Functional and Critical Literacy in *Yo Sí Puedo*
An examination of Cuba’s Literacy Program
Through a Freirean Lens

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Statement of Originality

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Ruth Ratcliffe
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Abstract

The adult literacy program *Yo Sí Puedo* has taught an estimated 5 million people, predominantly although not exclusively in the Global South, to read and write yet remarkably little has been written about these various campaigns. This research draws on the works of Paulo Freire to analyse both the seminal Cuban National Literacy Campaign of 1961 as a significant influence on YSP and the academic literature on contemporary YSP campaigns in 4 diverse settings, Bolivia, Timor Leste, Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia.

A Freirean framework which highlights the inter-relationships between oppression, liberation and education; dialogical and problem posing education and a specific form of conscientization within social struggle is used to analyse the YSP campaigns and draw a number of conclusions regarding how YSP can be characterised in relation both to traditional models of functional literacy and its ability to contribute to a form of critical and transformative literacy.

The unique and uneven contributions of the Cuban revolution to education and international solidarity are considered within the context of the development of ALBA as an alternate pole of international cooperation that potentially offers a path away from various economic and ecological crises.
### List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>ACSF</td>
<td>Australian Core Skills Framework</td>
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<td>ALBA</td>
<td>Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America</td>
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<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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<td>CONFINTÉA</td>
<td>International Conference on Adult Education</td>
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<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
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<td>EWLP</td>
<td>Experimental World Literacy Project</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>GLEACE</td>
<td>Latin American Group of Specialists on Literacy and Written Culture</td>
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<td>IPLAC</td>
<td>Pedagogical Institute for Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
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<td>MCP</td>
<td>Popular Culture Movement</td>
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<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organisation</td>
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<td>SESI</td>
<td>Industrial Social Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>TWOA</td>
<td>Te Wananga O Aotearoa</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States (of America)</td>
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<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>Union of Soviet Socialist Republics</td>
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<td>YSP</td>
<td>Yo Sí Puedo</td>
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<td>YSPS</td>
<td>Yo Sí Puedo Seguir</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

At the conclusion of the 1961 National Literacy Campaign, Cuba was declared a territory free from illiteracy, a significant feat for a small island nation that had only two years earlier freed itself from the yoke of US imperialism. The literacy campaign and the broader revolutionary process inspired educators and activists around the world. Fifty-three years later in an uneven and often polarized debate, the Cuban revolution continues to win admirers, in part due to its ongoing commitments to education, at home and abroad. As well as maintaining a 99.8% literacy rate (UNDP, 2013) and free and accessible education from kindergarten to university and beyond, the small island nation has consolidated its position as a world leader in literacy education with the international delivery of *Yo Sí Puedo* (YSP)\(^1\), the Cuban literacy program which draws on the lessons of the 1961 campaign and has been implemented in almost 30 countries teaching an estimated 5 million people to read and write (Lamrani, 2012). These impressive achievements have been won, and maintained, against a backdrop of a relentless United States opposition, extending to overt and clandestine promotion of political instability and an unprecedented economic embargo, amounting to a relentless campaign to extinguish the local Cuban example of independence and alternative to capitalism (Lamrani, 2013).

Background and Rationale

There are compelling reasons to develop a better understanding of Cuban literacy programs and to query some common assumptions about YSP. Perhaps most obvious is the fact that there are still 774 million people who cannot read or write by any standard, and many more millions who are considered ‘semi-literate’ (Torres, 2009; UNESCO, 2014). There is a well-established correlation between poverty and illiteracy and while gender equity in literacy has improved in recent years, women and girls are still over-represented in the ranks of the illiterate (Lind, 2008b) as are Indigenous populations (Schmelkes, 2011). Cuba has proposed to the international community that it could eradicate illiteracy globally within 10 years at the cost of just US $1.5 billion (Canfux

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\(^1\) English translation, ‘Yes, I Can’
Gutiérrez, Corona González and Hickling-Hudson, 2012). This offer, and the failure, to date, of the international community to take it up, raises broader questions about the social and political roles of literacy and education, and whose interests they serve.

In 1961 when the new Cuban government organised the Literacy Campaign dealing a swift and decisive blow to illiteracy on the island, Paulo Freire was a 40-year-old educational administrator working in the North East of Brazil. In the years that followed he became one of the 20th century’s most important writers on the interconnections between education, oppression and liberation. Freire played a leading role in literacy campaigns in Brazil, Chile, Nicaragua, Grenada, Guinea Bissau, Sao Tome & Principe, Tanzania and Mozambique, campaigns which were often directly linked to land reform and revolutionary situations. Freire was committed to developing literacy through a process of studying one’s own social conditions and thereby learning to accurately ‘name’ the world. Freire understood this process as inseparable from that of ‘calling forth’ a better, more just world and engaging in social struggle to bring that better world into existence. This aspect of Freire’s legacy however is often misinterpreted or downplayed (McLaren and Leonard, 1993, p.3). This research project is grounded in the academic tradition that has subsequently been taken up by scholars such as Paula Allman, Peter McLaren, Henry Giroux, Antonia Darder and Peter Mayo, amongst others, who have staunchly defended Freire’s contribution to a politically revolutionary pedagogy, that is not merely related to change in the classroom but to the radical transformation of society.

The spread and impact of Cuba’s YSP literacy program

From the early days of the Cuban revolution, health and education were priority areas – the immediate needs of Cubans in these areas were addressed through, for example, the 1961 National Literacy Campaign, a massive school building program, and mass vaccination and public health programs (Chomsky, 2011). Such programs were quickly followed with efforts from the Cuban government to export its expertise through advising on or delivering similar programs in other countries (Hickling-Hudson, Corona González and Preston, 2012). As such, Cuba has stood as an ongoing challenge to the US and its free market orthodoxy. Cuba’s success in areas of human development has been recognised as providing vastly better outcomes for its people than free market
capitalism has provided in neighbouring Haiti or Jamaica (Kaiser-Lenoir, 2009). On certain indices, for example child-mortality, Cuba outperforms the US itself (Newman, 2012). Cuba provides an important moral inspiration and practical example for the rest of the world, especially relevant to the struggle to move beyond capitalism.

The success of Cuba’s 1961 literacy campaign that, in part, has led to the development and take up of the YSP program internationally, is well recognised (Abendroth, 2009; Boughton, 2010; de Quesada, 2011). This project originated when, as a newly graduated teacher, I travelled to Venezuela in 2006. With some knowledge of both Freire and YSP, knowing that they both were associated with mass literacy campaigns, originated in the Global South and were broadly associated with the political left, I had assumed that there was a recognised association between the two traditions. However at a community meeting discussing the implementation of YSP (implemented in Venezuela under the banner of ‘Mission Robinson’), I was surprised to learn that those working in Mission Robinson were not familiar with Paulo Freire’s work. They were however, in the midst of implementing something more ‘Freirean’ than most teachers and academics familiar with his work could ever hope for! While significant educational developments in Venezuela since that time may well have resulted in a greater knowledge of Freire’s works amongst educators and policy makers, this experience led me to further examine the research literature on, and connections between, YSP and Freire.

Rather than being consistently presented as part of a similar tradition as I expected, YSP programs were largely absent from discussions in the research literature of Freire’s legacy, and when mentioned were sometimes counter posed to a Freirean approach. For example Kalman (2008) presents YSP as an example of a program which characterises “literacy as the process of learning letters and sounds”, and compares this to models which “associate literacy with a more complex notion taken from Paulo Freire’s theories of consciousness raising and orient their efforts towards building a more socially and politically aware population” (p. 527). The literature is contradictory about some basic points, such as whether Freire was inspired and his work influenced by the 1961 Cuban Literacy Campaign, and whether the Cubans drew inspiration from Freire. It was also noted while Freire’s methods are often promoted as exemplars of progressive and liberatory practice, it is too often a politically neutered version of his
ideas, in which Freire’s “revolutionary politics are all but dismissed” while he is simultaneously “elevated to teacher/saint” (Aronowitz, 1993, p. 10).

Moreover, YSP has been portrayed as didactic, or even amateurish or sinister, for example renowned literacy researcher Agneta Lind (2008a, p. 759) wrote that the Cuban program:

...claims it can achieve mass literacy in two to three months through radio, TV or videotapes. The Cuban government has managed to convince a number of governments and some NGOs in Latin America and Africa that they can provide a package that works. They send along Cuban advisers (almost none of whom has experience of designing or teaching literacy for adults, because it is a long time ago that Cuba had an illiteracy problem).

These kinds of criticisms of YSP, and the accompanying lack of deep and historical analysis of its development, influences and implementation, are significant. Lind is a highly experienced researcher and literacy advocate, she has criticised the role of organisations such as the World Bank in education, and consequently one might expect her to be more supportive of YSP. Her claim that the Cuban advisors do not have experience in designing or teaching literacy for adults is quite astounding. There has been an ongoing tradition of Cuban educators assisting in international literacy efforts since the successful 1961 literacy campaign in Cuba. This work was internationally recognised in 2006 when Cuba’s Pedagogical Institute for Latin America and the Caribbean (IPLAC) was awarded the UNESCO King Sejong Prize for Literacy for its work on youth and adult literacy (UNESCO, 2006). It is this lack of consensus on YSP and the ideological relationship between Paulo Freire and the Cuban educational tradition that underpins this project.

We live in a world, increasingly characterised by both ecological and economic crises. The capitalist world system has been shown to be incapable of meeting the needs of humanity (Bellamy Foster, 2013; Panitch, Albo & Chibber, 2011). The human cost of these crises, already beyond belief, is set to grow rapidly in the near future unless we are able to effect a rapid and transformative change in how we organise society. How to achieve that transformation and what sort of future society we are aiming towards are key overarching questions framing this research. Guided by these questions and
considering the many and varied sites of resistance to the current capitalist system, this research recognises that although some resistance has found expression in the Global North, many of the strongest examples of counteraction are located in the South and for various reasons are not investigated as thoroughly by researchers from the North. Cuba is one such example, which, for over 50 years and despite numerous challenges, has continued to demonstrate that a qualified shift beyond capitalist relations of production is possible and sustainable.

This is not to say that Cuba provides a model to be replicated uncritically. Moreover, there are a number of qualifications that have been made about the nature of its educational revolution, highlighting, for example, the instrumental character of preparing citizens for productive and disciplined work as is common in capitalist contexts (Griffiths, 2005, 2009). These complexities, however, further support the need to investigate Cuba’s YSP program more thoroughly, from a Freirean perspective, to provide a better understanding of its potential for contemporary radical political movements and purposes.

