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## Considering the Role of the Teacher: Buber, Freire and Gur-Ze'ev

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**ABSTRACT – Considering the Role of the Teacher: Buber, Freire and Gur-Ze'ev.** This article considers three different concepts of the role of the teacher. Buber understands the teacher as the *builder-teacher* of a dialogical community playing a fundamental role in the character formation of individuals. Freire develops this notion, adding a political tinge, and argues for a *political-teacher* who plays a central role in the formation of critical individuals and in the liberation of the oppressed. Gur-Ze'ev is critical of Freire and defends the *improviser-teacher*, who is always critical and encourages criticisms, but without reference to utopias. The article compares and assesses critically these concepts of the role of the teacher; and indicates the implications of adopting them, not only for education, but also for society more generally.

Keywords: **Buber. Freire. Gur-Ze'ev. Teacher.**

**RESUMO – Refletindo sobre o Papel do Professor: Buber, Freire e Gur-Ze'ev.** Três conceitos distintos relacionados ao papel do professor são considerados neste artigo. Buber compreende o docente como *professor-construtor* de uma comunidade dialógica que desempenha um papel fundamental na formação do caráter dos indivíduos. Freire desenvolve essa noção, acrescentando um matiz político, e defende um *professor-político* que desempenha um papel central na formação de indivíduos críticos e na libertação dos oprimidos. Gur-Ze'ev é crítico de Freire e defende o *professor-improvisador*, que exercita e incentiva a criticidade sempre, mas sem referência a utopias. O artigo compara e avalia criticamente estes conceitos relacionados ao papel do professor e indica as implicações de adotá-los não apenas para a educação, mas também para a sociedade em geral.

Palavras-chave: **Buber. Freire. Gur-Ze'ev. Professor.**

## Introduction

It seems inconceivable to think of education without teachers. This is because teachers play a fundamental role in enabling people to speak, read, write, think critically, and lead an ethical life (Ayers, 1995, p. 126). Even those who defend more progressive education, focusing on learners and learning, do not completely ignore the importance of teachers and teaching, as they realise it would be impossible to develop the kind of personal growth they envisage without the guidance of a teacher (Shim, 2008, p. 515)<sup>1</sup>.

The potential for dissemination of information and the increase of communication technologies has, however, led many to predict that teachers should become facilitators of learning, true guides who enable learners: “[...] from early childhood throughout their learning trajectories, to develop and advance through the constantly expanding maze of knowledge” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 54; cf. also Haddad, 2012). In addition, the growth of ICTs (i.e. Information and Communication Technologies), MOOCs (i.e. Massive Open Online Course), Distance Education, and other technologies, such as specific computer programs which teach languages, mathematics and other subjects, pointed to an ever diminishing need for teachers. It has become possible to envisage a gradual disappearance of the teaching profession. However: “[...] such forecasts are no longer cogent: an effective teaching profession must still be considered a priority of education policies in all countries” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 54; cf. also Haddad, 2012).

In fact, the importance of teachers in achieving a new model of development, based on the realization of individual potential and of sustainable societies is reemerging. Yet:

[...] a number of trends point to a process of deprofessionalization of teachers in both the global North and the global South. These trends include the influx of unqualified teachers, partly in response to teacher shortages, but also for financial reasons: the casualization of teachers through contract-teaching...the reduced autonomy of teachers; the erosion of the quality of the teaching profession as a result of...testing...and evaluations; the encroachment...of private management techniques; and gaps between the remuneration of teachers and of professionals in other sectors in many countries (UNESCO, 2015, p. 54; cf. also Haddad, 2012).

Such pressures and trends mean that we must rethink those issues that concern the teaching profession. There should be discussion about the nature of teacher training programmes, of the curriculum, of continuing development once training is completed, of the methodologies used across educational institutions, and the syllabus employed. These are fundamental matters which need to be considered if we are to solve the problems faced by the profession; *and* encourage a new model of development, humanistic in nature and nurturing of sustainability at

a global level (UNESCO, 2015). However, we begin with most fundamental question: what is the role of the teacher in education?

