

Born in Northeast Brazil in 1921, Paulo Freire grew up in a family where, as he says, he knew what it was to be hungry. His studies at the University of Recife finally led to a doctorate in Philosophy of Education. After a very brief exploration of law, he turned to education as his field of study and work. Aided greatly by Elza, his wife, who was educator working with children, he developed his literacy programs out of involvement and research with the peasants of the area. In the early 1960s, as a professor of the History and Philosophy of Education in the University of Recife, he led to a major government program in literacy, using the "conscientização" methods he had developed. The coup in 1964 forced him into exile in Chile, where he continued the same kind of educational activity and research with the agricultural extension service of the Chilean government, and as a UNESCO consultant.

In the late 1960s the Freires moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he worked with the Center for Study of Development and Social Change, and was Visiting Professor with Harvard's Center for Studies in Education and Development. In 1970 the Harvard Educational Review published the articles that were included in the book Cultural Action for Freedom. In the same year the English translation of his book, published in Brazil only in 1974, appeared as Pedagogy of the Oppressed. The Penguin edition of it in 1972 helped make it available around the world, and approved and pirated editions followed in many languages.

In 1970 the Freires moved to Geneva, Switzerland, where Paulo became a consultant in the new Office of Education of the World Council of Churches. From that base he visited many parts of the world, discussing and consulting about education for liberation. For several years he served as major consultant to the government of newly independent Guinea-Bissau as developed the nation's new educational system. From that experience came his book: Pedagogy in Process. During those years at World Council his thinking and writing stimulated educators all over the world to reflect more deeply about their educational commitments and practice.

In 1980 Paulo received the First King Baudouin Prize awarded by the King Baudouin Foundation (Brussels) for his struggle against illiteracy and oppression.

Since 1980 the Freires have been back in Brazil, where Paulo serves as Professor of Education in both Catholic and State Universities in São Paulo.

Doctor Honoris Causa: Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (Brasil)  
London Open University  
Michigan University  
Université de Genève  
Université de Louvain