Raby (2009) highlights two aspects of Cuba’s revolutionary process that she sees as “vital contributions to the emergence of a new socialist or anti-capitalist alternative” (p.10). Firstly, she cites the ecological example that Cuba is setting for the rest of the world. Although many of the changes in Cuba’s environment policy were originally made by necessity, in the wake of the collapse of the USSR, they have now become policy even though alternatives now exist through extensive trade relations with oil-rich Venezuela. Some of these environmental measures include: the promotion of organic agriculture and sustainable farming practices, an energy revolution that has encouraged smaller, more efficient power plants, and large-scale investment in wind and solar power.

Secondly, Raby cites Cuba’s role in the development of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA). Alongside other scholars (e.g. Cole, 2008; Lamrani, 2012; Muhr, 2010 & 2012), Raby highlights the significance of the alternative economic model of ALBA, established initially between Cuba and Venezuela, which today includes Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Dominica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Antigua and Barbuda. Artaraz (2012) argues that ALBA is more like a solidarity
network, than simply a trading bloc, and that real bonds of cooperation are being forged between civil societies, as well as government institutions in the member countries. The framework of ALBA has allowed Cuba to increase the extensive international assistance it has provided since the earliest days of the revolution (Hickling-Hudson, Corona González and Preston, 2012), particularly in areas of health and education, through such programs as YSP and Operation Milagro. These programs have, in turn, proved to be very popular in the ALBA countries as explained by Lamrani (2012) who points to the healthy margins by which ALBA leaders, in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, have won recent elections, in part under the banner of maintaining and extending such programs, thereby strengthening the alternative pole of government in the region.

YSP has delivered impressive results within ALBA nations such as Venezuela, which UNESCO in 2005 declared “a territory free of illiteracy”. Bolivia was declared the same in 2008 and Nicaragua and Ecuador both in 2009 (Lamrani, 2012). But Cuba’s efforts against illiteracy are not confined to ALBA states, with YSP programs also running in a number of other Latin American countries including Argentina, Mexico, Uruguay and further afield in several African countries, the South Pacific and even, as explored in this research, several countries of the Global North. Despite numerous international statements and aspirations, in the last two decades the global community has failed to make significant progress in reducing the numbers of adults who are illiterate. In 1985 there were 881 million illiterates, compared with 774 million today (UNESCO, 2014). Meanwhile, in the last decade alone Cuba’s YSP has helped 5 million people learn to read and write, with Cuba’s offer to use it to contribute to the global eradication of illiteracy open (Canfux Gutiérrez, Corona González & Hickling Hudson, 2012).

The YSP programs being delivered today around the world are exceedingly important contributions to improving the world both for the individuals and communities who benefit directly from the programs and for the broader community of those seeking transformative social change. The real life example of an alternative social organisation that Cuba provides and the potential of YSP to contribute to a broader anti-capitalist movement influenced my approach and inspired me to persist with this study. We need an ongoing study and critique of these programs in order to properly understand what
has been achieved with these methods and approaches in the past so that they can best be utilized and can inform other interventions, now and in the future.

**Aims**

While there have been various shifts over the years in how the goal of universal literacy is conceived (Jones, 1990), the Education For All charter has as one of its goals the improvement of adult literacy rates (UNESCO, 2014). This aligns with a commonly held assumption that it would be beneficial if everyone in a given society could read and write. However many critical scholars like Freire, and those from a Freirean tradition (e.g. Allman, 1994; Lankshear 1993; Lankshear & Lawler, 1987; McLaren, 2000, amongst others) have moved beyond a basic “right to literacy” framework to examine the question of whether and how literacy and education are used to domesticate or liberate people from the capitalist status quo. From this perspective the question becomes not simply how to improve literacy levels, but how to do so in ways that disseminate what can be called a liberatory literacy to not only those currently considered illiterate, but to all populations currently constrained by a domesticated literacy. This question informs the primary aim of this research, to investigate how YSP sits in relation to such political objectives. In order to respond to this question, however, we first need to establish a thorough understanding of the YSP program itself and a better understanding of how it has been represented and understood by the academy to date.

The second major aim of this research is to systematically examine the actual and potential connection between the works of Freire and the Cuban literacy tradition, of which present day YSP projects are emblematic. Boughton (2010), for example, recounts his discussion with leading Cuban educators who agree that access to basic literacy is “a question of humanism, in the Freirean sense” (p.68). This project poses the question of whether we can go further in comparing the two traditions, in order to better understand the liberatory and transformatory potential of literacy education. In what ways does YSP move beyond providing basic literacy to develop criticality in participants? Does it, in a Freirean sense, prepare participants to name and critically understand their world as grounding for political action to transform the world?
There is very little discussion of such questions in the academic literature. By reviewing various YSP projects from a Freirean perspective and collating and critically reviewing such academic discussion as exists on YSP in four diverse settings, this project hopes to contribute to an international dialogue that can advance our understanding of YSP and help direct further research in this field. There is an important space for a fruitful meeting of the Freirean and Cuban traditions and efforts towards this have been lacking both from non-Cuban and Cuban academics. This project investigates this link deeply, to argue that there is an identifiable ideological thread that runs from the 1961 campaign, through Freire’s writings and into YSP. In 2014, in the context of renewed efforts in Latin America to articulate and construct a viable model of ‘twenty-first century socialism’ (Raby, 2009), this project is timely.

**Research Questions**

This study seeks to contribute a better understanding of the connections between the YSP program, Freire’s legacy and praxis, and the imperative of transformational social change. The study brings together the limited English language literature on YSP, to identify and investigate any new perspectives on the program, including insight into debate about its nature and effects. This research is also a quest to understand why there is such a limited body of literature on YSP, and through the Freirean analysis of YSP, to understand the gap in the literature with respect to the connections between them.

This project collates and critically analyses the academic literature on YSP inspired by projects in four countries: Bolivia, Timor-Leste, Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia; and related YSP materials, to respond to the following major research questions:

1) What conclusions can be drawn about the nature of YSP in terms of its political and pedagogical approach and methods?

2) What is the relationship between contemporary YSP projects and a Freirean approach to literacy education?

3) What conclusions can be drawn about these YSP projects in terms of their development of participants’ functional and critical literacy?
Methodology

This study has been conducted as critical review of YSP, drawing on the academic literature and expert sources to develop an understanding of the campaign in four contexts: Bolivia, Timor-Leste, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Australia. A comprehensive and critical review and analysis of the research literature on contemporary YSP projects, in these four contexts is complemented by a Freirean analysis of the 1961 National Literacy Campaign in Cuba and contemporary Cuban education. Together these aspects provide the basis for an analysis of YSP which is contextualised by its historic and pedagogical influences.

The literature work was complemented by interview data and documentation shared by two other researchers in the field and correspondence with Dr Mercedes Zamora, an IPLAC specialist. The research was conducted using qualitative research methods specifically a critical analysis of available documentation and as such works to “develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2008, p. 213). The research was guided by a theoretical framework developed from Freire’s works, particularly drawing on the Gramscian and Marxist heritage within this. The writings of Colin Lankshear and Frank Youngman were also influential in developing my perspectives through the course of this project. This study then is grounded in clear understandings about the nature of literacy as a social practice and the potential for it to be used to contribute to either the domestication or liberation of participants, and draws from these understandings to clearly define a continuum of functional to critical literacy. Having established this basis, this study analyses YSP by drawing on a thorough review of the academic literature (as explained below), complemented by the additional information and materials, to make a systematic assessment of the relationship between YSP and the Freirean tradition. This Freirean analysis is then drawn on, to identify aspects of the program, which affect the degree to which YSP may be characterised as contributing to the development of functional and / or critical literacy.

2 Human Research Ethics Approval No.: H-2012-0203
Particular country contexts in which YSP has been implemented were selected for study partly in order to better understand the delivery of YSP in the Asia-Pacific area where it is less well known than in Latin America and the Caribbean, and to provide more focus on the delivery of YSP in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, countries of the Global North that are not often considered to have a major illiteracy problem. Timor-Leste was selected as the country in the region with the most developed and relatively well-known cooperation with Cuba and finally Bolivia was selected as a Latin American country and an ALBA member where YSP has been implemented in a fairly ‘typical’ way. Bolivia also shares important similarities with Timor-Leste as a complex linguistic environment and comparisons can be drawn between Bolivia’s (historic) treatment of Indigenous people and how Indigenous groups in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand have been treated. Together these countries provide a range of examples of the recent implementation of YSP in so called developed and developing countries; in various political environments ranging from the neo-liberal context of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, through to the potentially socialist transition occurring in Bolivia (Burbach, Fox & Fuentes, 2013). These diverse contexts thereby allow us to develop a deeper understanding of the nature of YSP and facilitate a rigorous and elaborated contribution to the field with respect to understanding YSP, its relationship to Freire’s legacy, and to the development of effective mass literacy for social transformation. To do this an elaborated detailed account of the Freirean approach (Chapter 2), as well as a comprehensive analysis of the Cuban approach to literacy teaching from the 1961 campaign onwards (Chapters 2 and 3) has been developed. Chapter 3 also briefly considers Cuba’s particular approach to international assistance and how the relatively recent development of ALBA has affected international dynamics in this regard. Having established this basis and the definitions of critical and functional literacy through the theoretical work of these chapters, in Chapter 4, I proceed to analyse YSP, as represented in the relevant literature, in light of the Freirean framework and research questions.
Identification of Literature

Identifying literature for review and analysis was achieved by entering the search thread “Yo Si Puedo” into 10 major academic databases searching all text of (English language) articles contents. In order to ensure a comprehensive search, additional searches were also conducted using the following search strands: “Cuban AND Literacy AND Program” (abstract only) and “Greenlight AND Literacy AND Maori” (anywhere in text). The latter was used in response to the highly limited retrieval of literature about the YSP campaign in Aotearoa New Zealand which was conducted under the name, Greenlight Learning for Life. The items returned by the above searches were then sorted manually: articles that did not mention the target countries were excluded, and newspaper articles were consulted for reference but not included in the literature review. This process resulted in 25 articles considered eligible for in depth analysis. An additional article (Boughton & Durnan, 2014) was published just as I was completing this thesis which was amended accordingly, bringing the total number of articles included in the critical analysis to 26.