This article contributes to an answer through considering three different concepts of the role of the teacher. Martin Buber understands the teacher as the *builder-teacher* of a dialogical community, with a fundamental role in the character formation of individuals. Paulo Freire develops this, arguing for a *political-teacher* who plays a central role in the formation of critical individuals and in the liberation of the oppressed. Ilan Gur-Ze'ev is critical of Freire and defends the *improviser-teacher*, who is always critical and encouraging criticisms, but without reference to utopias. In this article we dialogue with these three thinkers, comparing and assessing critically their respective understandings of the role of the teacher, and indicate the implications of adopting them, not only for education, but also for society more generally.

### **Martin Buber: the teacher as a *community builder***

Martin Buber (1878-1965), the well-known Jewish philosopher and theologian, is considered one of the greatest thinkers on education of the twentieth century. Buber had an outstanding university career and became a prominent academic in Germany. However, in 1933, when Hitler came to power, Buber was obliged to withdraw from the University of Frankfurt and devoted his time to the *Frankfurt Lehrhaus*. This became one of the main sites of Jewish education in Germany, especially after the implementation of the discriminatory and anti-Jewish *Nuremberg Laws* of 1935 (Taylor; Shaw, 1987). Buber also became the director of the Office for Jewish Adult Education in Germany, with responsibility for the training of volunteer teachers to work in the network of Jewish *Lehrhauser* that spread throughout Germany as Jews were excluded from German educational institutions. Buber's reputation at this time, both as an educator and as a moral leader, was considerable. Hannah Arendt, writing in *Le Journal Juif* on 16 April 1935, said of him: "Martin Buber is German Judaism's incontestable guide. He is the official and actual head of all educational and cultural institutions. His personality is recognized by all parties and all groups. And furthermore he is the true leader of the youth" (Arendt, 2007, p. 31). Buber left Germany in 1938 to become professor of social philosophy at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In 1949, following the establishment of the State of Israel, about which Buber held serious reservations given his support for bi-national state where Jews and Arabs shared power, the new Israeli Ministry of Education asked his help in establishing an Institute for Adult Education. Its purpose was to train teachers to work with immigrants and was aimed at fostering a sense of community among people from the most varied social and cultural backgrounds.

This gave Buber the opportunity to develop in practice his notion of a dialogical community through adult education. In *I and Thou*, first published in 1923, Buber (1970, p. 94) argues that a true community [*Die wahre Gemeinde*] (i.e. a dialogical community):

[...] does not come into being because people have feelings for each other (though that is required, too), but rather on two accounts: all of them have to stand in a living, reciprocal relationship to a single living center [daß sie alle zu einer lebendigen Mitte in lebendig gegenseitiger Beziehung stehen], and they have to stand in a living reciprocal relationship to one another. The second event has its source in the first but is not immediately given with it. A living reciprocal relationship includes feelings but is not derived from them. A community [Die Gemeinde] is built upon a living, reciprocal relationship, but the builder is the living, active center [aber der Baumeister ist die lebendige wirkende Mitte] [our brackets and emphasis].

According to this, a true community emerges when: i. the interactions between the members of the group and ii. between the members and *the living centre* of the group, *the builder* [der Baumeister], are based on *dialogue*. Moreover, the role played by the *living, active center* [lebendige wirkende Mitte] is a very important one as it is the very foundation of the *community* [Gemeinde] because it facilitates *dialogue* amongst individuals within the group, and between these individuals and itself. A way of visualising this is by considering the *the builder* as the axle of a wheel, and the dialogical relations as the spokes connecting the centre to the edges, *the builder* to the members of the community. It is important to note that by *dialogue* is meant I-Thou relations. For Buber such relations are those in which one is open to the Other. In contrast are I-It relations, in which one objectifies the Other. I-Thou relations are ethical because they are based on full mutuality and a deep existential connection between one and the Other; I-It relations are merely instrumental since one's interactions with the Other are based on considering the Other as a *resource*, an object to be used (e.g. attaining information). However, I-It relations are not necessarily *evil* in themselves (e.g. using the Other for some information), but could become problematic if taken to extremes, becoming the very source of prejudices such as racism (cf. Avnon, 1998; Morgan; Guilherme, 2013a).

