

Evaluative Thinking in Practice: Implications for Evaluation from Paulo Freire's Work in Guinea-Bissau

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Background: Evaluative thinking is rigorous analysis of evidence and reasoning to inform judgments of merit, worth, value, significance, and utility. Although formal concepts and definitions for evaluative thinking have only emerged recently, its practice has been around for many years. In-depth historical case studies of international evaluations using evaluative thinking principles are rare, especially the ones reported by those who were involved a half-century ago.

Purpose: This article describes little-known but historically significant educational reform initiative in Guinea Bissau (West-Africa) in the 1970s supported by a group led by Paulo Freire, examining what occurred through the lens of evaluative thinking.

Setting: In 1975, Freire and the Idac team were invited to develop a national adult literacy campaign in Guinea Bissau. Freire was already well known for his revolutionary ideas in "Pedagogy of the Oppressed."

Intervention: Idac team supported the government to adopt Freire's education and action approach comprising three core strategies: (i) *critically understand reality*, (ii) *conduct scientific studies* and (iii) *application of the new knowledge*. While Freire and four senior members of Idac's team visited the country every three months, two other members lived there for four years. The decision was to invest in experimental pilot projects while reforming what was possible within the existing traditional school curricula.

Research Design: The authors conducted a retrospective developmental evaluation exemplifying what can be learned by examining past events through contemporary concepts.

Data Collection and Analysis: In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, especially Claudius Ceccon (one of the authors) who was a senior member of the Idac team working with Paulo Freire in Guinea Bissau. Also, several project original documents and relevant publications were reviewed. Thick description and content analysis were used to revisit that educational reform and examine its implications for evaluative thinking.

Findings: Even though Freire's most prominent ideas were developed before evaluation was considered as an established field, his approach of dialectic inquiry, critical reflection and taking action has influenced and still influences many leading scholars and practitioners within our (trans)discipline. While Freire did not use the phrase "evaluative thinking," his process of critical engagement with local people to analyze and understand their situation and take action based on their reflections manifests core elements of what today would be considered embedded evaluative thinking. In political reforms around the world, the retrospective evaluation of what happened in Guinea Bissau reminds us of the importance of evaluative thinking and reflective dialogue – and the fragility of both in the face of political polarization and changes in leadership.

Keywords: Paulo Freire; evaluative thinking; developmental evaluation; retrospective studies; Guinea Bissau.

The Personal Factor: Introduction and Context by Michael Quinn Patton

Evaluative thinking is rigorous analysis of evidence and reasoning to inform judgments of merit, worth, value, significance, and utility. The core values that inform evaluative thinking are openness and explicitness. An invitation to engage in evaluative thinking asks that the reasoning, valuing, and judgment processes, whatever those entail within a given context, be made as explicit as possible. Thus, reflexivity and reflection support individual evaluative thinking, and dialogue facilitates evaluative thinking within a group. By being as open and explicit as possible, the basis for rendering judgments can be examined, questioned, discussed, and evaluated.

This article takes us into a little-known but historically significant reform initiative in Guinea-Bissau in the 1970s and examines what occurred through the lens of evaluative thinking. It's an extraordinary journey both methodologically and substantively. Our guides on this journey bring a unique perspective through their close collaboration. Who they are matters, an affirmation of *the personal factor* in evaluation, that the people engaged in evaluation are the source of credibility and insight every bit as much as what methods are used and what findings reported. So let me tell you about the authors to frame the significance of what this article offers.

Claudius Ceccon was a close associate of Paulo Freire. They worked together in Guinea-Bissau when both were exiled from Brazil. For the first time in print, this article provides an in-depth, first-hand look at details of the reform effort from the perspective of Claudius Ceccon as a participant in the effort. Thomaz Chianca provides the evaluation framework for understanding and interpreting what occurred. Together, Claudius Ceccon and Thomaz Chianca have crafted an exemplar of *retrospective developmental evaluation*, that is, looking backward to understand developments in order to learn and inform future initiatives (Patton, 2011).

Claudius Ceccon is the Executive Director of the Center for the Creation of People's Image, a non-governmental organization based in Rio de Janeiro that produces educational audio-visual and printed toolkits, conceives public interest campaigns and organizes training courses and seminars for educators and social actors, empowering and qualifying their action as citizens in bringing about necessary changes to improve democracy in our society. Claudius graduated in Architecture by the

National Faculty of Architecture and did post graduate studies on Urban Planning and Industrial Design. He is also well known as a political cartoonist and illustrator. But it is Ceccon's direct work with Freire that is of particular relevance for this article. They were political allies and exiled from Brazil at the same time and worked directly together in Africa from 1975 to 1980 as part of a team helping the newly formed government in Guinea-Bissau to plan and implement a national adult literacy program soon after the country achieved its independence from Portugal. That still doesn't explain how he appears in this evaluation journal. Claudius Ceccon is Thomaz Chianca's father-in-law.

Thomaz Chianca is an international evaluation consultant with 20 years of experience in Brazil and in other 23 countries. His work encompasses several content areas including early childhood development and education, rural poverty reduction, decent work agenda, environmental protection, livestock care and management, children and adolescents' rights, after-school initiatives, among others. He has a PhD in interdisciplinary evaluation from Western Michigan University (under Michael Scriven and Jane Davidson), a Master of Public Health from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and a dental surgeon degree from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). He is a founding member of the Brazilian Monitoring and Evaluation Network and a member of its first managing board.

Research on Evaluation

The significance of this retrospective evaluation methodologically is that it exemplifies what can be learned by examining past events through contemporary concepts. The reform initiative in Guinea-Bissau was not conceived of as an exercise in either evaluative thinking or developmental evaluation, but bringing these perspectives to interpretation of that initiative illuminates it in a new way that is relevant not only historically but relevant to our own times. In-depth historical analyses are a form of research on evaluation. When I accepted the 2017 AEA Research on Evaluation Award, I emphasized that research on evaluation can and should take a variety of forms. The Research on Evaluation Topical Interest Group of AEA promotes deepening our understanding of all aspects of evaluation. Contemporary and prospective designs for research on evaluation provide insights into current practices, trends, and challenges, while historical analyses help us

understand the origins of contemporary issues and frameworks.