To these articles, five unpublished theses and a Latin American Group of Specialists in Literacy and Written Culture (GLEACE) discussion papers were added. Some interview data from Dr Steven Smith and Dr Bob Boughton regarding the Greenlight program and some brief responses to questions via email from IPLAC specialist Dr Mercedes Zamora have also been drawn on. In the course of researching, analysing and writing, the broader literature body, newspaper articles, some promotional materials for the Arrowmight program in Canada which makes reference to the Greenlight program in Aotearoa New Zealand and an IPLAC produced Evaluation of the Social Impact of the Greenlight Learning for Life Programme have also been made use of. This additional material develops further analysis and understanding of the YSP program.

My initial approach to the literature was to sort the articles according to the depth with which YSP campaigns were treated in the literature. As a large number of the identified articles (11 of the 26) gave no substantive information on YSP other than identifying it

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3 The databases consulted were: EBSCO Megafile, Proquest, ScienceDirect, Sage, JSTOR, Springerlink, Taylor and Francis, Wiley, Scopus and Web of Science
as a significant literacy program delivered across a number of countries; however two of these articles (Gadotti, 2011 and Limage, 2009) referred to significant discussions at CONFINTEA and the UN. Another three articles made brief but serious criticisms of the campaign, leaving twelve articles, which provided at least some degree of information and evaluation concerning YSP. It is worth noting that at least three of the eligible articles mentioned the project in Aotearoa New Zealand yet not a single published, peer-reviewed article could be found that expanded on it in any way. It is also notable that some of the articles, which simply mention YSP, do hint at its significance for example, Baklett et al. (2011) refer to, “Cuba’s Yo Si Puedo campaign [which] rather famously offered technical expertise and a basic, adaptable curriculum to countries throughout the region” (p.190).

**Data Analysis**

Research methods used to analyse collected data, in order to answer the research questions, involved the following, sometimes over-lapping, components:

1) Literature review and theoretical work establishing the functional-critical continuum, and Freirean framework for analysing YSP.

2) The research literature was subjected to content and concept analysis, to first identify and synthesise major findings in relation to the YSP programs and their literacy outcomes. An initial characterisation of the nature of the literacy outcomes was made, based on descriptions reported in the literature.

3) This analytical work synthesising the identified academic literature also identified how the programs have been conceptualised in the research literature in relation to their political, educational and ideological character, and then systematically compared this characterization to a Freirean approach.

4) Consideration of the assessment of the program in the academic literature, to further elaborate an argument about the position of YSP programs on the functional-critical literacy continuum as outlined below. This involved a consideration of the other factors beyond specific teaching methodologies that impact on this characterisation.

Following this analysis there are a number of areas identified for further research, which are discussed in Chapter 5.
Definitions

In this section I discuss and define various terms and concepts relevant to this study. This project is centred on the capacity of certain forms of literacy, and the YSP literacy program, to contribute to social transformation. Discussing this work can be difficult due to the contested nature of a range of terminology within the field, which gives rise to the need to set out some working definitions as used in this project.

Literacy: A social practice in a social context

While a “common sense” definition of literacy is simply the ability to read and write, such a definition easily becomes contested, and is thus not particularly useful in this study (see Kalman, 2008 for more on the difficulty of defining literacy). Consequently, this research is based on a series of understandings about literacy. Specifically, it first understands literacy as a social practice rather than simply a neutral skill, and of central importance to this study, makes an important distinction between ‘functional’ and ‘critical’ literacy.

Before continuing however it is essential to establish that “what constitutes literacy varies from culture to culture – differences are dictated by the socio-economic and political structure of any society...[and] any definition of literacy is ideologically conceived” (Chege, 2009, p. 228). Equally it is important to understand that many societies that did not develop print literacy have complex knowledge systems and developed world-views. This is well illustrated in Keeffe’s 1992 account of a painting produced by Pintupi teachers and presented at an education conference in Canberra. Keeffe (1992) explains that the painting is a “Pintupi cultural and educational manifesto” (p.30) and discusses complex ideas regarding the past, present and future of education for Aboriginal children in Australia. Hickling-Hudson (2006) discusses how she used this painting as a teaching tool with non-Aboriginal students who generally lack the cultural understandings to interpret the painting with the sophisticated and nuanced meanings that the artists intended. Hickling-Hudson explains how she used this exercise to illustrate “the philosophically and artistically sophisticated knowledge and skills of Australian indigenous peoples” (p. 206). She recounts that her students come to acknowledge that the “Pintupi knowledge system represented by the artwork is
highly sophisticated, succinct and ‘literate’ in the use of symbols to convey thought-provoking messages” (p.206).

Consequently although this research notes that print literacy is by no means the only way of expressing complex beliefs and articulated worldviews, it is grounded in a reassertion that, within our print dominated world, access to print literacy should be recognised as a basic human right (UNESCO, 2005).

Despite being thoroughly critiqued by Harvey Graff (1979) in The Literacy Myth, there is still a strong societal discourse, including that of significant bodies such as UNESCO, that tends to consider literacy as an autonomous entity, the acquisition of which results in a fantastic range of life benefits. The claims of what literacy can achieve have altered throughout history but at different points have included – a closer union with God, the ability to engage in abstract reasoning, the promotion of civic-mindedness and economic development. Graff convincingly demonstrates, as his title suggests, that there is very little evidence that it is ‘literacy’ per se that achieves these outcomes. Following from this, New Literacy Studies (NLS) researchers like Street (1998, 2003, 2011) have argued that there are two models of literacy – firstly, an autonomous model, in which literacy is considered to ‘autonomously’ have effects as described above, and an ideological model, in which it is accepted that all forms of literacy carry an ideology and consequently views the autonomous model itself as ideological in its ethnocentric view of a singular ‘literacy’. Instead of discussing a singular ‘literacy’, NLS encourages us to discuss a variety of literacy practices and events in order to understand better how various groups and individuals use different forms of literacy. This research draws from the NLS approach and adopts an ideological model of literacy that “seeks to make explicit... underlying concepts and assumptions” about what constitutes literacy (Street, 2011, p. 581).

Based on this broad and, by now, widely accepted understanding that literacy is not a neutral and singular skill, but rather that numerous literacy events and practices exist in and relate to particular social contexts, we need to embed any study of literacy practices in a rigorous examination of the social contexts in which they operate. At a macro-level, this research acknowledges that the social context is one of systemic inequality that may be more or less extreme, but under capitalist (and many non-capitalist) conditions,
“groups that have greater access to structural power...are thereby systematically better placed to promote their interests” (Lankshear & Lawler, 1987, p. 27). This should lead us to query how those groups who are better placed to promote their interests use literacy practices to do so. Specifically, NLS explains that a key aspect of this power is the ability to define what counts as literacy (Street, 2011). But it is possible to go further. By drawing on Gramsci’s theory of hegemony (Coben, 1998), and Marx’s understanding that “the ideas of the ruling class are, in every epoch, the ruling ideas” (Marx, 1932), we can understand a dominant literacy practice as that which perpetuates the interests of those in power. From this position, there is nothing inherently liberating about literacy. Indeed, as will be argued, in the current global social context literacy can be seen as a key shaper and transmitter of our ideological bondage.

NLS helps us understand that while there may be a dominant literacy practice largely concerned with locking us into a process of exploitation, oppression and delusion, there is no singular literacy. Particularly importantly, there are literacy practices dedicated to explaining and criticising our current social context and debating and advocating alternative models. As McLaren (1992) writes:

> Literacy may link hope to possibility through developing various means of resisting oppression so that a better world can be summoned, struggled for, and eventually grasped (Freire, Pedagogy; Giroux and McLaren, “Schooling”). On the other hand, literacy may serve as a political restraint that uncouples hope from possibility, inhibiting the development of a world less terrorized by the conflict between those who have and those who hunger” (p. 10).

McLaren summarises here the two ends of the continuum between functional and critical literacy. Critical literacy practices are those that link hope to possibility and facilitate peoples’ capacity to create a better world; and ‘functional’ literacy practices act as a political restraint and help to maintain current structures of inequality and injustice. Again, these terms are contested so a little of their history is tracked before defining precisely how they are to be used in this project.

**Functional Literacy**

The term ‘functional literacy’ first appeared in UNESCO policy in the early 1960s in response to calls for a 10-year plan to achieve universal literacy, backed by the Soviet
Union (which had carried out an extended but ultimately successful literacy campaign between 1921-39) and various nations of the Global South. The United States (US) played a key role in objecting to this plan (Jones, 1990), advocating instead for ‘functional literacy’ or as the UNDP referred to it, ‘work oriented’ literacy. The essential shift was from the concept of basic universal literacy as a human right to a concept of literacy that was more explicitly tied to the specific literacy requirements said to be needed to underpin national economic development. Eventually, the plan for universal literacy was abandoned and UNESCO, in cooperation with UNDP, embarked on the Experimental World Literacy Project (EWLP) that ran from 1966 - 1974. This was a functional literacy program for selected populations, rather than aiming to achieve mass literacy. The EWLP focused on what Gillette (1987) called “the elite of the underprivileged”, such that it was targeted at what were thought to be strategic groups who would assist in the economic development of the countries where it was deployed (Algeria, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Guinea, Iran, Madagascar, Mali, Sudan, Tanzania, India and Syria). Gillette explains that although the EWLP began, as its name suggests, as an experiment to determine if there was a correlation between literacy and economic development, this shifted during the course of the project, first to an intent to prove their correlation, and then to an assumption that this correlation (and a causal relationship) existed. According to Jones (1990), the term ‘functional literacy’, dominant in the EWLP, defined:

An approach… in which mass attacks on illiteracy were rejected, traditional patterns of motivation, infrastructure, teaching methods, and reading materials were set aside, and key (largely economic) sectors, where illiteracy hindered development, were identified to determine who would receive instruction (1990, p. 55).

The EWLP was also associated with the promotion of 3 key points considered important to adult education / andragogy: starting from what the adult learner already knows; using experiential learning in workshops, fields and so on; and using a variety of teaching methods, for example group discussion, audio-visual, individual and joint use of written materials and so on (Gillette, 1987). It is curious, as Gillette (1987) points out that the EWLP strategists “virtually ignored the recently completed Cuban Literacy Campaign which was “anything but innovative in technical terms” yet it
“demonstrated forcefully that pedagogically uninnovative literacy action could succeed” (p. 206). In fact it appears that the UNDP and EWLP approach constituted a conscious rejection of the universal character of the Cuban program in favour of a more limited focus on an identified elite (of the underprivileged) intended to lead future economic development.