But who are these *builders*, these *living-centres* of the *community* [Gemeinde]? In one of Buber's theological essays, *Leadership in the Bible*, he provides a characterization of *the builder*. Avnon (1998, p. 88-94) notes that Buber (1978) identifies five kinds of leadership. The patriarch (e.g. Abraham) is able to sustain a direct and close relation with the eternal Thou, and has been assigned the task of creating a people. The leader (e.g. Moses) is ascribed with the mission of founding a nation, a historical entity. The judge (e.g. Deborah) emerges as a response to chaotic times, in which there are tensions concerning the development of the people – that is *dialogue* needs to be renewed because the members of the group are disconnected, and *the builder* needs to appear for this to happen. Walzer acknowledges Buber's insight in distinguishing peoples (and the Patriarch), nations (and the Leader) and nationalisms (and the Judge) when he says: "[...] the first is a matter of common experience, 'a unity of faith'; the second a collective awareness of this unity;

the third a heightened or 'overemphasized' awareness in the face of division or oppression. Peoplehood is an impulse, nationality an idea, nationalism a program" (Walzer, 1988, p. 75 apud Avnon, 1988, p. 238-239). The fourth kind of leader is the king (e.g. David), who emerges from an urge in the people to be governed historically. The fifth category of leadership, the prophet (e.g. Samuel), arises from the troubles caused by kingship and it challenges both those who are in office and the structures of power that support them. We argue that each different kind of leadership is a facet of *the builder*, of the dialogical leader, at the *centre* of the Gemeinde. The effect each different kind of leader had on the people was to enable I-Thou relations between themselves and to connect each of them to those crucial *ideas* that unite individuals to respond to the demands of the hour. In doing so they give rise to a true community, a Gemeinde. Such a characterisation is a very useful one, that transferable easily to our times and to contemporary *dialogical leaders*, who qualify as *centres* of a community, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela, but also anonymous individuals who unite their communities in the search for a better and more just future<sup>2</sup>.

Does this necessarily mean that the teacher should be conceived of as a *builder*, a *community* [Gemeinde] builder (Guilherme 2015a)? We argue that this is necessarily the case because it is *the builder* who prepares the ideological framework, while the members of the group receive the *idea* that binds them as a community. "The living centers of community, the builders of community, thus generate in the social world that quality of relation that constitutes 'the between'" (Avnon, 1993, p. 60); *the between* is that which come to be between individuals when they engage in I-Thou relations. This means that without *the builder-teacher* a group of students cannot enter into the dynamics of I-Thou relations with each other, and with the centre, since it is absent, and will remain trapped in I-It relations; certainly, sporadic and haphazard I-Thou relations might emerge between some members but they will not be able to form a community, a Gemeinde, because the *living centre*, the *builder-teacher* will be absent.

The importance of the community in education is, in fact, crucial for the character formation of individuals. That is, the *builder-teacher* and the community that emerges is something fundamental for understanding the importance, the ethical weight, of being a moral being. In the absence of a *builder-teacher* students may remain trapped by the kind of education that merely instructs, that is based on I-It relations rather than I-Thou. This kind of education is that which Buber called *Erziehung* (i.e. instruction) and Freire called *Banking* education. It does not form character, does not develop into that which Buber referred to as *Bildung* (i.e. character formation) and Freire identified as *problem-posing* (or *dialogical*) education. In *Erziehung* individuals come to know facts and acquire a range of skills, but do not realize their ethical dimension. That is, one remains unaware that one's deeds exist in the world and that the world exists in one's deeds. Therein lies the importance of the *builder-teacher* and of dialogical relations for education and society.

It is the *builder-teacher* that enables the formation of the community, the *Gemeinde*, in education, and in so doing affects the character formation of individuals. However, Buber does not take into full account the wider structural framework that might impact on the formation of a community; that is, without such a framework it becomes almost impossible for the *builder-teacher* to succeed in the formation of a community. Freire does take account of this, changing fundamentally the role of the teacher from a *builder-teacher* into a *political-teacher*, and it is to this that we now turn.