Yet, we have few in-depth historical case studies of international evaluations. It is rare to have the opportunity to capture such cases from those who were involved a half-century ago. Even when the opportunity is there, the space to report the case in depth is not available. I edited a *New Directions for Evaluation* on the *Pedagogy of Evaluation* (Patton, 2017) based on the principles of Paulo Freire. The authors of this article contributed a chapter to that volume that discussed principles extracted from this case example, but there wasn't space for the full case. Moreover, that volume focused on identifying and applying Freirean principles to evaluation. In contrast, this in-depth and new presentation of the full case study focuses on implications and insights for evaluative thinking. I urge readers not to skip the case details by just reading the implications and lessons at the end. Immersion in the case details provides an opportunity to generate your own insights and appreciate this case as a baseline for the field of evaluation internationally, that is, to savor this one example of the practice of evaluation before there was a formal field and profession as a stimulus for thinking about where we are now, what is different and, indeed, what is not so different. Following the presentation of the case, I will add reflections at the end about the contemporary relevance of this study as research on evaluation.

Embedded Evaluative Thinking

Much attention is being directed to the importance of embedding evaluative thinking in programs and community change initiatives (e.g., Ano & Archibald, 2018; Patton, 2011, 2018). This led us to revisit a major reform initiative in Guinea Bissau based on Freirean pedagogy in the 1970s and examine its implications for evaluative thinking. In another article (Chianca & Cecon, 2017), the authors have analyzed Freire's work in that country to explore the concept of Pedagogy in Process and its application to evaluation. Even though Freire did not use the phrase evaluative thinking, his process of critical engagement with local people to analyze and understand their situation and take action based on their reflections manifests core elements of what today would be considered embedded evaluative thinking. We begin by describing the reform initiative under review here and then look at its implications for evaluative thinking.

Freire's Influence and Trajectory Before the Guinea-Bissau Project

Brazil's early 1960s were times of open discussions about the urgently needed country reforms. Part of the Brazilian society was deeply committed to carry them out, in spite of several obstacles of different nature. The socio-economic structure, with its hidden roots in the colonial past, was considered one of the main factors responsible for the unjust distribution of wealth in the country and for the serious consequences resulting from it. Agrarian Reform, Urban Reform, national resources preservation, controlling the greedy multinational corporations that drained the economy, were some of the themes in debate. Issues that demanded broad discussion over possible alternatives. However, having open debates about such controversial issues in a cold war poisonous environment was a major challenge. Revolution was a word that came up frequently; for most people it was not armed revolution but one that would result from an awareness-raising process, involving political action at all levels. Fair and democratic elections was one of the top priorities. That would be an unprecedented event in Brazilian history.

In areas dominated by *latifundia*, specially the Northeast region, peasant leagues began to be organized, with the support of progressive Catholic bishops. Urban workers, getting rid of the corrupt old guard leaderships in their trade unions, began to make their voices heard, reinforcing society's demand for reforms. Brazil seemed to awake from its centennial lethargy. President João Goulart (1961-1964) publicly committed his Government to foster the reforms.

One of the obstacles hindering democratic participation was illiteracy. In Brazil's impoverished Northeast, almost two-thirds of the adult population could not read or write at the time. Legally speaking, millions of illiterates could not vote and, therefore, did not have a right to participate in the political process. This was the background of a silent revolution set forth by what soon became known as "The Paulo Freire Method."

"Conscientization" as Critical, Evaluative Thinking

Freire was a school teacher based in Recife, the capital city of Pernambuco State. He developed innovative methods for adult education that allowed him to teach illiterate peasants to read and

write in 40 hours (Pelandr  2002). That was already an extraordinary success, but even more so was that people, as part of the same process, also learned to develop critical thinking – what Freire called “conscientization.” (Freire Institute, N.D.) The method helped them understand the determinants of their unjust reality and to reflect about actions they should take to change it. Today, we would consider this learning to think not just critically but evaluatively because people were learning to describe their realities and make judgments about changes needed, which proved to be a threat to the status quo.

“Barefoot people also can learn to read” was the motto of Freire’s first experience at the municipality of Angicos, in the Northeastern state of Rio Grande do Norte (Torres 2013, Silva & Sampaio 2015). Important authorities came for the “graduation ceremony” held for the first group of peasants that were the living proof of that revolutionary change. Among them, the Governor of Rio Grande do Norte, several Congressmen and the Regional Army Chief, General Castello Branco. At the banquet, after the formal speeches, the General sat beside the Secretary of Education for Rio Grande do Norte and, leaning towards him, whispered, “Aren’t you, perhaps, breeding poisonous snakes?” To which the secretary replied, “It all depends whose heels they are going to bite, General...” This *polite* exchange gives an idea of the climate in those days.

The success of the Angico’s experience attracted national attention and the Ministry of Education asked Freire to come to Brasilia, the national capital, to design and implement a National Literacy Program. (Brazil 1964 A) A vast mobilization in the whole country ensued, linking members of the academy, educators, political activists and thousands of young, enthusiastic volunteers.

Independent Evaluative Thinking Threatens the Status Quo

Looking back, it is fair to say that the National Literacy Program, through *conscientization*, promoted independent evaluative thinking. What followed is well-known: fostering and exploring anti-communist fears and, with the support of the conservative branch of the Catholic Church, a military-civilian coup that started 21 years of dictatorship in Brazil. It was headed by General Castello Branco, the one that had seen snakes and poison in Freire’s literacy process. The dictatorship began by closing the Congress and ruling through

decrees. Coherent with his convictions, Castello Branco’s Act Number One was to cancel the National Literacy Campaign (Brazil, 1964 B). Freire was arrested and sent to prison, accused of subversion. He was released after a couple of months and had to go into exile. First to Bolivia, a very short stay – a military coup d’ tat happened also there, weeks after he arrived. Then, he went to Chile, where he worked at the Institute of Agrarian Reform, during all Eduardo Frei’s presidency (1964 to 1970).

