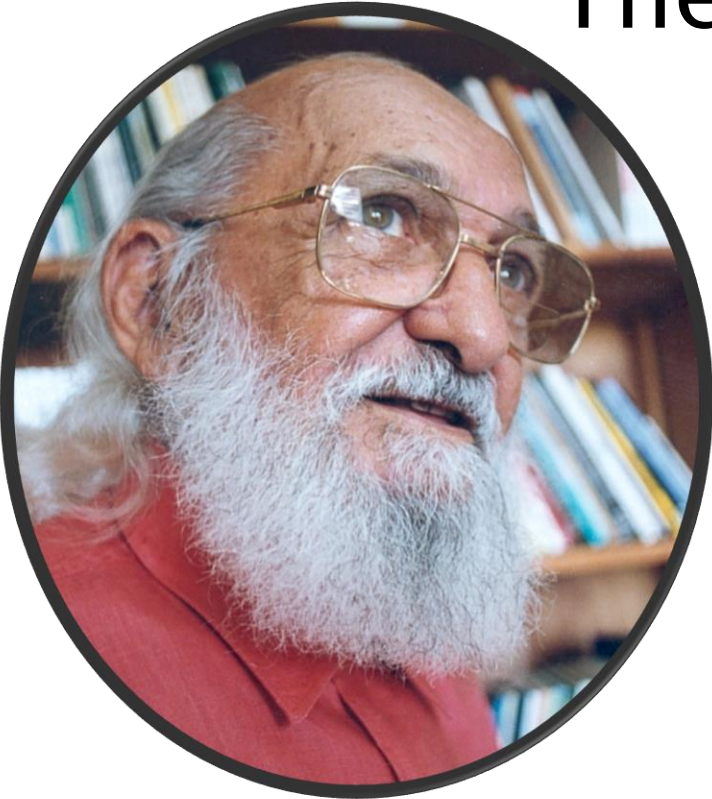
Fidel Castro addressing the  
United Nations General Assembly  
September 1960:

"Next year, our people intend to wage their  
great battle against illiteracy, with the  
ambitious goal of teaching the illiterate how  
to read and write... Cuba will be the first  
country in America with no illiterate people

"



# The 1960s



Paulo Freire

- 1961 Cuban literacy campaign
- 1961 UN General assembly resolved to mount a World Literacy Campaign
- 1963 Paulo Freire commenced his literacy work in North Easter Brazil
- 1964 UNESCO resolved “to initiate in 1966 a five-year experimental world literacy programme designed to pave the way for the eventual execution of a world campaign in the field”
- 1965 World Conference of Ministers of Education on the eradication of Illiteracy, Tehran
- 1966 Experimental World Literacy Program began

# The 1970s

- ACAL and also NSWALNC, were the 'child' of the Australian Association of Adult Education (AAAE), which was dominated by university adult education departments
- Despite the radical student movements erupting on campuses, AAAE was a fairly conservative body; and ACALs leadership reflected this
- The radical educators in Australia were influenced by Freire, who had come to Australia in 1974; by the marxist analysis of Bowles and Gintis, US education economists who visited in 1976; and by the emerging fields of 'critical pedagogy' and 'popular education' in the US, the UK and the Global South, especially Southern Africa and Latin America
- The policy developments of the 70s, such as the TAFEs move into adult literacy, was a response to the pressure for change from the radicals among the university students and education unionists, and from social movements among women, Indigenous people and migrants, as much if not more than it did the lobbying of ACAL and AAAE academics
- Many of us were further radicalised by the 1975 coup, which removed the reforming Whitlam government

# The 1980s

- In 1983, after 7 years of conservative rule under Malcolm Fraser, the ALP won power federally, and Hawke became PM
- Despite the attempt by the World bank and others to roll back the global literacy movement, mass campaigns had continued e.g. Mozambique 1975-79; Nicaragua's campaign led by the Sandinistas in 1980-81.
- There was also now a campaign underway in the UK, which in 10 years reached 200000 people; and another had occurred in Portugal, which began following the fall of the Fascist dictator, Salazar
- The global movement had also convinced the UN to declare 1990 the International Year of Literacy. A key organisation pushing for this was the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE), whose first Chairperson was Julius Nyerere, President of Tanzania, which had also run a successful mass campaign
- In 1982, the ICAE convened an international meeting to review progress on campaigns around the world.



# 1980s (continued)

- No wonder, then, that a Senate Inquiry in 1984 recommended that Australia also have a campaign; this proposal found its way into the national Australian language Policy of 1987; and
- The 1987-88 Federal budget earmarked \$2m for an Adult Literacy Action Campaign

# So, what happened?

- Instead of a mass campaign to make adult literacy a central issue in Australian society, instead we got:
  - The Training Reform Agenda;
  - New Literacy Studies;
  - A celebration of ‘policy activism’ at the expense of the ideology of social movement struggle;
  - Increasingly sophisticated literacy theory and pedagogy, derived from anthropology and linguistics
  - A much greater focus on ‘professionalism’ and academic qualifications
  - The gradual retreat in adult education from marxist political economy, critical pedagogy and popular education, in favour of post-modern and post structuralist theories of power and social change
  - Less solidarity here for the radical social justice and equality agenda in the Global South, and more support for World Bank/OECD funded ‘human capital development’ focused on schools and VET