### **Paulo Freire: the teacher as a *political liberator***

Paulo Freire (1921-1997), the Brazilian educator and critical pedagogue, is another very important figure in the field of education of the twentieth century. He completed his PhD thesis in 1959, and this was entitled *Educação e Atualidade Brasileira* (Education and the Current Situation in Brazil (*our free translation*)). Soon afterwards he started working on a seminal project tackling illiteracy in the small town of Angicos, state of Rio Grande do Norte, in the Northeast Region of Brazil. It is interesting to note that, even at this early stage, he argued about the relationship between politics and education, developing a literacy method through which individuals could learn to read and write *and* also gain political consciousness. However, in 1964 a coup d'état forced Freire to seek exile in various countries, most notably in Chile where he worked on literacy projects and agrarian reform under Salvador Allende, the United States, where he was visiting professor at Harvard University, and in Switzerland where he worked at the World Council of Churches. It was only in 1979 that Brazil permitted those who had left to return, and a year later Freire decided, as he often said, to *re-learn* Brazil. On his return he taught at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUC-SP) e Universidade de Campinas (UNICAMP), and in 1989 became the Secretary of Education for the city of São Paulo, after the Worker's Party, which he had helped establish, won the local elections. This led to Freire's thought influencing educational policies, especially those related to curriculum and methodologies, first in the city of São Paulo and later in other municipalities (e.g. Angra dos Reis; Porto Alegre) and states (e.g. Rio Grande do Sul; Alagoas) (cf. Saul; Silva, 2009). He left a very large body of work and his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) is perhaps one of the best known of modern educational texts.

Freire developed Buber's notion of the teacher as a *builder-teacher*, a *community builder*, but adds a political dimension; that is, the *community builder* becomes *political liberator* who plays a central role in the formation of critical individuals and the liberation of the oppressed. The *builder-teacher* is transformed into the *political-teacher*. In the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) acknowledges Buber influence on his thought in a little-known passage dealing with the nature of cooperation and community building. We quote, Freire (1970, p. 165):

In the theory of antidialogical action, conquest (as its primary characteristic) involves a Subject who conquers another person and transforms her or him into a 'thing'. In the *dialogical theory of action*, Subjects meet in cooperation in order to transform the world. The antidialogical, dominating *I* transforms the dominated, conquered *Thou* into a mere *it*. The dialogical *I*, however, knows that it is precisely the *Thou* ('not-*I*') which has called forth his or her own existence. He also knows that the *Thou* which calls forth his own existence in turn constitutes an *I* which has in his *I* its *Thou*. The *I* and the *Thou* thus become, in the dialectic of these relationships, two *thous* which become two *I*'s [our emphasis].

This passage is important not just because it acknowledges Buber's influence on Freire, but also because it demonstrates that Freire is already adapting Buber's concept of dialogue into something political; this is to say, into a *dialogical theory of action*, as Freire calls it. Let us demonstrate this further.

In the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire distinguish dialogical education from non-dialogical education, which he calls *banking education*. He characterizes *banking education* as:

[...] an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher the depositor [...] [and] the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filling, and storing the deposits [...] and [consequently] the more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world [...] they accept the passive role imposed on them (Freire, 1970, p. 45-47).

Freire *banking education* as a form of *domestication*, imposed on the masses by the oppressive elites. This kind of education prepares individuals to fit into the system that subjugates them and not to question their situation. Freire argues that no educational system or educator is *neutral* and can either *domesticate* or *liberate* people (Freire, 1970, p. 41-42; Archer, 2007, p. 10). This implies an intimate relation between power and social relations, suggesting that one can challenge power structures by trying to change the social relations that give rise to them. *Liberation* can only happen through what Freire calls *conscientisation* and *praxis*. Freire's notion of *conscientisation* is characterized by the continuous, critical and dialogical engagement of individuals with their historical context, together with a profound belief in the transformative capacities of human agency, and committed to confronting and overcoming the *limiting situations* that people face (Freire, 1970, p. 71-72). If this is to happen, the individual must become *conscious* of the problems arising out of his or her own situation, and understanding them within the structural context of society; only then can the individual achieve consciousness of the structural injustices that feed social inequality. This is because if the individual perceives problems solely from the individual



perspective, then they might be regarded as mere accidents or part of the natural order of things. Accordingly, educational initiatives and social movements can make important contributions in this respect (O'Cadiz; Wong; Torres, 1998; Mayo, 1999) and the intervention of teachers and students against oppression at all levels is fundamental to the achievement of just societies (Schugurensky, 2011, p. 46).

This means that teachers have an important role to play in the conscientisation and liberation of the oppressed; that is, Freire defends the *political-teacher*<sup>3</sup>. Schugurensky (2011, p. 100-106) notes that there is a confusion amongst Freire's commentators about this issue and we consider this below. The confusion arises because, in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970, p. 80) says:

Through 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. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become responsible for a process in which all grow [...].

