

SCI PEACE MESSENGERS

NEWSLETTER

#11

CONTENT

Peace Messengers at ICM

Focus : Keep it real : Peace Messengers and popular education

Paulo Freire

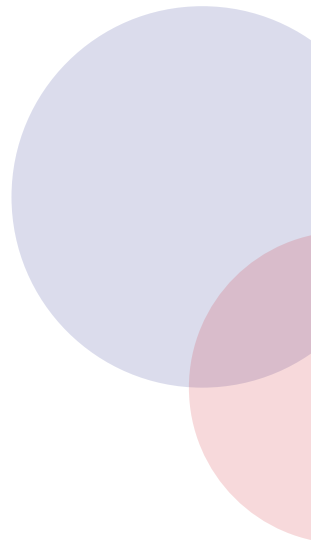
Paulo Freire at SVI Brazil

Meeting with MST

Irina's article

PM of the month : Imran

Online training in the coming months



EDITORIAL

During this winter months, it's good to go back to the roots and think about what it means to be a Peace Messenger and what is the point of our actions.

So that's why we chose to focus in this issue on popular education and Paulo Freire's ideas, and their influence on Peace Messengers and SCI work in general.

We'll share also some news with you, and there will also be the return of our Peace Messenger of the month- this month Imran from Bangladesh!

PEACE MESSENGERS AT ICM (MAURITIUS, DECEMBER 2009)

Last year, in Glencree, we took any opportunity to present and promote the Peace Messengers programme. This year however the Peace Messengers network presence was more low-key, as the programme is now fairly well known. The two Peace Messengers present instead took time to discuss with other delegates, mostly from Asia, to hear about how PM activities in their branches were going. We heard good news about PM activities in Asia: the Bangladesh seminar (see previous issue) has been very successful, both to provide SCI volunteers with training skills, and to motivate them to start PM activities in their branches.

In Nepal and Sri Lanka in particular there are great plans to develop this type of Peace education activities; especially in Sri Lanka where a team of 50 Peace Messengers will be constituted- we hope to hear more about it in the coming months!



We did organise a Peace Messenger session though, with SVI-Mauritius volunteers. It was an enriching experience as much for participants as for Peace Messengers: participants got the chance to reflect about what is peace and what are the factors destroying or building it, and also discovered a new method of Peace education; for trainers, we heard new ideas and ways of seeing different concepts, and it was a very inspiring session.

Thank you, SVI volunteers!

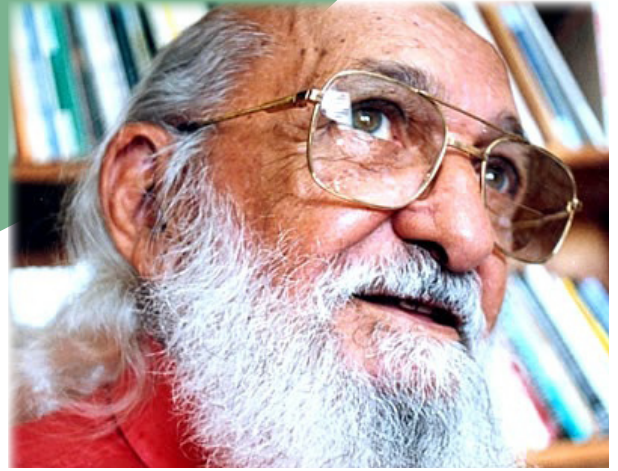
FOCUS : KEEP IT REAL : PEACE MESSENGERS AND POPULAR EDUCATION

Introduction

Peace Messengers sessions are often a strong experience for participants and Peace Messengers. However, one may wonder about the real impact of these sessions, especially since they are not always connected with issues met in daily lives of the participants. This is actually a criticism that popular education activists often make to development education activists: what is the value of discussing issues that are not experienced by people, is this not just a nice but empty talk ?

We, Peace Messengers, believe that our sessions can be a first step on a path of self-discovery and peace activism, but we are interested to hear about popular education methodology and experiences, this is why we have devoted this issue's focus to Peace Messengers and popular education. You will find a presentation of Paulo Freire and his philosophy, and also an article on how SVI Brazil aims at putting his teaching in practice. Another article reports on a meeting between Brazilian popular education activists from the Landless Workers' Movement and Belgian development education workers and volunteers. And finally, we gave the floor to Irina, an experienced Peace Messengers from SCI-Romania, who argues that Peace Messengers are much more than a nice talk about abstract issues!

FOCUS : KEEP IT REAL : PEACE MESSENGERS AND POPULAR EDUCATION



Paulo Freire - learning to become free from oppression

Paulo Freire is one of the most famous pedagogues of last century, and well-known in informal education circles. Yet it is likely that many Peace Messengers do not know him, so that's why we decided to give you a short introduction to the man and his thinking.