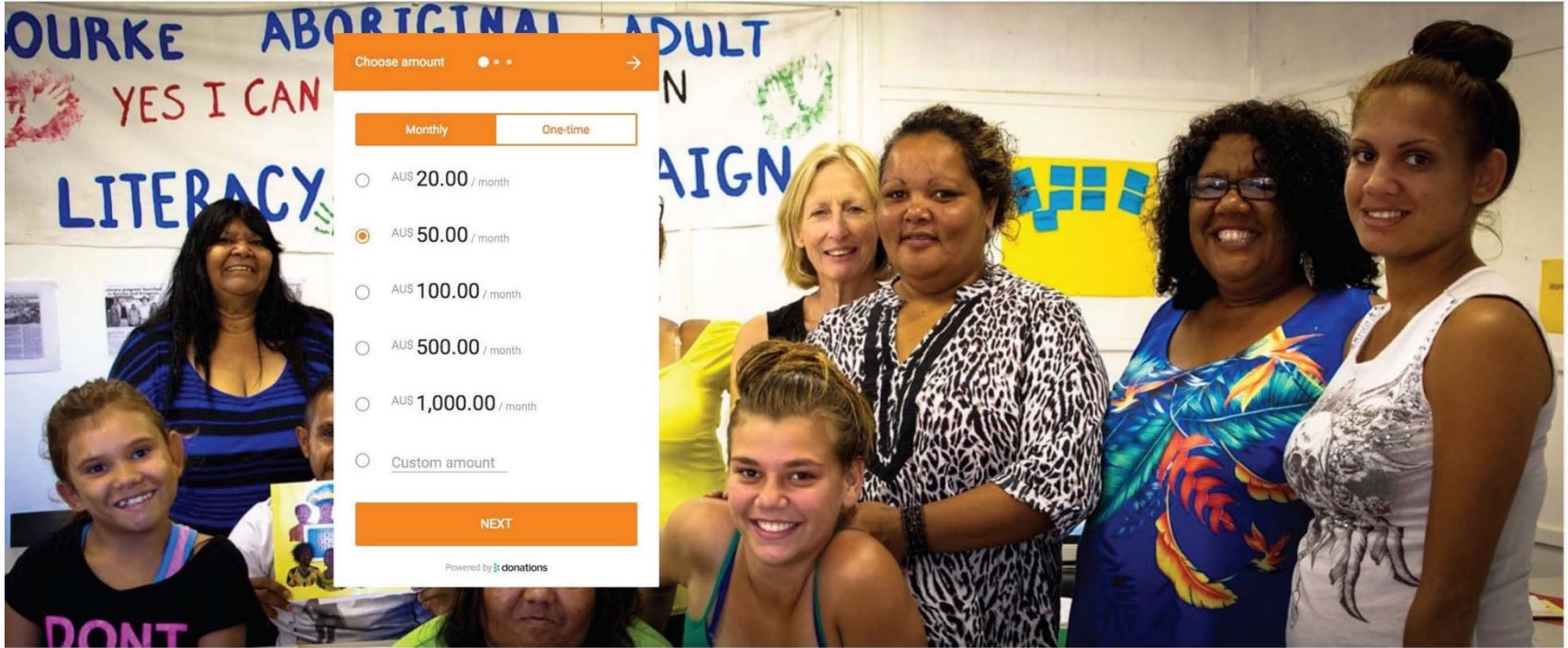
# What is to be done?

“Liberating education can change our understanding of reality. But this is not the same as changing reality itself. No.

Only political action in society can make social transformation, not critical study in the classroom. The structures of society, like the capitalist mode of production, have to be changed for society to be transformed....

The issue of social conflict is absolutely important here. In the last analysis, conflict is the midwife of consciousness."

(Freire & Shor, 1987, pp175-6; cited Youngman 2000, p. 38



Please don't hesitate to call if you'd like to discuss making a donation or other ways you can partner with us -

phone: (02) 9322 2120 If you prefer to donate via PayPal please click the button below.

# Literacy for Life Foundation

## Literacy. Everyone's Right, Everyone's Business

<https://www.lflf.org.au/donate/>

# In Praise Of Learning

## Bertolt Brecht

Learn the elementary things!  
For those whose time has come  
It is never too late!  
Learn the ABC. It won't be enough,  
But learn it! Don't be dismayed by it?  
Begin! You must know everything.  
You must take over the leadership.

Learn, man in the asylum!  
Learn, man in the prison!  
Learn, woman in the kitchen!  
Learn sixty year olds!  
You must take over the leadership.  
Seek out the school, you who are  
homeless!

Acquire knowledge, you who shiver!  
You who are hungry, reach for the  
book:  
it is a weapon.  
You must take over the leadership.

Don't be afraid to ask, comrade!  
Don't be talked into anything.  
Check for yourself!  
What you do not know yourself  
you don't know.  
Scrutinize the bill,  
it is you who must pay it.  
Put your finger on each item,  
ask: how did this get there ?  
You must take over the leadership.