Further Developments Leading up to and Setting the Context for the Guinea-Bissau Project

Just before the inauguration of Salvador Allende, a socialist who succeeded Frei as Chilean president, Paulo Freire went to Harvard, where he served as a consultant at Harvard University’s School of Education. Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 1970) had just been published in the United States. Successive translations to other languages followed, making Paulo Freire increasingly known and praised around the world. In 1970, he moved to Geneva, Switzerland, to lead the educational division of the World Council of Churches.

In Geneva, Freire started to meet regularly with a group of Brazilian intellectuals to reflect about what had happened in Brazil since the 1964 military coup. The 1968 Act Number Five, installing a State policy of torture and murder of opponents, was seen as a coup inside the coup. It suppressed any constitutional rights that had somehow survived after the first 4 years of dictatorship. There were also political crises in several countries throughout Latin and Central America as well as in other different parts of the globe: Paris’ May 68, Prague’s Spring, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the Vietnam war, Democratic Chicago’s Convention, Kent State, Bob Kennedy and Martin Luther King assassinations, and, always, the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East.

As a strategy to find ways to contribute to a better world through education, the Geneva group decided to concentrate their efforts in studying and critically reflecting about Freire’s experience in designing the Brazilian National Literacy Program and implementing conscientization programs with Chilean peasants. The meetings became very intense and in early 1971, they decided to create the Institute of Cultural Action – Idac (French acronym). Paulo Freire, Miguel Darcy de Oliveira, Rosiska Darcy de Oliveira and Claudius Ceccon (one of the authors of this article) were the founding

members and held daily meetings after work or after classes at the university. Progressively, the work done by Idac began to be known. Invitations to participate in meetings and workshops became more and more frequent. Eventually, the group started to systematize the work they were doing through written documents, in English and French, that were mimeographed manually. Later, printed in offset, the subscribers' list grew slowly but steadily, sharing with thousands of interested people Freire's ideas and the reflections they provoked.

At the same time, there were many European groups increasingly in dissent with the oppression of their societies, present everywhere in power unbalanced relationships, such as teachers and students, physicians and patients, labor union leaders and workers, politicians and voters, among others. These groups saw in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* the theoretical foundation for seeing those contradictions more clearly and then taking action for change. Idac was approached by some of the groups that wanted to bring another perspective to their critical decisions. For instance, Idac collaborated with Italian labor unions linked to the progressive Catholic Church and with the Swiss Technical Cooperation, responsible for training the volunteers who would "help the Third World". The idea was to discuss with those groups a new political-pedagogical conception, based on the principle that every educative action must produce new knowledge.

In the Spring of 1975, Idac received an unusual letter that had important consequences to its future. Paulo Freire and the Idac team were invited by Mario Cabral, Minister of Education of the recently created Republic of Guinea-Bissau, to develop a national adult literacy campaign.

The Guinea-Bissau Project

The Idac team had mixed feelings about the opportunity presented. While they were very excited about helping the reconstruction of a country that had defeated the powerful Portuguese colonial army on a struggle for freedom, the size of the challenge made them wonder whether they were in a position to live up to the high expectations. Idac's initial answer was that they needed to assess the situation on site to determine if they could make a real contribution to the cause. The World Council of Churches provided the needed financial support for the Idac team to make their first visit to Guinea-Bissau.

Even though there were important cultural differences, the Idac team did not find major difficulties in communicating with the people in Guinea-Bissau. The different Portuguese accents did not hinder interaction and they were even able to embed some words in creole, the common language bridging the dialects of some forty ethnic Guinean groups, into their conversations.

Idac team interacted with many different stakeholders as part of their first visit. They met with top leaders, including the President, ministers, military and other government officials, especially the team of the ministry of education responsible for the creation of a new school system for the country. They also made sure to meet with school teachers, peasants in the countryside and urban areas in the periphery of Bissau, and with the "Homens Grandes" – the Elders, the guardians of the tradition, culture and history of the people. Furthermore, relevant documents were collected, extensive notes and pictures were taken, and in-depth discussions about the particularities of adult education were held with representatives from the Ministry of Education. Freire and his colleagues returned to Geneva with a good sense of the many challenges they would have to face. At the same time, they were very conscious about the opportunity they had at hand to make a real difference in the lives of many people.

It is worth pointing out that as an evaluation profession we have now systematized such in-depth upfront work in preparation for undertaking innovative projects and we expect to conduct a needs assessment and situation analysis as part of an initial evaluability assessment process. However, such inquiry processes, now formalized, labeled, and prescribed, were not standard operating procedure in those days. The Idac team was figuring out what made sense and creating a process of engagement that, in retrospect, was innovative, insightful, and fundamentally evaluative, as demonstrated by what they did next.

Even though each member of the Idac team had diverse perspectives on how to interpret and value the information they had gathered during their first visit, they agreed that the main overall question they needed to help the Guineans address was: *what kind of educational system should they build now?* There were two competing models running in parallel at that moment. One, inherited from the Portuguese, was designed to maintain the status quo. It was taught in Portuguese, a language only spoken by 5% of the population with the curriculum based on Portugal's history, geography, hydrography, etc., but with no recognition of African culture, history, and traditions. It was a

very selective and elite system that did not retain most students. The few that stayed completed their de-Africanization process in Portugal's universities, subsequently returning to their country to work for the colonial power. This educational system was the same one adopted in the other Portuguese-dominated territories in Africa: Angola, Moçambique, São Tomé e Príncipe, Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau. The educational model served the purpose of detaching students from any kind of African identity, or examining their country's reality, but rather adopting a colonial identity and thereby helping maintain colonial rule.

The second and alternative educational system was the one that grew from the schools built in the liberated zones during the war of independence. Those schools, even though operated in very precarious conditions, tried to connect knowledge to practice and to value their African culture, history, knowledge and traditions. At the same time, they acknowledged the value of Western knowledge, especially advances in science, and they valued discussions about gender equality – a main issue that needed to be faced.