Paulo Freire was born in Recife (Brazil) in 1921, and after studying law, got interested in pedagogy and education theories. Being a director of education, cultural and social services, he worked mainly with illiterate poor. This, as well as his family background, helped him develop a strong social and political conscience, and to develop educational theories aiming at teaching literacy but also to free the oppressed. The dictatorial government did not always like these theories, and for some years P. Freire had to flee his country. His teachings were influential to liberation movements all over the world.

For him, the notion of dialogue and reciprocity between the teacher and the student is central. The student is not an empty account that has to be filled with units of knowledge by the teacher; the teacher should also learn, and the student teach.

Teaching is a dialogue

Teaching is thus a dialogue, and through this attitude, we already change the world, by showing respect to each other and developing relations between us, and this changes our ways of acting. But this new knowledge built together also leads us to action. Knowledge without action is as bad as action without knowledge.

When working with oppressed communities, teaching is also a way to

FOCUS : KEEP IT REAL : PEACE MESSENGERS AND POPULAR EDUCATION

give a voice, and to conscientize. This process gives a new consciousness and a power to change reality. When teaching to read and write, the educator starts from the daily life of the student, not from an abstract situation (the texts you find in reading textbooks). This approach gives a more active role to the student, and helps him naming the world, developing ownership of your environment, and then acting on it. Literacy and knowledge in general becomes power and a way to take an active role in your life and fight against what oppresses you.

Peace Messengers use informal teaching methods, and therefore parts of Freire's theory are familiar to Peace Messengers (mostly the fact that we're not here to give facts to participants but to help them building their own knowledge; also the fact that during PM session we learn as much as we teach). But sometimes we lose sight of the political dimension underlying in any teaching activity, and we forget about the liberating power of knowledge. Although a majority of work camps participants do not come from oppressed communities, still it is interesting for us to reflect about this dimension and to draw from experiences linked to Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed. As part of a global social movement, it is also good for us to know about his theories, who are influencing many social movements action, in Brazil and elsewhere (see following articles in this section).

This is why we strongly recommend you to check the Paulo Freire entry in the Encyclopaedia of informal education (www.infed.org), and then visit the numerous webpages of groups devoted to studying and spreading Paulo Freire's ideas (for example:

<http://www.paulofreireinstitute.org/>

<http://www.freire.de/sprachen/english.html>)

His two main books are *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) and *Pedagogy of Hope*. *Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1995).

FOCUS : KEEP IT REAL : PEACE MESSENGERS AND POPULAR EDUCATION

“For the tattered of the world and for those who discover themselves in the tattered and in this way, discovering themselves, with them suffer, but, over all, with them fight.”

*Paulo Freire
First words of Pedagogy of The Oppressed*

Was Paulo Freire the founder of SVI Brasil?

We believe that yes, Paulo Freire was present in the first meetings of the SVI Brasil Team and kept walking together with us until nowadays. But how? Didn't he die many years before SVI Brasil begun? Indeed his body died before, but he was there in the very beginning of SVI Brasil and he is still here.

We are not saying he was and is here as a ghost... Well maybe he even is, but we can not know that... What we are trying to show in this article is that Freire's principles are very alive in the SVI Brasil identity and actions since its beginning. There are plenty of Freire's insights which we can relate to SVI Brasil way of acting and understanding the world. Let's highlight two of them:

Starting by the reality.

Freire taught us something that can sound obvious but it is quite rare: every action which aims to change the world should start by the reality of the people involved. Yes, it does not change anything anywhere if we convince people to march defending some cause which has no connections with these people daily life... that's not the way... this march would not be the expression of people's ideas. It would be just one more up to down marketing speech... swimming in a big ocean of millions of empty speeches...

No, as Freire taught us, SVI Brasil projects and the team actions start by the worries and perceptions we have about the reality we are living in. Just to make a short list of topics we address: unequal division of the wealth, exploitation of natural resources, stereotypes about Brazil spread worldwide, lack of opportunities for poor Brazilian communities to experience international solidarity. We experience these “limit-situations” everyday and that's why we have energy to keep working on overcoming them. And we will not stop.

FOCUS : KEEP IT REAL : PEACE MESSENGERS AND POPULAR EDUCATION

Nobody releases anyone.

Nobody releases anyone. Nobody releases him/herself alone. The human beings release each other when they relate to each other inside the world. This insight from Freire might be his strongest influence on how SVI Brazil team understand international solidarity and the potential of volunteer exchanges.

Considering this principle it gets clear that SVI Brazil is not creating a way for foreign volunteers come to Brazil to “save our poor children” because they saw “The City of God” movie and now they feel pity about the Brazilian little children in the slums... SVI Brazil is not about that!