This passage, and similar ones elsewhere in his work<sup>4</sup>, have led some commentators to view Freire as a supporter of non-directive education because of his statement that the *teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist* (cf. Schugurensky, 1998; Leach 1982). However, when Freire et al. (1988, p. 76) was asked about this he said:

I have never said that the educator is the same as the pupil. Quite the contrary [...]. The educator is different from the pupil. But this difference [...] must not be antagonistic. The difference becomes antagonistic when the authority of the educator, different from the freedom of the pupil, is transformed in authoritarianism.

This suggests that Freire tries to maintain a middle ground between directive and non-directive pedagogies, which might be considered untenable. First he argues that teacher and students are co-creators of knowledge and that the differences between them are erased; and then acknowledging that there is a fundamental difference between being a teacher and being a student. How should we to understand this antimony in Freire's thought? One way is to read Freire's views from the perspective of Buber's thought; Buber's *builder-teacher* enables a community based on dialogical relations that gives rise to mutual respect, a community in which teacher and students affect each other, forming each other's characters, while maintaining the difference between the *builder-teacher* (i.e. the *living centre*) and the other members of the community. Freire attempts the same, but his literary style and poor choice of words lead commentators to misunderstandings (Schugurensky, 2011, p. 102). In addition to this, Freire expands the concept of the *builder-teacher* so that it encompass a political dimension, not argued

primarily by Buber; Freire turns the *builder-teacher* into the *political-teacher*. Freire (1984, p. 520 apud Schugurensky, 2011, p. 102; cf. Schugurensky, 2008) says that: “[...] the issue is how to teach without imposing on students our own knowledge, and our political and ideological options, but also without omitting them. I don’t hide my options from students. But I also respect their choices”, which is a very democratic position; however, just a few years later Freire (Shor; Freire, 1987, p. 157 apud Schugurensky, 2011, p. 102) went further by stating that: “[...] we must say to the students what we think and why. My role is not to be silent. I *have to convince students of my dreams* but not to conquer them for my own plans”, which suggests almost an imposition of one’s views though in this case Freire was careful with his wording. Schugurensky (2011, p. 102) also reflected on Freire’s position and suggested that:

Freire’s argument is that when teachers do not reveal their positions to students openly and explicitly, they do so covertly and implicitly, and this can easily lead to deceiving and manipulating students under the auspices of neutrality. Insofar as Freire argues that education cannot be neutral, it follows that it is as unethical for teachers to hide their positions from their students as it is to impose their ideas on them. The challenge for teachers [...] is to be honest and open in revealing their thoughts and values and [...] to respect students who have different opinions.

The tensions and dangers of Freire’s position are explicit in Schugurensky’s analysis. As we show below, Gur-Ze’ev was critical of Freire’s views as they might lead to both active propaganda and to a lack of critical thinking. Hence, Gur-Ze’ev proposed a different kind of teacher, the *improviser-teacher*, to replace and deal with the shortcomings of Freire’s *political teacher*.

### **Ilan Gur-Ze’ev: the teacher as an *eternal improviser***

Ilan Gur-Ze’ev (1955-2012), an Israeli philosopher of education, is a well-known writer and commentator on critical theory and critical pedagogy. The son of a holocaust survivor of Matthausen Concentration Camp, he was born in a poor neighbourhood of Haifa in the north of Israel. Gur-Ze’ev entered higher education without any certificates through an access programme at the University of Haifa. His PhD was on the theme of pessimism in philosophy, directing particular attention to the Frankfurt School and to thinkers such as Walter Benjamin, Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse, which was published as *The Frankfurt School and the History of Pessimism* (in Hebrew; cf. Gur-Ze’ev, 1997). As a professor at the University of Haifa, he began organizing international workshops on critical pedagogy (Oslo, 2002; Madrid, 2004; Oxford, 2006; 2007; 2008), and developed a strong reputation among philosophers of education. Gur-Ze’ev (2005; 2007) was a prolific writer and, after his untimely death in 2012, left a number of writings in English, and others in Hebrew that are yet to be translated. It

is worth mentioning *Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy Today: toward a new language in education* (2005) and *Beyond the Modern-Postmodern Struggle in Education: toward counter-education and enduring improvisation* (2007), which are his most important texts in English (McLaren 2012).