The Idac team realized that those two contrasting educational systems were in conflict and contradiction. After many exchanges between representatives from the Ministry of Education and Idac, it became clear that the best option for the new society they dreamed to build was to devise an improved version of the system created during the war. Lack of trained teachers, no curricula, and limited number of adequate books and other educational materials were major challenges they had to face immediately. Therefore, they could not implement the new system at once. Both systems had to coexist while they prepared the terrain for a gradual transition to the “new school” they wanted to have for the country.

Stimulating Evaluative Thinking

A Strategy to Engage Leaders and the People in Conversations

Situation analysis and background discussions helped Idac understand more clearly how and where their participation could contribute more efficiently. A formal proposal to the Ministry of Education of Guinea-Bissau for a consultancy on adult education was written, providing all needed details. There was, however, the pending question of how the proposal should be presented so it would generate ample discussions among different key stakeholders. Realistically, it was very unlikely that

the people targeted as the main beneficiaries would have access to it. Perhaps Paulo Freire himself could orally present the proposal, describing the process that led to it, its aim and justification as he had already done during one of Idac team's visits to the countryside. In his late fifties, with his white beard and hair, Paulo looked older than he really was. With this *physique du rôle*, he was invited to join the Council of Elders meeting that was taking place under a mango tree. Perhaps Freire's explanation of the proposal would be faithfully reproduced thereon. But no, there should not be any prescription, no sacred word. On the contrary, ideas should sprout from the discussions of the proposal to help improve it and stimulate evaluative thinking and informed engagement. Such processes involving stakeholders are widely used now, but at the time, this was a radical departure from the authoritarian, top-down processes associated with colonialism.

Visualizations

In the literacy campaigns in Brazil, visual aids were key to start and ignite conversations. Knowing the value of visuals, the Idac team decided to present its proposal as a series of slides depicting its logic, some proposed strategies, and the pending questions the Guineans had to face now. One hundred slides were developed to tell the story of education in Guinea-Bissau. It had an open ending: solutions would have to be found by the people themselves, through engaged discussions. These discussions would allow the Guineans to make the choices that would have to be supported and implemented by themselves.

The set of slides had many advantages. It could be shown to many people at one time. Being a series, it could be divided into several parts, if necessary. Its projection could stop anytime, going back to review slides if the participants so requested, and then continuing when they were ready to proceed. The projection was done at a comfortable pace because there was no fixed time or rhythm. If needed, a slide would be explained by a facilitator. Finally, the series could be complemented adding more slides of appropriate images of specific local needs. It turned out to be a friendly and sustainable technology. Each frame was mounted with translucent paper instead of film. The figures were drawn with china ink, then colored with markers.

Here again, we see a pioneering and innovative approach to stakeholder engagement – visualization – that is widely advocated and used in

evaluation today. Books have been written by evaluators about the subject (Evergreen, 2014, 2018) and a Topical Interest Group on data visualization and reporting has been created by the American Evaluation Association.

The conception of the slides (which accounted for more than one hundred) and the creation of the images that would tell the story (scriptwriting and story-board) were very challenging. Members of Idac's team had found very few images during the research done in their initial visit – no pictures, paintings, or engravings. Some photos they made could illustrate an issue, but could not tell a story. They had to be very inventive in creating the slides using what they had seen and heard. In the process of producing images to tell a story with no concrete visual references, they were stepping into unknown territory. There were endless discussions about some images. Would the image of a sheep be a good way to get some idea through? Would it be clear what the image was supposed to convey? Would it be understood and culturally appropriate to the people in Guinea? Idac realized that, in fact, they ignored almost everything about what the Guineans really thought, what their cultural references were, and how a projected image would be seen in a place where there was no cinema or TV. It was a total mystery whether a story told in sequenced images would have any effect on that audience. On top of all that, the images were drawn in cartoon-style and appealed to humor. Would that work? Who could know? They had to take the risk.

The Idac team arrived back at Bissau six months after their first visit. Later in that day, the Minister of Education called all the staff to listen to Idac's proposal. The future of education in Guinea-Bissau would result from a process of broad discussion among the whole population. There were approximately two dozen people in a large room. A brief idea of the proposal was presented by Paulo Freire. Then the lights went off and the first slide was projected on the wall. An "Oooh" was heard. A few people in the room had already been to Portugal and had seen movies and watched TV, but the brightness, the size of the projection, the colors, the images, were an absolute surprise. Each slide was presented by the narrator. When the presentation was finished, it was clear that it had made an impact. After an initial silence, many questions were asked. One referred to the making of the series of slides. It was explained that it did not depend on costly materials or sophisticated machines. Each slide was drawn directly on paper, with absolute freedom. There were markers and some blank frames on the table. The Minister's son, six years old, took a marker and without hesitation

did a drawing on one slide. Immediately the slide was put in the projector. All of a sudden, there it was, occupying the whole wall. No more doubts: even a child could do it!

Mario Cabral, the Minister of Education, wanted to test the slide series in his political base, a neighborhood in the periphery of Bissau named Pilon de Cima. The next day it was already dark when the Idac team arrived there. The surroundings looked very much like some of the Brazil's poorest rural areas. One-story houses dominated the landscape, most made of clay, with verandas, their roofs covered by corrugated zinc. A crowd of children came to welcome the foreigners and, laughing, talking, yelling, jumping, took them to a large space encircled by houses. That was the neighborhood's center, its pulsating heart. Many people were already there, sitting on chairs, benches and boxes they had brought. More people kept coming, sitting wherever they could or kept standing: a thick crowd. A large box provided a base for the projector, fed by electricity brought by a long line of extensions plugged one to another. But where to project the images? No problem: a group of youngsters tied a king-size white sheet by the four corners and installed it on a veranda, forming a quite functional screen. When the first image was projected all the crowd noise stopped instantly. The image of an old man (Homem Grande) filled the screen. He was the narrator:

In ancient times there was no school, but it doesn't mean that there was no education. People learned by doing, by producing useful things. Every adult was a teacher...