It was not until 1978 that UNESCO officially defined “functional literacy” (a definition still used today) as follows:

A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community’s development (UNESCO, 2005).

This definition appears to focus on helping people to function more effectively within the existing economic and social system, while also noting the potential for literacy skills to be used for community development. At times, ‘functional literacy’ has been viewed as a qualified version of ‘literacy’. In some countries it was associated with 4 years of primary schooling (UNESCO, 2005). Torres (2008) argues that the qualifier ‘functional’, “applied to qualify both illiteracy and literacy, has always been ambiguous and has contributed to confusion rather than clarity in the field” (p. 541). However both ‘functional literacy’ and ‘functional illiteracy’ persist as commonly used terms. Lankshear (1993) argues effectively, that ‘functional literacy’ is used to denote a minimal or basic form of literacy, which he argues is “a negative state – avoiding failure to cope – rather than any optimal achievement, or a positive expression of human capacities” (Lankshear, 1993, p. 94). For the purposes of this study, the distinction here is between this idea of a more effective operation within existing systems, that is functional literacy, and a critical literacy that provides the knowledge and skills to critique and transform these systems (Jones, 1990; Lankshear, 1993; Lankshear & Lawler, 1987; McLaren, 1992). Understood in this sense, functional literacy is that which encourages thinking, and literacy practices, within the bounds of what is possible within a capitalist framework. It is literacy that is functional to the perpetuation of current society with all its attendant problems and injustices. Continuing this argument, Lankshear & Lawler (1987) contend that ‘functional literacy’ rather than improving people’s life chance actually limits them, and provocatively argue that this should be
considered *dysfunctional* for those targeted by literacy programs, and functional to those currently benefiting from a grossly unequal system.

However, the UNESCO definition also alludes to the possibility of functional literacy being used for individual and community development. It is important therefore not to discount the demand for equal access to functional literacy. Functional literacy allows access to wider sources of literacy materials such as novels, which can be extremely subversive, or newspapers, which allow for greater engagement and potential development of critical literacy through the learning opportunities provided. Just as it is now widely recognised that it is more useful to understand literacy acquisition as a continuum, “a set of skills that may become more complex over time” in response to numerous factors (Arnove and Graff, 1987, p. 21), rather than a simple dichotomy between literate and illiterate; so too a continuum from functional literacy to critical literacy can be conceptualised.

This research makes a distinction between these two poles of functional and critical literacy, on a continuum. This is done to assist with the assessment and characterization of the YSP program and its potential contribution to social change. An important reason for conceptualising the functional-critical continuum is to avoid arguments that as critical educators we should abandon efforts to extend functional literacy. Functional literacy inherently holds the *potential* to develop critical literacy. The distinction being emphasised is the political intent of educational processes, which in turn links to content and methods. Therefore as well as continuing to advocate to extend functional literacy, progressive educators should also interrogate the extent to which functional literacy actually serves to improve (or to limit) peoples’ life chances and continue to advocate for more critical forms of literacy.

This approach aligns with Freire, who generally used the terms ‘domesticating’ and ‘liberating’ rather than ‘functional’ and ‘critical’. Importantly, Freire in no way considered the process of education to be limited to the classroom, but considered various cultural, social and political organisations important avenues for education. Therefore it is possible for people to receive a wholly functional formal education and yet develop criticality through engagement in other spheres. The key understanding here
is that the cumulative acquisition of functional or domesticating literacy and knowledge in no way necessarily leads to a critical awakening. Or in Freire’s (1998) words, Hoping that the teaching of content, in and of itself will generate tomorrow a radical intelligence of reality...means to fall for a magical comprehension of content, which attributes to it a criticising power of its own: “the more we deposit content in the learners’ heads, and the more diversified that content is, the more possible it will be for them to, sooner or later, experience a critical awakening, decide and break-away.” Any back-alley neoliberal knows very well that such a view is absolute nonsense and that he or she would lend his or her support to any educational project where the “reading of the world” was irrelevant (pp. 75-76).

Critical Literacy

So if functional literacy is not sufficient, in and of itself, to achieve the social transformation that contemporary capitalism requires, what of the literacy that does allow us to “link hope to possibility” and work towards that transformation? Critical literacy stems from the tradition articulated by Freire and the field of critical pedagogy, in which his work has been so influential. JanMohamed (1994) concisely explains the unity between the specific style of literacy learning, which Freire is often credited with, and action towards social transformation:

To the extent that the dominant society that disenfranchises the peasants is never a totally sutured and stable structure, it manages to sustain its coherence and power only by repressing the peasants who threaten it. Thus, for Freire to encourage them to study the conditions of their existence [and to acquire literacy concurrently with the study of these conditions] is implicitly to persuade them to study the power relations that define their current and future identities (Jan Mohamed, 1994, p. 245, cited in McLaren, 2000, p. 157).

This formulation is important as it demonstrates that by linking the development of initial literacy with a study of one’s own conditions can lead learners to an understanding of themselves as subjects rather than objects of history, and consequently can spark the development of a truly radical conscientization.

UNESCO has also considered more extensive, and more radical, notions of literacy such as in the 1975 Declaration of Persepolis, which stated that UNESCO:
Considered literacy to be not just the process of learning the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, but a contribution to the liberation of man (sic) and to his full development. Thus conceived, literacy creates the conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the contradictions of society in which man lives and of its aims; it also stimulates initiative and his participation in the creation of projects capable of acting upon the world, of transforming it, and of defining the aims of an authentic human development (UNESCO, 1975, p. 2).

Scholars have offered a range of interpretations of critical literacy or liberatory literacy. Lankshear (1993) for example, draws on Aristotle’s concept of the ‘good life’ as that being lived for happiness, to:

Re-present Freire’s distinction between domesticating and liberating forms of literacy (and more generally of education) as the distinction between forms of literacy which impede or enable, respectively, the proper performance of our function as human beings (p. 109).

The meaning here is that liberatory literacy is one that allows us to fulfil our function as human beings, which according to Lankshear’s argument is essentially to be happy.

Along the functional-critical continuum, this study draws on Lankshear's (1993) work to define ‘critical literacy’ as reading and writing in ways that express “one’s own intentions, creative potency and (emerging) critical perspective, rather than serving as a vehicle for absorbing directives and myths imposed from without” (Lankshear, 1993, p. 114). In so doing critical literacy can be understood as being connected to the process of coming to accurately understand our circumstances and our capacity to act, and connecting action to processes of revolution and liberation that transform the world. This approach rejects the increasingly common usage of the term critical literacy, in which it is restricted to being a “text critic” (Patel Stevens and Bean, 2007, p. 5), or to “aspects of higher order comprehension” (Luke, 2000, p. 450). This is not to deny the value of educators encouraging their students to develop critical readings of texts, and such teaching practices could be placed at various points along the continuum between functional and critical literacy depending on the text, the criticality of the reading, the context in which the reading occurred and other factors. It is important, however, not to define such a limited act as the end of the continuum, and so the limit of critical literacy.
This research is based on an understanding of critical literacy in which literacy is consciously connected to the process of “critically acting to transform relations and the critical transformation of consciousness” (Allman, 1994, n.p.). This form of critical literacy is therefore inseparably linked to, not only, an understanding of the need for transformational change, but engagement in the struggle to bring about that transformation.

The above understandings of literacy as ideological are arguably not new or particularly controversial. Limage (1987) for example recognised that “schools in industrialized countries have never had as their fundamental mission the transmission of literacy and numeracy skills” but rather “schools have had a social control function that forms the framework in which they transmit any knowledge including reading and writing” (p. 295). Freire’s work is orientated around the understanding that “every educational or cultural process can be seen as one which either domesticates people or as one which... [helps] prepare them to collectively liberate themselves” (Allman, 1994, n.p.). Hence the political nature of any form of literacy education is widely accepted. Yet such understandings still seem to be frequently overlooked in relation to literacy acquisition and development.

This study brings these issues to the fore and both uses and defends a form of critical literacy in which the process of reading and writing is tied with developing a systemic understanding and critique of capitalism and the possibilities for its transformation. As Marcos Guerra, student director of one of the initial literacy programs Freire developed in Brazil, put it:

We don’t consider it enough to teach people to read and write alone...without making it possible for him to become a conscious and true participant in Brazilian democracy, paying attention to the needs of the historic moment we are living (Guerra, cited in Kirkendall, 2010, p. 41).

Global South and Global North

This research uses the terminology of ‘Global North’ and ‘Global South’ in relation to the implementation of YSP in a number of countries, acknowledging the problematic nature of these terms. The key distinction indicated by these terms is between the
economically wealthy countries located largely in the geographic north, but including Australia and New Zealand and the impoverished countries, largely located in the geographic south. While the geographic ascriptions make sense in terms of understanding the current locus of political/economic power as sitting largely in North America and Western Europe, i.e. in the ‘North’, the terms are particularly problematic when focusing attention, as this research does, on countries (Australia and New Zealand) considered members of the Global North, located in the geographic south hence the use of the term ‘Global’ in an effort to clarify this.

Any attempts to fit huge complexities into a single dichotomy are fraught with difficulties and many questions inevitably remain for the writer and reader to explain after these terms are used. Some of the many nuances and questions which this terminology can conceal include: the vast differentiations of wealth and power within countries identified as being in the North or South (i.e. that there are people living in extreme poverty in the Global North and very rich people living within the Global South), the position of some significant world powers such as China and the special position of Indigenous communities in countries in both the Global North and the South. Such broad categories inevitably obscure huge diversity, particularly in the Global South, for example, Argentina, Angola and Kiribati are all considered within the Global South yet are hugely different countries in terms of their levels of human and economic development, cultural and political traditions and contemporary challenges to their citizens being able to realise their full human potential. Although not all post-colonial countries are now members of the Global South, many do share an experience of colonialism whose historical legacy continues to negatively influence the ability of these countries to determine their own economic and political course today.