Gur-Ze'ev was influenced by Freire's thought and develops some serious criticisms to his version of critical pedagogy. According to Gur-Ze'ev, critical pedagogy faces two major problems: i. it creates a narrow view of reality as it conceives oppression in a very narrow sense (Gur-Ze'ev, 2010c, p. 4) and ii. in doing so it becomes incapable of being critical of itself, as it believes that it can explain the problems of reality simply by applying its method, which is in mechanical (cf. Yaakoby, 2012; Tubbs, 2005; Gur-Ze'ev, 2005). Critical pedagogy seeks to change the world, to start revolution of reality, and to implement positive utopian visions in the name of a more just and liberal society. For instance, Freire's vision is to be realised through the liberation of an enlightened oppressed poor (Freire, 1970, p. 48-49); McLaren's through a socialist democracy (McLaren, 1998, p. 458); Giroux's through a democracy of differences (Giroux, 1995, p. 60) (cf. Yaakoby, 2012, p. 16). What is common to each of these narrow visions of reality is that one side oppresses, while the other is oppressed. This is a potential problem as once a positive utopian ideal is created and a goal to be achieved, then it becomes impossible to criticize and revise the ideal because doing so puts the project in danger. Thus, utopias cease to be an end and become the foundational principle on which an entire methodology and philosophy is constructed. A prime example is the *Freireanism* found in some academic circles in Brazil and abroad, which regard criticism of Paulo Freire's thought and their own *Freireanism* as heresy (cf. Weiler, 1996; Brayner, 2015).

Another point of contention is that the simplistic view of reality presented in positive utopias seem not to consider the complex web of power relations that actually exists in the world. For instance, an oppressed individual can be another's oppressor (e.g. the poor man (oppressed according to Freire's views) who oppresses his wife and children (oppressed according to feminist pedagogy)). Moreover, and this is perhaps more subtle and controversial, the oppressed can find ways of oppressing their oppressors in an Hegelian Master and Slave manner. This is to say: i. a member of a minority who is oppressed can implement acts of utter terror against those who oppress his nation; and ii. those who are oppressed can refuse to dialogue and discuss their oppression with those who oppress them – this means that instigating fear and not-dialoguing can be turned into relations of power and ways of oppressing, of causing instability in those who oppress in other ways (cf. Morgan; Guilherme, 2013a; 2013b).

It is the potential for a lack of self-criticism embedded in critical pedagogy that is problematic for Gur-Ze'ev, and it is our contention that this points to a fundamental problem faced by critical pedagogies. As a response he proposes counter-education, a term that he coined, which

is education that is: “[...] conscious of its impossibility and that it has neither an antitoxin nor an emancipating mantra to sell. It has not safe haven, no spiritualistic moral nor any unsuspecting guide to facilitate the hospitality of a cloud of self-forgetfulness which will become a condolence strong enough to appear as liberation [...]” (Gur-Ze’ev, 2010a, p. 20). Gur-Ze’ev’s counter-education alternative does not propose an unachievable positive utopia and aims to remain critical, and most importantly, self-critical. To explain this, Gur-Ze’ev uses the metaphor of *a caravan* to describe the continuous critical and dialogical process that should be undertaken in all learning and education. Gur-Ze’ev’s position is reminiscent of Karl Popper’s Critical Rationalism, a theory holding that all knowledge and scientific theories must be criticized *and* all empirical content can and should undergo tests that may falsify them (cf. Popper, 2013). Gur-Ze’ev (2011, p. 38-39) says:

In the Hebrew language ‘Orcha’ means a convoy of camels and humans with their belongings moving in an endless desert towards their destiny. The ‘Orcha’ is an improvised movement that is to find/create its own destiny....The ‘Orcha’ is never totally determined by territorial sovereignty, not even by commanding knowledge and people. It is a kind of *togetherness-in-movement* [...].

But what is the role of the teacher in Gur-Ze’ev’s counter education? It can be argued that given that Gur-Ze’ev’s position is a reaction to critical pedagogy, then the role of the teacher in counter-education should also be understood as a development of the *political-teacher*. Hence, counter-education conceives of the teacher as the *improviser*. The *improviser* is a constant in Gur-Ze’ev’s work, and must be distinguished from the *political* teacher. Gur-Ze’ev (2010b, p. 43) says that the *improviser* and counter-education displays an:

[...] openness and uncontrolled...creativity that is responsible and generous towards the Other and reaches out to the unknown and to self-overcoming as self-constitution; *without an egoistic-oriented ‘I’ initiating the colonization of the Other, the response to the otherness or the self-sacrifice of the victimizing kind*. The otherness of the other, the insecurity, the non-consensual and refusal of the self-evidence and other manifestations of the invitation to the ‘home-returning’ project [...] [our emphasis].