The narration in Portuguese was immediately translated to Creole. The following images gave sequence to the story, showing daily life in pre-colonial Africa, depicting situations that still existed in certain places of Guinea-Bissau. The projection was followed attentively by the people, in almost total silence, broken here and there by laughs, whispers of approval, and timid comments in a low voice. But when the image of the colonizer, shown as a bird of prey, appeared in the screen, there was a thunder of laughs, yelling, clapping hands. That was one of the images the Idac team feared would not be understood, but it became clear that communication with the Guineans had been established.

Deepening Engagement

The following slides continued to tell the saga of slave trafficking, colonial rule, and the school

system brought by the Portuguese. The colonizer's ideology was represented by a sequence showing a black young man arriving at the university in Portugal, being welcomed by the director with open arms. The director's hug, in reality, immobilizes the young man, unscrewing and throwing away his black head, and replacing it with a new one, a white head. This little story provoked another thunder of laughter. The Idac team was later told that Guinean families with many children used to choose the brightest boy to send to school. The others would work to pay for his studies, so he could become a doctor. They called this son "the white one of the family". The "white" would give up the values of his original culture and adhere to the colonizer's. People laughed because the images reproduced faithfully what was everybody's experience. A sample of the cartoons created by Claudius, one of the authors, telling this story is included in Figure 1.

The use of cartoon-style humor allowed a freedom hard to find in other media. Cartoons permitted presenting ideas visually in a way that brought light to characteristics that were hidden. It also made it possible to combine isolated elements, thereby creating new meanings. This process required from the viewer a certain effort of identification with what was shown. The codification that was presented resulted from working on something that existed scattered, in a raw state. After being assembled and re-organized, the resulting codification was sent to the target public and had to be re-edited at the receiving end. Both groups did their own specific work. The receiving group "de-codified" and reorganized what had been received, giving it new meanings, thus participating in the process of communication by elaborating a new synthesis. Cartoons expressing humor helped improve this process because they were not "serious", as most educational content was. It involved a certain amount of surprise, of freshness, that helped facilitate communication.

This successful experience led to the creation of an Audio-Visual Center, linked to the Ministry of Education with the purpose of producing printed and visual educational materials needed to feed the new school system. Such a center had not previously existed in the country.

Applications and Adaptations of Freire's Method in Guinea-Bissau

The overall picture in Guinea-Bissau was that of a country devastated by centuries of colonial exploitation. On top of that, the Portuguese, before

leaving the country, practically destroyed all existing public and private equipment. There was an urgent need of restoring lost equipment, especially items related to health and education. In the first school year after independence, the Government expected about 50,000 children to enroll in primary school and another 4,000 youngsters in middle school. To their surprise, almost 75,000 children tried to enroll in primary school and 8,000 in middle school. It is important to note that, at the time, demographic data were very unreliable. The Government had to build improvised schools, find and train new teachers, and develop new curricula to address the demand appropriately.

Evaluative Thinking as an Intervention

Following the early positive experiences of the Idac team interacting with the people, the government decided to adopt Freire's education and action approach which comprised three core strategies:

1. *Critically understand reality* (engage in comprehensive and critical dialogue with people to understand their needs and strengths).
2. *Conduct scientific studies* (understand what you do not know and try to identify themes to generate learning).
3. *Application of the new knowledge* (attempts to solve important issues for the community using the acquired knowledge).

This 3-pronged approach was not labeled evaluative thinking at the time, but with the advantage of hindsight and in light of current understandings, it is fair, in our judgment, to interpret the process as undergirded by a pioneering form of evaluative thinking.

Freire's ideas were closely aligned with the thinking of the main leader for Guinea-Bissau independence, Amilcar Cabral – also one of the most extraordinary theoreticians of the emergent new African nations at the time:

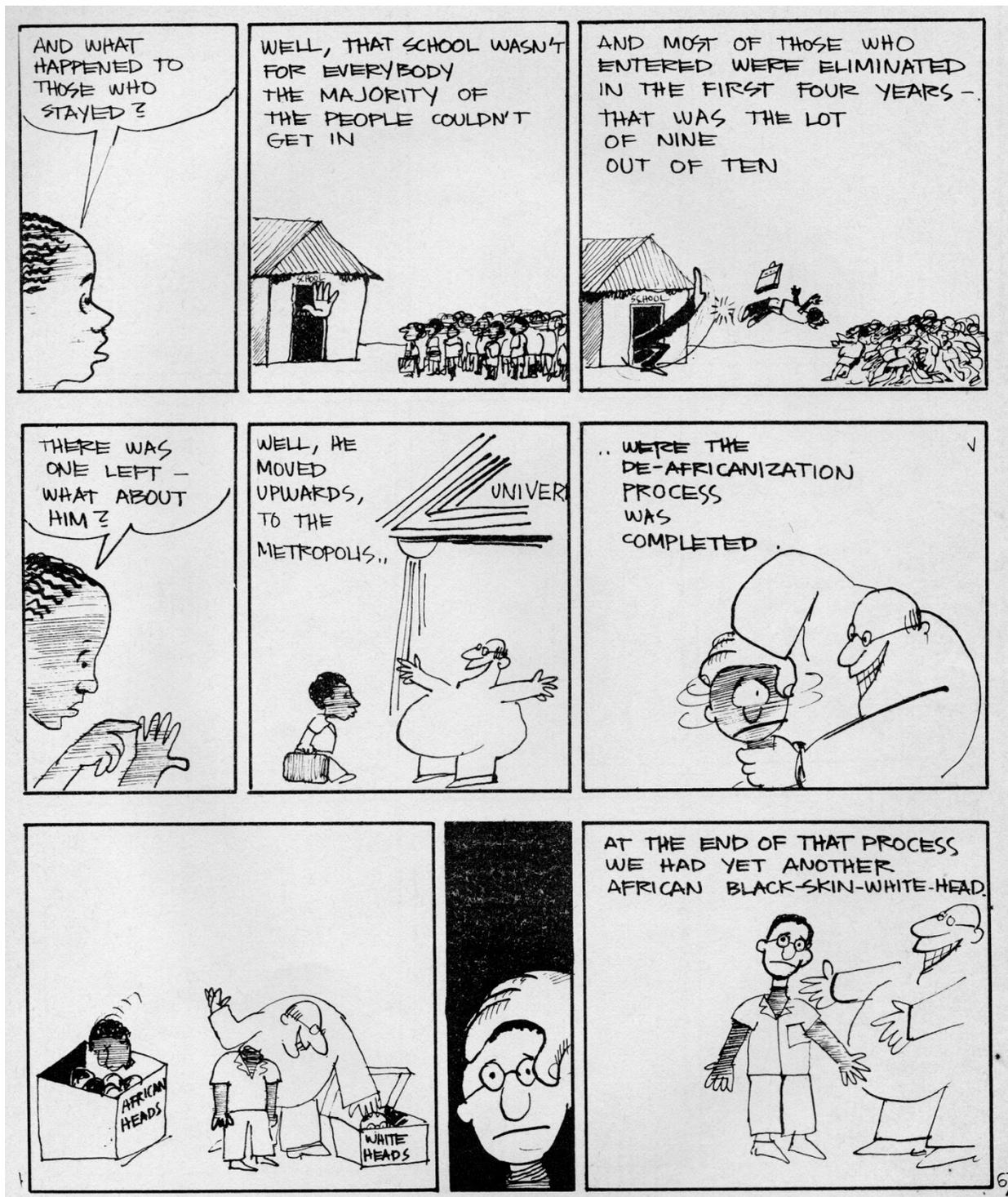


Figure 1. Visualization in support of evaluative thinking: Example of a cartoon storyboard sequence created by Claudius Ceccon, one of the authors, for use in working with nonliterate community members to support critical thinking about their colonial past, which included replacing their African identity with an imposed European identity.

To perform its role in the liberation movement, culture must establish the objectives to attain so that the people it represents reconquers the right to have its own history and have at its free disposal its production forces in view of the future development of a richer, more profound national, scientific and universal culture. (Cabral 1975)

Emergent Challenges

The teams from the Ministry of Education and the Idac team had to face great challenges to accomplish the implementation of such radical ideas. On one hand, reinventing education is rooted in a strongly participatory process involving all key stakeholders – it can never be a top-down process and demands time to mature and improve. On the other hand, the country's context demanded timely answers and needed to be reinforced by socioeconomic transformations, including greater participation of the people in fundamental decisions regarding the future of the country.

Furthermore, Idac immediately realized that there was another unsolved question: in which language should the schools work? There were about 40 “national languages”, spoken by the different ethnic groups living in Guinea-Bissau. Portuguese, the language of the dominator and of the bureaucracy, was practically spoken only in Bissau, by less than 5% of the population. It wasn't either spoken or understood by the great majority of the population. The bridge among the different ethnic languages was Creole, a *lingua franca* disseminated in the liberation areas, spoken by an estimated half the population. Even though there was much evidence supporting the adoption of Creole as the main language for educational purposes, the Government of Guinea-Bissau decided to adopt Portuguese instead. They justified their decision indicating that Portuguese was “*a literary language, with a multiseccular accumulation*” and that “*the European heritage had much to contribute to the independent development of Guinea-Bissau*”. The final argument might have made Amílcar Cabral turn in his grave: “*Portuguese was the true language of Culture*”. (Arruda 2009) This decision proved misaligned with reality. In schools, those who succeeded did so by translating for themselves into Creole.

Despite disagreeing with the Government's decision to adopt Portuguese as their official language, Idac continued its efforts to help the Ministry of Education reinvent their educational

system. While Freire and other four senior members of Idac team would visit the country every three months for a couple of weeks, two other members of Idac's team moved to Guinea Bissau and lived there for four years to be closer to the project's implementation. The decision was to invest in experimental pilot projects using Freire's approach, while reforming what was possible within the existing traditional school curricula. The two most important projects implemented at the time took place in the villages of C6 and Sedengal. (Freire 1977)

Experimental Projects and their Evaluation

In C6, a small rural village about 50 kilometers north of the capital city Bissau, an old army barrack used for decades by the Portuguese military as their headquarters for the region was transformed into a teachers' training center – the *Centro de Capacitaça6o M6ximo Gorki*. The Portuguese left it almost in ruins and the existing Government resources allowed only for partial reconstruction. Regardless of the infrastructure challenges, this was an exemplary collective educational experience that involved not only the educators and learners, but also the whole community. Many of the Center's teachers had worked in the schools in liberated areas during the independence war. Based on their experiences and inspired by Freire's approach the Center had in its DNA the close combination of manual and intellectual work as well as symbiosis between teaching and learning.

Teachers and students divided their time directing the Center, caring for its maintenance, as well as studying and working on agriculture, sanitation, food production, social assistance, and education. Everybody participated in all activities and those issues were the subjects of the study programs. In weekly meetings, a committee formed by the Center's director, teachers and students made decisions by consensus, most of the time, after extended discussions. “*When we vote it is because there is disagreement. We discuss some problems for as long as it is necessary*”, said director Jorge Ampa, “*so that everybody can understand it, therefore avoiding to get to the point of having to vote.*” (C. Ceccon, personal communication, Sep 5, 1977) These long discussions weren't time lost: they were in fact a way to learn how direct democracy functions to reach consensus involving all people. Everybody participated in agricultural production which was the main economic activity in that region. Experiments were also undertaken involving local villagers trying out innovations to improve

productivity as part of their teaching and learning processes.

From the beginning, the teachers carrying the idea of creating the Center developed strategies to engage the people living in the region in discussions about the new institution, so it could become their dream too. Several encounters and discussions with representatives from the surrounding “tabancas” (villages) were held to actively mobilize people to participate in the initial efforts to create the Center. Teachers and community members worked together in cleaning the old colonial army barrack as well as weeding its surrounding land with locals using their own tools. This sealed their partnership and created dialogue based on mutual support between the teachers and the people from the “tabancas.”