Acknowledging all these difficulties in defining these terms, for the purposes of a macro-level differentiation between nation-states within a single world-economy, it is important to differentiate between countries whose ruling classes (and to varying degrees their working classes) continue to benefit from the systemic underdevelopment of sectors of the world-economy (the Global South), and the transfer of global surplus from these regions to the Global North. Therefore, despite its limitations, this categorization of differential power and wealth in the world is used in this research.
Similarly the concept of ‘development’ requires some ideological unpacking. In his ground-breaking essay of 1966 Andre Gunder Frank established that it is a fallacy to conceive of economic development as a linear process that all countries followed. He critiqued the idea that under-developed countries were simply at a different point on a continuum from under-development to development, and so could all be expected to progress along until reaching the same position of developed countries at a future point in history. Rather, Frank argued that the development of the metropolis, both in an international and a national sense, relied on the exploitation and the underdevelopment of the satellite. In short, the development of some countries was predicated on, or required, the under-development and exploitation of others. Countries (generally those now constituting the Global South) were systematically underdeveloped through the process of colonialism and as Hickling-Hudson, Corona González and Preston (2012, p. 9) state, “most former colonies have not yet recovered from this process”. Che Guevara (1961) put it this way:

We, politely referred to as “underdeveloped,” in truth are colonial, semi colonial or dependent countries. We are countries whose economies have been distorted by imperialism, which has abnormally developed those branches of industry or agriculture needed to complement its complex economy. “Underdevelopment,” or distorted development, brings a dangerous specialization in raw materials, inherent in which is the threat of hunger for all our peoples. We, the “underdeveloped,” are also those with the single crop, the single product, the single market. A single product whose uncertain sale depends on a single market imposing and fixing conditions. That is the great formula for imperialist economic domination (1961, n.p.).

While subsequent work in dependency theory and world-systems analysis has further elaborated this field (e.g. Amin, 1997; Wallerstein, 2005), the fundamental rejection of modernization theory under conditions of capitalism remains. Scholars such as Youngman (2000) have highlighted this by redefining the concept of development as “US capital’s search for expanded economic opportunities” (p.92). This research comes from a perspective which concurs with this analysis, and consequently rejects the ideological implication inherent in the term ‘developing countries’ that suggests that
these countries are on their way to economic wealth as experienced in countries of the Global North. When the term ‘developed countries’ or ‘development’ is used in this study it is generally in the context of their use as a standard and comparative measure of social and economic well-being, as reflected for example in the UN Human Development Index which quantify differences between nation-states, and regions, within the world-economy.

However there is a second context in which ‘development’ is discussed, specifically as Cubans use the term in relation to projects such as YSP. The Cuban conception of development includes a broader understanding of social and cultural, as well as economic, development (Boughton, 2010). This connects to the notion of ‘decolonised development’ which acknowledges that countries whose economies and societies have been distorted by colonialism and imperialism have a right to the economic development that other sectors of the world enjoy, but this right extends to this development being on their own terms and in a manner which doesn’t fetishize economic development over a healthy, humane and sustainable society.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 2: Freirean Literacy and the Cuban National Literacy Campaign
This chapter provides some brief biographical and historical background, and summarises some of the key contributions of Freire that are relevant to this study. A Marxist perspective on Freire’s wider contribution to revolutionary pedagogy foregrounds the development of a framework for a Freirean approach which is subsequently used to analyse and thereby deepen our understanding of YSP. Following this, the chapter will review the 1961 National Literacy Campaign in Cuba as one of the most significant single events in the history of literacy education, and make an initial assessment of the links between the Cuban campaign and a Freirean approach to literacy education.

Chapter 3: Post-revolution education and internationalism in Cuba
This chapter briefly outlines some of the key achievements and characteristics of contemporary Cuban education in order to ground our discussion of the internationally delivered YSP program within the national context from which it arises. It reviews the international dynamic of Cuban education; particularly the role Cuba plays as a provider
of educational aid internationally, and regionally as a leading member of ALBA. The extent to which this aid constitutes an alternative to neo-liberal education in a neo-liberal world is considered.

Chapter 4: Analysis of the literature on YSP against the Freirean framework
This chapter elaborates fully on the results of the comprehensive review of English language literature on YSP in the target countries. In this chapter I report on the content and concept analysis on the literature on YSP in order to analyse the YSP campaigns in comparison to the Freirean framework established in Chapter 2. This chapter also draws out some themes in the critique of YSP such as it exists and highlights and begins to address, some significant gaps in the literature.

Chapter 5: Conclusion
In the final chapter I revisit the global context in which the problem of adult illiteracy is situated and in which YSP is making an important contribution. YSP is examined in relation to understandings of functional and critical literacy and the intersection between these various forms of literacy and transformative social change. This chapter also outlines some possible future directions for research.
Chapter 2: Freirean literacy and the Cuban National Literacy Campaign

This chapter provides some biographical and historical background, and synthesises some of the key contributions from Freire that are relevant to this study. It develops a Marxist perspective on Freire’s wider contribution to revolutionary pedagogy, as the basis for a discussion of a Freirean approach to teaching initial literacy. This work, elaborating a particular Freirean approach, will be used in Chapter 4 as a framework for the analysis of YSP. Following the establishment of this framework, the chapter will review the 1961 National Literacy Campaign in Cuba as arguably one of the most significant single events in the history of literacy education, and make an initial assessment of the Cuban campaign in terms of the elaborated Freirean approach to literacy education.

Freirean Literacy

Paulo Freire has become something of an iconic figure representing the inter-connection between literacy and liberation. Carlos Alberto Torres (1993) referred to him as “perhaps the best-known educationalist of the Third World, whose work has inspired a whole generation of progressive and socialist teachers” (p. 93). During his life he played key roles in literacy campaigns in Brazil, Chile, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Tanzania, Sao Tome e Principe and Nicaragua. He is widely acknowledged as one of the most significant thinkers of the 20th century. Just as Karl Marx famously stated that he was not a Marxist, Paulo Freire insisted on numerous occasions that there was no such thing as a “Freirean method” and stated, “I cannot accept responsibility... for what is said or done in my name contrary to what I do and say” (Freire, 1994, p. 74). Freire protested that his work had been misinterpreted and misappropriated. According to Torres (1993), he argued against the ‘fetishization’ of the concept of conscientization, and explicitly warned against its use in conservative literacy programs. Moreover, Freire complained that the representation of his thought was frozen with the publication of his most famous book, The Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1994; Torres, 2007).
It is clear that there are many dangers when attempting to define the ‘position’ of a writer as prolific and profound as Freire. From his earliest writings he referenced and built on from the work of significant and diverse thinkers including Marx, Feuerbach, Hegel, Lukács, Fanon and many more. His thinking clearly evolved throughout his life and in response to his practice. Such a large and complex body of work does not lend itself to simple summaries, yet it is necessary to define some key points of what constitutes a Freirean position for the purposes of this study.

First, it is necessary to step back and ground our understanding of Freire in the broader political context, or the historical moment, from which he emerged as a thinker and practitioner. Freire was a product – not only of his family environment, which is often referred to specifically his personal and somewhat unexpected experience of poverty and hunger at a young age – but also of the broader political environment, which initially was his native region of Northeast Brazil. Many contemporary writings on Freire still refer to him as coming from this area but today’s readers could be forgiven for understanding this merely as a geographic location. However in the late 1950s, the period when Freire was emerging as an influential force in literacy education, ‘Northeast Brazil’ denoted a very specific political context. The Brazilian economy had grown rapidly in the post-WW II boom, resulting in significant urban growth and modernization, particularly in the South of the country. However, the Northeast remained dominated by poverty and illiteracy. A serious drought in 1958 compounded problems for the people of the Northeast. These factors helped develop a political militancy in the region which in 1960, *New York Times* reporter Tad Szulc described as “the makings of a revolutionary situation” (Kirkendall, 2010, p. 25).

Already unnerved by the Cuban revolution, the US was very concerned about the “many influential communist or pro-communist leaders” identified as being in the area (Kirkendall, 2010, p. 26) and consequently provided significant aid to the region. President Kennedy stated, “No area in this hemisphere is in greater or more urgent need of attention than Brazil’s vast Northeast” (cited in Kirkendall, 2010, p. 26). At this time, Freire was employed as the Director of Education and Culture with SESI (Industrial Social Services) an industry funded organisation which promised to deliver social peace to Brazil through the provision of educational and social services to the working class. Freire also worked with the Popular Culture Movement (MCP) who used popular
theatre and other artistic endeavours as well as educational activities amongst children and adults to popularise its mission of winning liberation for the masses (Kirkendall, 2010, p. 20). This was a time of rapid change and the socio-political context provided a rich and intellectually dynamic atmosphere in which Freire began developing his ideas about literacy and liberation. Through his work with SESI and the MCP, Freire was associated with a range of significant adult literacy programs prior to the class series held in 1962 in Angicos, Rio Grande do Norte, which is often viewed as the beginning of the so-called “Freirean method”.

Literacy was a central issue in post-war Brazil. At the time the right to vote was only granted to literate men, yet the extension of literacy was recognised as a central aspect of the processes of development and democracy and within this there was a contradiction for Brazil’s ruling class and their international allies. Mass literacy would result in mass franchise and could thereby endanger their ability to retain power. As history unfolded, this contradiction was highlighted and then brutally resolved. On the back of the success of the adult literacy programs launched at Rio Grande do Norte, the new left-leaning president, Joao Goulart, invited Freire to design a national literacy campaign using the same method. In 1964, before these plans could be implemented, a right-wing military coup deposed Goulart and forced Freire into exile.

After a brief time in Bolivia, Freire spent the years 1964 - 69 in Chile working with a number of organisations associated with peasant education and land reform. It was in Chile that Freire wrote two of his most important works: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and (most of) *The Politics of Education*. Chile during these years was characterised by the “growing mobilisation of the popular classes for significant and fundamental social transformation” (Holst, 2006, p. 247). In Chile Freire worked again with a dynamic group of thinkers and social activists who influenced his thinking and practice in numerous ways. The significance of land reform and the “limitations of gradual reform from above when met with demands for fundamental change from below” (Holst, 2006, p. 247) are two themes, which resonate from Holst’s account of Freire’s time in Chile. According to Holst (2006), it was in Chile where the method of teaching initial literacy that Freire had implemented in Angicos, was further developed and became known, more accurately, as the psychosocial method. Overall Holst argues
that Freire’s time in Chile marked a shift in his thinking from a liberal democratic outlook to a more mature:

Marxist influenced analysis of the political nature of education... which places literacy and critical education within the context of the struggle of the oppressed to go beyond capitalist modernization and toward a revolutionary transformation (2006, p. 245).

Freire’s subsequent work in various contexts continued to influence his work and thought, such that more detailed studies of particular aspects of Freire’s work and writing should be read in conjunction with the context in which they developed.