This means that Gur-Ze’ev’s *improviser-teacher* is critical, encourages criticism and everything can be the subject of critique, and this process brings about changes in reality; however, the *improviser-teacher* does not offer positive utopias, such as Freire’s liberation by enlightening the oppressed poor, and as such the *improviser-teacher* overcomes a crucial weakness faced by Freire’s *political-teacher*. That is, the *political-teacher* can become the propagandist of an ideological view (i.e. the liberation of the oppressed by enlightening the poor), and as a consequence of this, of using subjects as a means to an end (i.e. using the oppressed poor to achieve the goal of liberation, but constraining this

within a very narrow form of liberation). The *political-teacher* knows what the *oppressed* must know to achieve their positive utopia, which generates a contradiction because the *oppressed* must be enlightened, but in a particular pre-defined way set by the *political-teacher*.

## Conclusion

We began by with the importance of teachers for a new model of development based on the full realisation of individual potential and for sustainable development on a global level; and that, as a consequence, the teaching profession faces challenges. The key question is *what is the role of the teacher today?* in such a context. We contributed to this discussion by investigating three different concepts of the role of the teacher. Martin Buber understands the teacher as the *builder-teacher* of a dialogical community and as having a fundamental role in the character formation of individuals. Paulo Freire develops this notion and argues for a *political-teacher* who plays a central role in the formation of critical individuals and in the liberation of the oppressed. Ilan Gur-Ze'ev is critical of Freire's approach and defends the *improviser-teacher*, always critical and encouraging criticisms, but without reference to utopias. We conclude that Buber's concept of the teacher is fundamental in the sense of forming a real community in the classroom, as well as developing the character of individuals. Freire expands on this by adding an explicit political dimension to the role of the teacher, but this seems to go too far with a danger of turning the teacher into a propagandist and of using individuals as means to the pursuit of an utopia. Gur-Ze'ev is aware of this problem and suggests that the role of the teacher is to be critical and to encourage criticisms, but without utopian targets. We suggest that what is needed is a synthesis of these three concepts that aim at formation of character, community sense and critical thinking for the emergence of a true dialogue and *living-together* in society.

We recognize the difficulty in implementing such a synthesis, not least as teachers themselves are products of their education systems, and have internalized its methodology, knowledge and values. This means that childhood socialisation and experiences are often reinforced by teacher training programmes that train teachers to maintain the status quo without much questioning (cf. Giroux, 1981, p. 12; Zeichner; Gore, 1990, p. 332; Yaakoby, 2012, p. 14). In this respect, Freire was right to say that all education is political, and teachers hold immense socio-political power because they educate the next generation, and in doing so, they also influence the future of society as a whole. The radical possibilities of non-formal and informal education and the civil society role of Gramscian *organic intellectuals* need to be explored further in the light of this (Morgan 2002).

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## Notes

- 1 Certainly, there are those who hold more radical views, such as Ivan Illich in his *Deschooling Society* (Illich, 1971) and more recently Gustavo Esteva (cf. Esteva; Prakash; Stuchul, 2005), arguing for the eradication of teachers because they act as forces that normalize individuals helping to maintain socio-economic inequalities. These extreme views would require a complete overhaul of educational systems, and the eradication of formal education.
- 2 It is important to note that Buber uses the word *Baumeister*, builder, and not *Führer*, leader to describe de community builder. “‘The leader’ contrasts with ‘the builder’, because he is incapable of establishing I-Thou relations with Others. ‘The leader’ is able to galvanise support and unite individuals but he does not ‘listen’ or ‘dialogue’ with Others, using and objectifying them to achieve his own goals. This is the reason Buber refers to ‘the leader’ as a demonic Thou, a disguised Thou trapped in a monological existence; he lacks the spiritual dimension necessary to be a ‘builder’” (Guilherme, 2015b, p. 836). Hitler is a good example of this demonic *thou*, of the leader.
- 3 Certainly, Freire never used the term *political-teacher*; however, it is arguable that this is a direct implication of his affirmation that all education is political.
- 4 For instance, Freire (1970, p. 61) says: “Through dialogue, the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow [...] Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects [...]”.

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