Another example of the efforts to connect the school to the lives of the communities was the close collaboration of the Center’s teachers and learners with the local health center. Health promotion activities aligned with the policies and priorities of the Ministry of Health and activities to demystify some health misconceptions of the members of the “tabancas”, rooted in traditional religious beliefs, were also implemented.

This experience was considered an example that could be inspirational to other parts of the country if properly communicated and supported by the Government. In C , education, including the literacy program, was not an isolated effort. It was deeply embedded in the lives of the local communities and linked to a larger process of regional development. The fact that such a successful experience did not receive more official support at the time was probably a sign that there were already internal divergences at the Government about how to develop the country’s educational policy and strategies.

The other exciting educational experience took place in Sedengal village, located far north from Bissau, almost bordering Gambia. There, three ethnic groups lived in harmony, in spite of being very different in their way of building houses, their food habits, dressing, rules of marriage, language, tools to work the land, household division of work, property sharing and skin color. Sedengal was the site where the idea of literacy experience as a cultural action was well-received, indeed, found not only acceptance but momentum.

About 200 students from Bissau High School (Liceu de Bissau), with their origins in rural areas of the country, agreed to participate in literacy programs based on Freire’s methodology in their original regions during their summer vacation. They were called the ‘literacy brigades.’ In close coordination with the local committees of the Government’s party, the brigades, always working in small groups, were targeted to mobilize the communities around the creation of Culture Circles¹. They would also motivate some local youth that, after being trained by the visitors, would continue the local literacy efforts started by the literacy brigades. (Freire 1977)

Sedengal had one of the most successful literacy programs using Freire’s approach. The whole community got excited about the program and deeply engaged in its implementation. Several Culture Circles were created, and a significant number of local youth volunteered to assume the role of cultural animators responsible to facilitate the literacy efforts. Members of the Culture Circles were engaged in processes to learn how to read and write associated with critical reading and re-reading of their realities and the idea of always connecting theory and practice as part of their learning processes. One notable result of the literacy program in Sedengal was the realization by learners, during the “conscientization” process of re-reading their reality, that they needed to work collectively to cultivate a large field of Government land. Through this experience, they started to re-write their reality by incorporating collective work and not only individual work as part of their working practices.

But program implementation was slowed considerably by the Government’s decision to use Portuguese as the official language. Again, those who, in spite of not knowing Portuguese, managed to learn the literacy mechanisms that were taught, used this new knowledge to create word combinations and phrases in Creole. It was their language, the one in which they did their thinking and reasoning, their instrument of communication. Paulo Freire, in a letter to the cultural animators, proposed:

Precisely because we define adult literacy as a cultural action serving the reconstruction of our country – and not as the simple learning of reading and writing – we may face occasions where our work with the population

¹ A strategy to substitute formal school classrooms. A group of about 20 people met regularly with a facilitator/educator to debate about central issues of their lives including work, citizenship, nutrition, health, people’s organization, ethical

values, freedom, happiness, politics, oppression, economy, civil rights, culture, and religion. They also engaged in meaningful conversations about how to change their futures as they learned how to write and read.

must be centered, on a first moment, on the “reading,” the “re-reading” and the “writing” of reality and not the learning of a language. (Freire 1979)

Freire provided examples of people’s mobilization around reality, such as increasing or improving the quality of what was produced, or dealing with health problems, always aiming at a collective discussion and consequent collective action, in an educative process. These development actions, according to him, might take some time before the people involved feel the need to acquire the knowledge of reading and writing. In other cases, the cultural action may well start by the literacy itself. But then it would be necessary that, from this learning of the language, the population also take up projects to transform reality:

Because it’s only when the Adult alphabetization will be undertaken and perceived as a political act and knowledge act, intimately tied with production and health - and not a simple mechanical exercise of memorization of words - that it will succeed to insert itself and to really contribute to the process of national reconstruction. (Freire 1979)

Ending the Work in Guinea-Bissau

Idac’s work in Guinea-Bissau met increasing difficulties. They were very conscious of the limits of their role as foreign consultants and were careful when approaching key stakeholders, especially in the Ministry of Education. They did not want to be prescriptive, trying to listen more than speaking, even though they felt they did have some certainties based on other experiences of literacy campaigns led by Freire in various countries. They also had additional information about what was happening in de-colonized Africa as well as the traditional role of international cooperation. Reading Freire’s letters to Bissau (Freire 1977) from today’s perspective, it becomes evident how he tried to avoid imposing his ideas, providing only tips based in his own experiences.

The limitations of a single party ruling government became increasingly clear to Idac. Criticism and self-criticism, proposed by Amilcar Cabral as a way of improving internal democracy, did not succeed. Internal divisions between the Party and the Government led to a situation in which disagreement created mistrust and enmity. This was probably the reason why decisions made at the level of the Ministry of Education were not

followed through. Mario Cabral, the Minister of Education, who had invited Idac and with whom they had worked closely throughout every step of their collaboration, was eventually transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture. In his last meeting with Idac members in Bissau, he expressed his concerns about the success of the efforts they were implementing:

The whole plan for the transformation of the national instructional system will not be worth anything if there are not similar transformations in all of the other sectors of activity. ‘It is possible,’ said Mario Cabral ..., ‘that, in a certain sense, education initiates the challenge. It is necessary, moreover, that structural transformations be made, giving support to the challenge, so that the practice implied in the challenge may become concrete.’ (Freire 1978, p.36)

Idac’s work in Guinea-Bissau officially ended in 1980, after a coup d’état led by General Nino Vieira, who had fought alongside with Amilcar Cabral in the independence war, toppled the Government of President Luis Cabral, Amilcar Cabral’s half-brother.

Implications and Lessons for Evaluative Thinking

Idac’s experience in Guinea-Bissau ended abruptly and with some frustration. However, there is no doubt their work was one of the best examples demonstrating how to practically apply Freire’s philosophy on pedagogy, especially regarding adult literacy. It has also produced some important learnings regarding implications of Freire’s philosophy and practice for contemporary evaluative thinking.