To summarise, some of the key factors which need to be considered in relation to the development of Freire’s work include: the Cold War and the consequent competition for international influence and control; the Brazilian promotion of development and democratisation in the post-war era, and the importance of literacy within that process; the Cuban revolution; the 1964 Brazilian coup; the politically awakened atmosphere which engaged Freire in Chile; and the political contexts of the countries Freire subsequently worked in, all containing movements for radical social change. Without detracting from his significant contribution, it is important to recognise that key concepts often attributed to Freire individually, in fact arose from the dynamic cultural and political milieus that these social conditions developed. For example, the concept of conscientization that is often attributed to Freire was a key theme for thinkers associated with the Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies at the time (Coben, 1998, p. 72). Freire himself attributes great importance to the contribution that his various Chilean colleagues had on his thinking (see Freire, 1994). The point to be emphasised here is that Freire was propelled into his influential role in 20th Century thinking about literacy, education and politics through a complex web of factors under certain historical conditions. This included the force of his practice, ideas and writing, which were influenced by and arose from extensive collaboration within specific, culturally and politically dynamic circles.

**Marxist underpinnings and ongoing relevance**

Freire’s legacy is contested ground, with something of a battle between the more liberal and the more revolutionary wings of various disciplines to claim him as their own.
Allman (1994) summed up this problem when she wrote of Freire’s “nebulous legacy”. Allman also points to the potential of his work to help us create a “coherent theory capable of developing a truly radical educational/political practice”. She argues that Freire’s work is underpinned by several important and interconnected understandings which Marx also held, namely a dialectical method of analysis and consequently a particular view of human consciousness as a unity of thought and action and from that a negative concept of ideology, or as Marx referred to it, ‘false consciousness’. She argues that in the absence of a grounding in Marxism, “readers will take from Freire what seems meaningful to them” and consequently are more likely to “ignore the revolutionary intent of his work” (Allman, 1994, n.p.). However given this analysis, it is puzzling that Freire’s work has also often been misconstrued, or ignored completely, by many organisations that consider themselves Marxist. Allman is at pains to point out that she takes her Marxism directly from the writings of Marx and not from subsequent interpretations or applications. However, as Allman and other authors have pointed out, Freire’s work is permeated with references to dialectical method and revolution and contains favourable references to Marx, Lenin, Mao and Guevara, amongst other revolutionaries. Why the Marxist left has not made more use of Freire’s work, remains then a somewhat open question.

Freire’s work clearly has ongoing relevance and has been reinterpreted by many scholars and activists. One of the most recent and relevant trends for the overall framework of this study, is that of eco-pedagogy which Kahn (2010) defines as seeking to:

Interpolate quintessentially Freirean aims of the humanization of experience and the achievement of a just and free world with a future-oriented ecological politics that militantly opposes the globalization of neo-liberalism and imperialism, on the one hand, and attempts to foment collective ecoliteracy and realize culturally relevant forms of knowledge grounded in normative concepts such as sustainability, planetarity, and biophilia on the other (p. 18).

The concept of ecopedagogy demonstrates that whereas the political left may have neglected the relevance of Freire’s work, the various planetary crises we face have encouraged others to utilise and re-interpret Freire’s work. Arguably this effort would
be strengthened by a broader acknowledgement of the influence of Marx’s ideas on Freire.

Moving on, it is indisputable that Freire’s work was concerned fundamentally with politics, which for Freire definitely included but was not limited to revolutionary politics, and education, and the interplay between politics and education. McLaren (2000) referred to Freire as,

One of the first internationally recognised educational thinkers who fully appreciated the relationship among education, politics, imperialism, and liberation...that they unavoidably abut to one another as well as flash off each other (p. 141).

Therefore, any discussion of pedagogy in relation to Freire must be understood as distinct from the traditional notion of teaching, which is the sense in which many more domesticated views of Freire use the term (Aronowitz, 1993). Rather, a ‘Freirean’ notion of pedagogy goes far beyond classroom education and can be understood as a well-developed philosophy concerned with the formation of ideas and culture, with the notion of ‘praxis’, or action and reflection, at its core. Indeed as Allman points out, Freire often uses the broader terms of cultural action and cultural revolution rather than education, and most of what is commonly interpreted as Freire’s writings on education, was intended to apply equally to revolutionary leadership and the pursuit of a better society (Allman, 1994).

**Defining a Freirean framework**

Other scholars have analysed Freire’s work from various viewpoints to develop similar frameworks for understanding his work, for example, (Hurtado, 2007; Lankshear, 1993). While the framework defined below is particularly complementary to Lankshear’s framework (see Lankshear, 1993, pp. 110-111) it is somewhat broader which has proven useful in organising and interrogating a limited body of evidence. However both the breadth of the framework and the limited amount of research which has been conducted on YSP mean that the characterisations of the YSP campaigns made within this research should be considered as tentative. Proceeding on this basis and building on the characteristics of Freire’s work as identified above, three
key features are elaborated below, which constitute a broadly Freirean framework for the analysis of YSP in this project.

The relationship between oppression, liberation and education

As suggested by the title of his most well known work, The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, the problem of oppression is central to Freire’s work. This in turn is underpinned by recognition that both at an international and a local level, contemporary society is defined by the existence of oppression. Freire’s description of oppression as ‘dehumanization’ takes a particular understanding of an apparently familiar term. As well as explaining that the process of oppression ‘dehumanizes’ (both the oppressed and the oppressor), Freire (1984) also explains that as humans we cannot but yearn for humanization:

While both humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is [hu]man’s vocation. This vocation is constantly negated, yet it is affirmed by that very negation. It is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors; it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity (p. 28).

This is another important ideological underpinning of Freire’s work: the idea that our ontological vocation is to become more fully human. Freire critiqued traditional education as a key tool in the process of dehumanization, being focused on training people to adapt to and not question the current dehumanising system. This was a part of his well-known description of education as ‘banking education’, in which students are conceived of as vessels to be filled with pre-determined knowledge. Freire argued that this is “well suited to the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquillity rests on how well [humans] fit the world...and how little they question it” (1984, p.63). He argued that traditional education, including the process of becoming literate, involved the acculturation of the learner into hegemonic culture, in which they saw themselves as disempowered objects of history, and argued that unless this is specifically challenged, even well meaning teachers “actually participate in disabling the heart, minds and bodies of their students” (Darder, 2003, p. 498).

The alternative proposed by Freire was ‘problem-posing education’, an approach that engages students in the co-creation of knowledge and encourages students to develop a
critical awareness of reality. Central to this approach to education is the existence of an authentic dialogue between students and between students and teachers, which encourages students to view themselves and their relationship with the world in a new light. Specifically, the dialogue of a problem posing approach encourages students to view themselves as subjects rather than objects of history. That is, the approach calls on students to understand that as human beings we are makers of history, rather than simply objects to whom history happens. It is this awareness, and the actions that flow from it, which Freire referred to as ‘conscientization’, which enable the fulfilment of the ontological vocation of becoming more fully human.

Allman (1994) draws an important parallel between Freire’s ideas on liberation and, “what Marx called ‘the negation of the negation’ by negating their relation with the oppressor thereby negating themselves as a separate and oppressed class or group”. With this connection in mind, Freire’s writings on the struggle of the oppressed as also resulting in the liberation of the oppressor (see Chapter 1, Pedagogy of the Oppressed), can be more clearly understood. The point here is that this liberation is not based on a liberal preoccupation with the liberation of the individuals who currently exploit and oppress, but based on a more fundamental change in social conditions that would remove the material basis for such an oppressive class of people to exist.

**A dialogical, problem-posing approach**

The importance of dialogue within Freire’s work is often referred to, but again this is often misrepresented to the point that it is simply reduced to, and indistinguishable from, simple ‘discussion’. Freire explained what he means by dialogue at length, particularly in Chapter 3 of Pedagogy of the Oppressed, where he wrote:

dialogue is the encounter between [people], mediated by the world, in order to name the world.....dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of person’s “depositing” ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas....Nor yet is it a hostile, polemical argument between [people] who are committed neither to the naming of the world, nor to the search for truth, but rather to the imposition of their own truth. Because dialogue is an encounter among [people] who name the world, it must not be a situation where some [people] name on behalf of others.
It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one [person] by another (Freire, 1984, pp.76-77).

Allman (1994) re-articulates Freire’s precise understanding of dialogue, explaining that central to the notion of dialogue is that both participants are required to problematize their knowledge. She argues that both participants in a dialogue must be committed to “develop a deeper and more critical understanding of their reality”. Consequently, knowledge, according to a Freirean outlook, cannot be conceived as a “static possession” but is better understood as a “mediation or tool between people and the world which either helps or hinders a critical perception of reality” (Allman, 1994, n.p.). Because the world is constantly changing, knowledge can never be considered complete, and treating it as such is one of the fundamental flaws of banking education.

Allman (1994) elaborates this point as follows:

Therefore, any knowledge is a means by which we begin learning rather than an end in itself. When knowledge enables us to unmask the dialectical contradictions of our reality it becomes the springboard for the creation of new knowledge or the deeper understanding of the world which we will need for developing a revolutionary praxis. When, on the other hand, the critical scrutinising of a form of knowledge reveals that it is concealing those contradictions, it can be used to inform us of ideological processes and results (n.p.).

Dialogue thereby is intimately connected to the understanding inherent in critical education, namely, that many of us are currently under a series of misapprehensions regarding the world and our role within it, and the purpose of critical education is to overcome these misapprehensions and come to understand the world more accurately. While the notion of dialogue implicitly rejects the notion of an absolutely ‘correct’ way of knowing the world, it does acknowledge critical and uncritical (or naive) ways of knowing the world. Dialogue emphasises that coming to know the world more accurately / critically is a social process rather than an individual endeavour, and that by engaging with others and seeking to understand how they perceive the world, we in turn come to understand the world more clearly. In this sense dialogue cannot be separated from processes of liberation and conscientization.
Conscientization within social struggle

While Freire’s work is often referred to as ‘revolutionary’, it has also been misunderstood and domesticated in a number of ways. Central to these misunderstandings have been a lack of appreciation of the true meaning of conscientization and its political consequences, as noted above. The Freirean framework being established for this research project proceeds from the idea that Freire intended that conscientization be understood not merely as an understanding of one’s agency in the world in an individual sense, but as understanding, and consequently taking action on the basis of one’s social class. This was particularly the case from the time of his Chilean period onwards. Holst (2006) argues that Freire’s thinking shifted in Chile and that he then understood “in class terms what he previously understood in terms of humans” (p. 259). It could be argued that his practice of often writing of ‘the oppressed’ or ‘the oppressor’ in a way which leads the reader to conceive of a single person, rather than a social class, has led to his work being misinterpreted in a highly individualist social context.