We promote volunteer exchanges because we believe when people come from very different realities (as international volunteers) and live together with each other focusing in one common concrete aim (the work of the workcamp which must bring a concrete benefit for the local community), it creates a very unique circumstance, where human beings are strongly invited to release each other from each other prejudices and other beliefs which were preventing them to experience life in a wider and more peaceful way. Human beings in relation in the world... releasing each other from their chains. This is the Peace Revolution we believe. This is the revolution Paulo Freire taught us to do in Brazil and in the world by his initiatives on Popular Education.

There is a lot to say about Paulo Freire thoughts and its connections with SVI Brasil actions, but Paulo Freire himself would say the best way to understand it all is living it... is seeing with your eyes our achievements and contradictions... is coming and helping us to bring SVI Brasil reality closer to our beautiful “Utopia”. If you come by this motivation, we have very wide open arms to welcome you: www.svibrasil.org.

*By Pedro Chaltein
SVI Brasil coordinator
pedro@svibrasil.org*

FOCUS : KEEP IT REAL : PEACE MESSENGERS AND POPULAR EDUCATION

Popular education in a socio-political movement : a meeting with Landless Workers' Movement

End 2007, Frère des Hommes, a Belgian NGO, invited Jose Claudio da Silva, from the Landless Workers' Movement (Brazil), to share with development education workers and volunteers training experiences from the LWM and introduce us to the pedagogical approaches of the LWM.

When one thinks of the LWM, one thinks first of land occupation operations and mobilization of farmers against latifundistas (owners of large estates who don't always cultivate all the lands they own). But Jose showed us that training and popular education were also key dimensions of the movement. The LWM aims not only at giving land to landless farmers, but also change the society features dating from colonial times for more social justice, and, at the end of the day, emancipation for all. Popular education is essential first for practical reasons: if farmers are not able to manage their new farms, after one or two generations they will have lost their land again. But it is also essential for political, and even ethical reasons: if you want to change society, you must raise awareness among farmers to then mobilise them in the struggle against all types of domination. And education is also an aim in itself, to develop and emancipate any human being.

In order to reach these aims, methods inspired from liberation theology, communist cultural circles and of course theoreticians like Paulo Freire are used. Education can sometimes take very concrete forms; tearing away a fence closing lands is to show that property is not holy. And each occupation action is immediately followed by an assembly, which can also be considered as an educating event. Besides this, formalised structures, both mobile and sedentary, are used to provide more formal training activities. Jose also insisted on the humanist character that these education activities must

FOCUS : KEEP IT REAL : PEACE MESSENGERS AND POPULAR EDUCATION

keep, and above all of joy and celebrating dimensions of these events.

Jose let us experience one of the activity that often starts training sessions, called 'mystique'. The aim was to talk about food sovereignty. Each participant received an object, and the trainer called these objects one by one:

- some earth (x2)
- water
- a candle
- seeds
- fruits (x3)
- a LWM cap
- a model LWM truck

Each participant had to lay down on the table his/her object (or spread in the case of earth), and explain

what this object symbolized for him/her. At the end, a picture of LWM culture and action was thus created



This 'mystique' moment is experienced as a gathering moment, almost a celebration. It is a symbolical moment, where input and ideas of all participants are collected, and where relations are built. In the words of Jose, you start from the cold pessimism of rationality, which says that things are like that and cannot be changed; you also start from a difficult reality, to go towards something utopian, or at least possibilities for change. The 'mystique' starts from concrete reality to invite individuals to criticise it. In the afternoon, some participants stayed to discuss this experience with José. A participant expressed how she was pleasantly surprised when, at the

FOCUS : KEEP IT REAL : PEACE MESSENGERS AND POPULAR EDUCATION

end, Jose said 'Thanks for you input'. In formal university courses, she was not used to the fact that the educator acknowledges the fact that knowledge is built together.

The discussion quickly moved to how this Brazilian popular education experience could be replicated in Belgium, especially in the development education sphere. The LWM and popular education in general raises awareness so people take action to change their realities, the world around them; development education is dealing with a reality that is perceived as far away, and that first requires taking distance from your own reality ('In this game, you'll be...an African farmer, an Asian government, a street kid..'). One of the participants for instance said that for her, a Belgian urban girl, earth didn't mean or symbolize much. But everybody agreed that the challenge of development education is to work on values (and not only denounce and make people feel guilty). It is also to link issues from the South to daily lives of Northern countries residents, to make a link between what happens here and over there. In this respect, a participant noted that development education should be more open to social movements, to create a link between awareness-raising and political campaigns.

But before that, some had noted that an activity similar to the 'mystique' could be organised, not at the beginning but at the end of the training event, so that each participant can take part to the construction of a symbolical representation of the outputs of this training events.