Evaluative thinking is a state of mind of constant questioning, reflecting, learning, and applying the learning for improvements. It is a vibrant and dynamic process focused, ultimately, on informing action; not just an academic exercise. It is the way our human brain tries to resolve the tension between the current level of performance and the level of performance we would like to be at. (Davidson, 2005) The acquired learning is focused on context-specific knowledge to inform change and action. (Patton, 2006)

Those ideas are congruent with Freire’s Critical Consciousness concept (Freire 1973) which is a product, as he maintains, of the people’s capacity to reflect about their world and integrate with social reality and not solely adapt or adjust to it. Humans

are subjects and not objects of the social-historical-cultural change process.

Men relate to their world in a critical way. They apprehend the objective data of their reality (as well as the ties that link one datum to another) through reflection – not by reflex, as do animals. And in the act of critical perception, men discover their own temporality. Transcending a single dimension, they reach back to yesterday, recognize today, and come upon tomorrow. (p. 1)

Even though Freire's most prominent ideas were developed before evaluation was considered as an established field of professional practice, his approach of dialectic inquiry, critical reflection and taking action has influenced and still influences many leading scholars and practitioners within our (trans)discipline. Examples include (i) Fetterman, Rodríguez-Campos, Wandersman, & O'Sullivan (2014) and Cousins, Whitmore, & Shulha (2014) and their participatory, collaborative, and empowerment approaches to evaluation; (ii) House & Howe's (2000) ideas on democratic dialogic evaluation; (iii) Stake (1975, 2004) and Guba & Lincoln (1981) on responsive evaluation; and (iv) Patton (2011) and his developmental evaluation approach and principles-focused evaluation (Patton, 2018).

Freire's ideas are grounded in the dialectical method of argumentation, inspired by and adapted from Hegel (Maybe 2016). However, besides producing contradictory processes between opposing sides, Freire emphasized the importance of generating integrated syntheses that should inform collective actions. This is probably one of the aspects that makes his thinking so relevant and influential in the evaluation field. Michael Patton (2017) has interpreted Freire's work and analyzed its relevance to evaluation, by articulating 10 specific principles that seem to guide his pedagogy:

1. Use evaluative thinking to open up, develop, and nurture *critical consciousness*.
2. Consciousness resides in communities of people, not just individuals.
3. Critical consciousness pedagogy must be interactive and dialogical.
4. Integrate reflection and action.
5. Value and integrate the objective and subjective
6. Integrate thinking and emotion.
7. Critical consciousness pedagogy is co-intentional education among those involved in whatever roles.

8. Critical consciousness is both process and outcome, both method and result, and both analytical and change-oriented.
9. All pedagogy is political.
10. Critical pedagogy is fundamentally evaluative.

On a separate paper, Chianca & Ceccon (2017) have assessed the extent to which the ten pedagogical principles identified by Patton could be identified in Freire's experience in Guinea-Bissau. Concrete evidence of eight of those principles were found to be relevant for that specific work. However, the authors also identified two new principles that should complement Patton's list. They are:

11. Experiences are not for transplantation, they are to be reinvented; and
12. Root any pedagogical effort in people's real interests and needs, so those efforts will become more effective.

The implications for evaluation of those 12 principles are fully discussed in the two papers cited above.

Evaluative Thinking Through Dialogue

Freire's pedagogy was fundamentally dialogical. He described an evaluation review in Guinea-Bissau as a dialogue:

We also dedicated eight days of that trip to a seminar to evaluate all the work of the Commission. The evaluation, as mentioned earlier, does not consist of a process in which we take the Coordinating Commission and its work as the object of our analysis, discussing them with "professional airs." Rather, we and the Commission members together engage in dialogue about what is being done. We are active Subjects in the evaluation as we try to analyze together the cause of whatever failures there have been and to study alternative means of overcoming them. (Freire, 1977b, p. 174)

This reflection epitomizes evaluative thinking through dialogue. By reviewing the reform effort in Guinea-Bissau, we have hoped to illustrate how evaluative thinking was embedded in Freire's practices and principles, thereby illuminating how those practices and principles can be adapted and embedded in contemporary transformation and evaluation processes.

Conclusion by Michael Quinn Patton

I want to express appreciation for the hard work and deep thought manifest in the detailed description of the Guinea-Bissau initiative reconstructed by Thomaz Chianca and Claudius Ceccon. This is an important historical case demonstrating how and why evaluative thinking has become so critical in much of contemporary evaluation. We dare not take these engagement processes for granted. As the case shows, supporting critical consciousness based on evaluative thinking will not be welcomed by those who aim to control and manipulate. That was true then and it is true now.

Elizabeth Minnich (2017), a distinguished philosopher and feminist scholar has written an important new book, *The Evil of Banality: On the Life and Death Importance of Thinking*, concerned, ultimately, with what can be done to prevent genocide. Minnich enquires into how it is possible for human beings to engage in genocide, slavery, sexual trafficking of children, systematic rape, mass torture, and other acts of violence in the vast human arsenal of brutal and deadly acts of oppression and exploitation. She concludes that such acts are made possible by *thoughtlessness*, literally, *a failure to think*. Thoughtlessness disables conscience, which can make it possible for otherwise decent people to participate in systematized extensive evils such as genocide, human trafficking, and grinding exploitation of the most vulnerable.

Evaluative thinking offers an antidote against thoughtlessness banality in human affairs and inquiries of all kinds. Learning and using evaluative thinking and reasoning may ultimately be more important and have more far-reaching implications than merely applying evaluation methods and using evaluation reports. In political reforms of all kinds around the world, the retrospective evaluation of what happened in Guinea-Bissau reminds us of both the importance of evaluative thinking and reflective dialogue – and the fragility of both in the face of political polarization and changes in leadership.

I close with this provocative insight from Uruguayan journalist Eduardo Galeano, which, it seems to me, applies to both political reforms and evaluation: “History never really says goodbye. History says, ‘See you later.’”

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