As well as being understood as a collective process, conscientization also needs to be understood in terms of action, or more precisely, as praxis. This is not blind activism, but a simultaneous and conscious process of action and reflection (Freire, 1984, p. 52).

Allman (1994) makes a distinction between conscientization and the more liberal notion of ‘consciousness raising’ to illustrate this point, citing Freire’s observation that “human beings do not get beyond the concrete situation, the conditions in which they find themselves, only by their consciousness or their intentions however good these may be” (Freire, 1985a, p. 154). The processes of critical thought and action are thus intertwined, and so it is only in the process of seeking to transform the world that “critical consciousness can fully develop” (Allman, 1994, n.p.). This clearly has relevance to the goal of this research as laid out in the preceding chapter of contributing to a whole-scale transformation of social conditions – a revolution. As Freire (1985a) explained, “there is no other road to humanization … other than the authentic transformation of the dehumanizing structure” (p. 49).
Without diminishing his commitment to actual liberation, Freire did not argue that we have to wait for the revolution in order to free our minds. Rather he argued that by more accurately understanding the world and the way in which forces such as class, gender and race are impacting on us, and engaging in the struggle to overcome these limits, we will win a certain victory. He wrote:

To exist humanly, or to engage in the process of humanisation, we need not wait for a revolution. We can begin, even in the most limiting situations, to perceive those limits, our reality, critically and engage in the struggle to transform our societies (Freire, 1972, pp. 72-73 cited in Allman, 1994, n.p.)

This is important to this study as it calls on us to understand the political significance of actions that may initially appear inconsequential. However if such actions are taken as a result of a person coming to understand their agency in the world, apparently minor actions can still indicate a trajectory towards liberation.

**A Freirean method or a Freirean approach?**

This research contends that to conceive of a Freirean method is fundamentally flawed as it suggests a “freezing” of knowledge and method in contradiction to a number of the precepts which Freire clearly considered crucial. The idea of a Freirean method has too often been invoked in contradiction of the fundamental precept of Freire's work, specifically, that the world and our knowledge about it is constantly changing and therefore if we are conducting genuine praxis our actions will be in response to these changed circumstances. However clearly there are key points to be taken from his work consequently this research asserts the concept of a Freirean approach which is understood as incorporating the three key points elaborated above: 1) a concern with the interconnections between oppression, liberation and education; 2) an effort to achieve genuine dialogue; and 3) a concern with conscientization or an understanding of one’s class agency. However it should be noted that these are broad themes and are not exclusive to Freire. Other scholars and practitioners have prioritised very similar themes in their approach to education, not least of all Che Guevara (the connections between the work of Guevara and Freire are discussed extensively by McLaren, 2000).

By conceiving of Freire's work as guiding an approach or being based on particular principles we move away from some of the problems identified, for example by
McLaren and Leonard (1993) who write that Freire’s work is “continuously in danger of domestication into ‘mere methodology’” (p. 3). Freire himself stated on a number of occasions that he did not develop a single ‘method’. However, many of Freire’s texts clearly describe and advise how a liberating process of teaching could and should be implemented. In the introduction to *Education for Critical Consciousness*, Denis Goulet (1974) explains a series of steps that characterise Freire’s approach to teaching initial literacy to adults as follows:

- observation by educators “tuning in” to the vocabulary universe of the people,
- arduous search for generative words at two levels: syllabic richness and a high charge of experiential involvement,
- a first codification of these words into visual images which stimulates people, “submerged” in their culture of silence to “emerge” as conscious makers of their own “culture”,
- the decodification of these images through dialogue between educatee and educator,
- the creation of new codifications, this time explicitly critical and aimed at action, wherein those who were formerly illiterate now begin to reject their role as mere “objects” in nature and social history and undertake to become “subjects” of their own destiny (1974, viii).

There appears to be a contradiction in these positions between the style of much of Freire’s work that involves describing, even prescribing, a particular method of teaching initial literacy, and his simultaneous insistence that he did not develop a method. This is explained by examining other aspects of Freire’s work in which he discusses the role of the teacher, arguing that far from being anti-teacher as he is sometimes portrayed, he believed that teachers have a definite responsibility to teach and therefore initiate a dialogical process with students. In recording his experiences, Freire began a dialogue with his readers regarding the knowledge he developed on teaching initial literacy. But as his work stressed, reality is not static, and the conditions in the world are hugely different now than in 1997 when Freire died, let alone the changes that have occurred since the early 1960s when Freire began developing and implementing literacy campaigns. Therefore, we constantly need to create new knowledge about how to develop literacy campaigns. This project does not suggest that Freire developed a single and fixed method, nor that this method should be associated solely with one individual.
In reality, every literacy campaign that Freire worked on was clearly a broadly collaborative effort, as discussed above.

Freire’s contribution to the struggle for a freer, more humane world, clearly extended far beyond a particular approach to teaching initial literacy and scholars are therefore right to object to a decontextualized application of a ‘method’, particularly when this has so often been separated from an effort towards radical social change. However, that does not mean that we should abandon the project of understanding Freire’s actual pedagogical praxis as it relates to adult literacy. When efforts towards transformative social change are intersecting with literacy education (such as occurred in 1961 in Cuba and, are potentially occurring with YSP projects today), there are good theoretical, practical and political grounds for literacy scholars to examine these programs with reference to Freire’s praxis. Hence, while recognising that his approach to teaching initial literacy was only one part of a much broader body of work, this research does seek to define and discuss a Freirean approach or framework for teaching initial literacy, which might be characterised as a set of Freirean principles, as a tool for investigating YSP. There are other aspects of Freire’s work which are not covered by this framework but remain rich grounds for analysis, such as his religious or spiritual standpoint. Freire is often associated with other key themes, such as ‘thematic universe’, ‘culture of silence’ and ‘fear of freedom’ that, while partially captured by the framework, are not fully represented in this project’s particular focus. Nevertheless, selecting key, representative and recurring themes from Freire’s work and applying them systematically as part of a critical and contextualised analysis of contemporary literacy campaigns, such as YSP, is a fruitful analytical tool.

Freire and the political left

It appears that both in Latin America and beyond the organised left has persistently ignored or misrepresented aspects of Freire’s work. Perez Cruz (n.d.), provides a thorough account of how a variety of ideological prejudices and isolationism from traditions outside of the Soviet bloc contributed to Freire’s significance being overlooked for many years in Cuba. Kirkendall (2010) adds that at least until that time, not one of Freire’s books had been published in Cuba. In Brazil, Perez Cruz (n.d.) claims that the:
Communists neither wanted nor could they understand the fact that this intellectual from Pernambuco could have created a literacy method that facilitated the dialogue between the left and the poor... they questioned the voluntary stance, a quality only the party intelligentsia was considered to have as ‘vanguard of the proletariat’ (p. 3).

What are some of the reasons for this arguably false dichotomy? The initial literacy program in Angicos was funded by USAID, a fact which was criticised by some on the Brazilian left. Freire addressed these criticisms at the time, claiming that the source of the money for programs was not important, emphasising instead the importance that the education itself was independent from “partisan political agendas” (Kirkendall, 2010, p. 42). Certainly Freire’s work in Brazil received initially positive coverage in the US and the US ambassador recommended that other Brazilian states receiving USAID money also adopt Freire’s approach (Kirkendall, 2010, p. 40). Given the political environment in the region at the time, it is not implausible that the US considered it politically wise to support Freire’s approach in order to demonstrate their commitment to help extend development and democracy (of a certain limited form) in Brazil. Christina Luhn, for example, argues that “the unshakeable faith in the ameliorative powers of education clouded the US officials’ ability to understand the truly ‘subversive’ nature of Freire’s program” (Luhn, 2003, cited in Kirkendall, 2010, p. 30). Presumably by 1964, however, when the CIA actively supported the coup against Goulart in Brazil (Chomsky, 2010), the US had come to better understand this. Later in his career Freire worked for the World Council of Churches which also provoked suspicion as it was viewed by the USSR as possible front for CIA and NATO (Perez Cruz, n.d.).

Additional criticisms have been levelled at Freire from the political left, including that he was an idealist who paid too much attention to nebulous concepts such as hope and love, and that his writings lack clarity around important concepts such as ‘class’ and ‘oppression’ or even a rigorous analysis of capitalism (Darder, 1998). Freire (1984) was well aware of these criticisms, writing in the preface to Pedagogy of the Oppressed, some “may even consider discussion of ontological vocation, love, dialogue, hope, humility and sympathy as so much reactionary ‘blah’”(1984, p. 21). Perez Cruz (n.d., p. 3) observes that such themes were at that time “undervalued by most Marxists”. Yet
Freire’s discussion of such topics was usually firmly grounded in political realities. For example, of the Tanzanian experience he wrote, people had hope “because they understood their past, were changing their world in the present and saw a future to construct” (Kirkendall, 2010, p. 105). Freire repeatedly wrote about the challenges of implementing a liberating pedagogy from within an oppressive system and acknowledged that it was a contradiction to expect the oppressors to allow, let alone to implement a pedagogy of the oppressed. For example, Kirkendall (2010, p. 99) cites Freire’s correspondence with a rural development worker in Malaysia in 1975 in which he wrote, “We cannot expect the ruling classes to commit suicide... They cannot really permit us to put into practice a kind of education that will lay them waste, once the raison d’etre of the oppressive reality is revealed”.

It is highly significant to this study that Freire argued that adult literacy programs, as he advocated they occur “as a political act and as an act of knowledge within the process of national reconstruction” (Torres, 1993, p. 130) would only be successful alongside “radical and progressive alteration of the social relations of production in society (Torres, 1993, p. 130). While he wrote extensively on questions of literacy and education, he maintained that “in the last instance the schooling system does not change society, instead society can change the schooling system” (Torres, 1993, p. 125).