Sylvie (SCI Belgium)

FOCUS : KEEP IT REAL : PEACE MESSENGERS AND POPULAR EDUCATION

Education is the Key

Nowadays, education is or at least it should be the key to a better life, to being respected and not discriminated in any way, to have equal rights and beneficiate of the same treatment as any other human being living on the face of Earth. And when I say education I do not refer to the formal one, thought in schools. Because certainly that type does help as well, but it is not the only one a person can have. There are other forms of education, more appealing to people, more fun and entertaining. For example, non-formal education, the one in which you learn by the means of free debate on differ-



ent issues or by interesting games, education practiced largely in every branch of SCI. Also, I reckon that learning from your or other people's experience is a very good way of educating yourself, of knowing what is right or wrong, what is suited for you to do or how to get along with others, how to respect and cherish their presence, actions and ideas.

I would like to further talk on Peace Messengers' work in our organization, and how this kind of workshops held

in workcamps from a lot of branches made the participants thoroughly talk about the higher aim of SCI-peace- and to try to apply it in every aspect of their lives; not only to be in peace with the others, but with themselves as well, and last but not least with the environment, because if you do not treat mother Earth well, you cannot expect it to be always good to yourself. I am very aware that some people would argue that in the Peace Messenger sessions you only debate upon peace and play some funny games, but you do not change anything, so that is not popular education. Not true at all from my point of view! I have realized from all the session that I held in these 2 years as a PM that people leave the workshops spiritual enriched and fell stronger than they ever felt before to apply the peace and human rights values in their daily life, to improve their relationships with family, friends and even the community they live in. They truly realize that they can

FOCUS : KEEP IT REAL : PEACE MESSENGERS AND POPULAR EDUCATION

be the change they want to see in the world, that with a little bit of effort from the part of each of them, we will someday live in the world we envisage in our dearest dreams.

They go back home and some of them become more socially or politically active, by taking part in different protest actions such as: petition signing, protest actions or manifestations. Some even start participating in further debates about peace and non-discrimination, sometimes even implementing workshops of their own, in order to try to spread the info they acquired during the PM workshops and make others have a positive attitude towards all humans they meet in their lives. Simply because all people deserve to be treated right and to be loved.



In PM workshops, as in other forms of popular education, you do talk a lot about personal experience, the participants present different situations they have been experiencing during their life or try to seek an answer about how they will act if put in different extreme situations of conflict or various forms of discriminations directed to them or other people. From my own experience I have noticed that

these workshops are very different from the formal education you get in school. Why? Because they are not a one-way process, but a two-way one, where not only the participant learns new things, but also the PM. As a facilitator you get wiser and richer after each and every session you develop, it changes your life bit by bit. You leave the session knowing that you changed something in the people you dealt with, but that they also changed you, made you even more focused on doing good actions and always thinking positively, no matter what happens in your life. And that is why I just love it!

Irina (SCI Romania)

PM OF THE MONTH : IMRAN

Imran (SCI-Bangladesh) met Peace Messengers even before they were called Peace Messengers, and was immediately interested by the concept. He took part to last year's Peace Messengers training seminar in France, and then helped organizing a training seminar in Bangladesh, to which participants from Asian branches took part (see previous newsletter). And this month, he is our Peace Messenger of the month!



If Peace Messengers were a noun, they would be: **Buddha**. Why I choose this name? Because when I think about him or even when I hare or read this name I feel peace inside me. He inspired me to meditate. And when I meditate I pray, wish and dream for peace in all aspect of life and nature.

If Peace Messengers were an adjective, they would be: **Tolerant**. Without this peace cannot be established. It is not so easy to respect others all the time in practical way. If we look at the people from history who tried to empower people in the state or in the society or promote their philosophy for mankind they have all shown their patience and tolerance against all kind of obstacles. So this is very important.

If Peace Messengers were a verb, they would be: **Awaken**. Without knowing, without developing oneself and without wishing to change the thing nothing is possible.

PEACE MESSENGERS ONLINE TRAINING

... Well, it's still more a vision than a plan, but a small group of Peace Messengers is thinking about organising a Peace Messengers online training, and developing contents and technical approaches. This course would be an introduction to Peace Education and Peace Messengers' activities, would last a few weeks (and require one hour or two of your time a week, plus occasional Skype meetings) , and would also allow SCI volunteers from different branches to get to know each others and exchange ideas. If you're interested, write us at peacemessengers@gmail.com and we'll get back to you when we actually start running the course.

PEACE MESSENGERS CONTACT DETAILS

Peace Messengers Contact Details

Our email address is :

peacemessengers@gmail.com

You can find information on us on our
webpage:

<http://spaceforpeace.net/pm.phtml>

Connect with us on FaceBook!

We have a Group page (SCI Peace Messengers) and a Profile (Peace Messengers).