As has been stressed, Freire’s work evolved throughout his working life, as a body of work it raises many questions of vital importance for the organised left, as it is broadly represented today in anti-capitalist social movements and some political parties. However perhaps the most basic but also the most important question which Freire’s work addresses is, how to move people from where they are at now, that is broadly supporting or at least tolerating the current economic and social formation, to where we need to be in order to enjoy fuller human freedom and a form of existence which our planet can actually sustain – a post-capitalist social formation of some kind. The inter-relationship between pedagogy and revolution is conveyed by Aronowitz (1993) who considered “the aim of pedagogy to be the development of revolutionary initiative from below” (p. 16), and Torres (1993) who refers to Freire’s conception of “revolution itself as pedagogy” (p. 125).
Aspects of Freire’s work certainly criticise some practices common amongst the organised left. Allman (1994) reminds us, that his work specifically addresses the need for a similarly liberatory praxis within the political struggle as within the classroom. Yet his work is clearly not opposed to the left, rather it is littered with reference to revolution. In particular, Freire did not hide his admiration for Cuba, often acknowledging the work of important Cuban thinkers such as Marti and Guevara. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire praises the approach of “Fidel Castro and his comrades…an eminently dialogical leadership group” (1984, p. 164). When he visited Cuba in 1987 to attend a psychologists’ conference, he said, “I believe you understand the emotion I feel setting foot on a soil where there is no child without a school, where there is no one who has not eaten today” (Kirkendall, 2010, p.159). At the time of his death, Freire was planning another trip to Cuba.

Worldwide, the question remains and is ever more urgent, how do progressive educators engage with the process of teaching in a way which helps “lifts the ideological veil in people’s consciousness” (Torres, 1993, p. 125), thereby assisting the development of a movement capable of transforming society? We turn our attention now to an exceedingly impressive example of this praxis, the Cuban National Literacy Campaign, and to what elements it shares with the approach Freire would go on to develop and popularise in subsequent decades.

**The Cuban National Literacy Campaign**

The National Literacy Campaign was one of the first priorities of the new revolutionary government in Cuba following the victory over the US backed dictator, Fulgencio Batista, on January 1, 1959. One quarter of the population was illiterate, not a particularly high rate in comparison to other countries of the Global South at the time, however it was estimated that in rural areas the illiteracy rate was closer to 40% (Artaraz, 2012; Lorenzetto & Neys, 1965). By the end of the year long campaign an estimated 250,000 teachers and volunteers with minimal training had taught over 700,000 previously illiterate people to read and write to a first grade standard (Artaraz, 2012; Leiner, 1987; Prieto, 1981). This translated into a residual illiteracy rate of 4%.
It took an enormous effort to achieve this goal, which was won through large sections of the population being mobilised to either teach literacy or otherwise support the campaign. Schools across the country were temporarily closed to allow both teachers and students to participate in the campaign. The average age of the Conrado Benintz Brigade (named for a young volunteer teacher who was murdered by counter-revolutionaries) was just 15 years old and many of these volunteers travelled to distant rural areas far from their families for most of the year. Other volunteer literacy teachers remained in their local urban areas to teach. All trained teachers were enlisted in the effort and often worked as advisers to a group of volunteer teachers. The campaign was also publicised on an enormous scale. Newspapers carried interviews and articles about the campaign and one newspaper published the primer in instalments. As the campaign was entering its final phase in August and September 1961, some 30,000 articles about it appeared in Cuban newspapers. One of the many songs inspired by the campaign The Hymn of the Conrado Benitez Brigades was broadcast on radio 6 times a day. In September a 3 hour long radio musical about the campaign was aired. The Department of Publications created a new magazine, Nueva Arma (New Weapon) for the newly literate, of which 8 editions were produced. Pamphlets about the campaign targeted at different sectors of society were produced (Lorenzetto & Neys, 1965).

The campaign succeeded, in large part, because of the individual bonds that were forged between learners and teachers, however these would not have been possible without a coordinated national effort driven with political conviction. The National Literacy Commission, was the peak organisation charged with the national coordination of the campaign and it included representation from all the eighteen mass organisations in the country including trade unions, the militias, the women’s organisation, youth and student groups and journalists’ organisations. This model was mirrored at a municipal level and beneath that, at a barrio (neighbourhood) level, where there were a series of qualified teachers who would oversee advisers who, in turn, would work with the alphabetizers themselves. The extent of community mobilisation is demonstrated in the diagram of the structures of the campaign shown in Appendix A. It was recognised that a major challenge was to actually locate all the illiterates in the country due to the fear, shame and stigma that illiteracy carries and provokes. Consequently areas would be continually re-screened to encourage illiterates to come forward during the course of the campaign. Post offices, court houses and banks were enlisted into the campaign effort,
if they found someone could not sign their name or could only sign their name, they would notify the Department of Statistics and the individual would be invited to join the campaign (Lorenzetto & Neys, 1965).

On December 22 1961 there was a mass gathering in *Plaza de la Revolución* to celebrate the successful completion of the campaign. Not only had the central goal of the campaign been achieved – that of bringing the entire country to a beginning reading level, but the Cuban nation had been transformed and brought together around a commitment to a new way of living, based on a set of revolutionary values.

*The relationship between oppression, liberation and education*

The Cuban revolutionaries’ commitment to education had been evident from 1953 when, on trial for the attack on the Moncada army barracks, Fidel Castro detailed the revolutionaries’ platform in his defence speech, which would later be published as *History Will Absolve Me* (Castro, 1975). At a time when only 50% of school aged children were in school, Castro stated that education should be a right of all Cubans, that education should be extended to rural areas and that teachers’ pay should be raised across the board (Castro, 1975). After a term of imprisonment, Castro and the rebels regrouped and began a guerrilla struggle from the Sierra Maestra. The rebels conducted literacy drives amongst both rebel soldiers and *campesinos* (peasant farmers). They set up a three-month study school where rebel soldiers studied history, geography, politics, economics and ethics. When graduates returned to their units they, in turn, were expected to lead courses amongst troops and *campesinos*. The rebel army built schools and protected them from Batista’s bombings. Their approach to education was to make it universal - equally available to rich and poor, black and white, male and female alike, this was in line with the writings of Jose Marti, an important ideological figurehead of the anti-colonial Cuban revolution, who wrote extensively on education (Abendroth, 2009).

Preparations for the literacy campaign began almost immediately after the rebels took power. In April 1959 the newly established Literacy Commission convened a 15-day course in which 1300 volunteer teachers studied various methods for teaching adults to
read and write. A four month long investigation of the vocabulary of the Cuban farmer was undertaken with the aim of developing a primer which:

would not only have an adequate motivation from an historical and psychological point of view, but also would equally express this motivation in a comprehensible form and as close as possible to the language and expression of the Cuban farmer” (Lorenzetto & Neys, 1965, p.18).

The primer produced from this process was entitled Venceremos (We shall conquer) and was accompanied by a manual for the literacy teachers, Alfabeticemos (Let’s teach how to read and write), and a more political document, Cumplirimos (We shall achieve), which explained the national and international context of the Literacy Campaign in more detail. The literacy campaign can therefore be seen to be intimately connected with the theme of the liberation of the Cuban people from the US-aligned dictatorship and beginning the process of building a new, liberated society.

A dialogical, problem-posing approach

The emphasis on dialogue in the 1961 campaign, particularly the exchange of learning between brigadistas (the volunteer literacy teachers) and participants, corresponds more closely with what Freire later referred to as liberating forms of education, rather than banking education. Although it is sometimes suggested that Freire’s ideas influenced the development of the Cuban campaign (see for example Kapcia, 2005, p. 409) the Cuban campaign in fact predated most of Freire’s writings on education and, as is discussed in the next section, it is far more likely that it was the Cuban campaign which influenced Freire. Many accounts from brigadistas emphasise the two-way nature of the learning and exchange, recalling how much they learnt during the campaign. On the other hand, the use of the primer and thus a predetermined vocabulary appears to contradict a dialogical approach.

The use of a primer was often referred to, by Freire, as indicative of a domesticating or banking educational process (see for example Freire, 1985a, pp. 46-47), Perez Cruz (n.d.) and Boughton (2010) refer to Freire’s endorsement of primers in various contexts. However there is evidence regarding the use of Venceremos which suggests that it was used as a tool to promote dialogue rather than a tool of ideological banking education. Venceremos was organised around a series of 15 topics beginning with the US
dominated Organisation of American States (OEA in Spanish). It was clearly a significant and conscious decision to begin the course with discussion of the organisation which was primarily responsible for administering Cuba’s under-development and exploitation, and from which Cuba was suspended shortly before the campaign began. Additionally its initials provided an opportunity to learn common vowel sounds. It is a testament to the politicisation of the Cuban people that the OEA was a topic that could engage illiterate, rural peasants. Leiner (1987) quotes a brigadista, who was 14 years old in 1961, explaining;

sometimes, the peasants themselves, though they couldn’t read, had lived more, so it was they who would explain things to us. The OEA… I had some idea of what it was but the peasants, they knew. They had knowledge… related to the history of Cuba – what they had lived through and what they’d heard spoken of” (p. 183)

The other topics in Venceremos were: the National Institute for Agrarian Reform (INRA); The Cooperative Farm under the Agrarian Reform; The Land; Cuban Fishermen; The People’s Store; Every Cuban a Home Owner; A Healthy People in a Free Cuba; National Institute of Tourism (INIT); The Militia; The Revolution Wins All the Battles; The People at Work; Cuba is Not Alone; The Year of Education; and Poetry and the Alphabet (Lorenzetto & Neys, 1965). Although Leiner indicates that the OEA was chosen as the first topic both for its political relevance and the opportunity to learn the key vowel sounds through the initials, apart from this it does not appear that the themes in Venceremos were chosen or organised for their syllabic qualities. Rather, they were selected for their ability to initiate a conversation with the Cuban people about a number of key political reforms.

Similar to Freire’s later use of images to begin a dialogue with learners, each lesson was accompanied by a photograph illustrating the topic, which was used “to overcome timidity and promote expression in the student” (Leiner, 1987, p. 179). Lorenzetto & Neys (1965) also refer to the importance of the photographs in the primer, stating they: helped to capture the most essential aspect of the motivation, since it not only served as a visual aid to the learning how to read and write by solving in
advance the doubts which may have arisen by providing conversational themes, and awakening the attention (p. 23).

It appears that in this instance the use of a primer was primarily to provoke interest in a set of highly politicised themes, which were then the topic of various short reading and writing exercises. The view that these exchanges did constitute dialogue in a genuine Freirean sense is reinforced by the many accounts from *brigadistas* that emphasise the two-way nature of the learning and exchange, recalling how much they learnt during the campaign about food production and other aspects of rural life. For example, one *brigadista* told Leiner:

> We tried to help the peasants in their work whenever possible. When we didn’t have classes we’d go with them to the fields. In this we learned a great deal. For instance, peanuts - what you get peanut oil from - I’d never seen a peanut plant before. He grew peanuts. I’d go out with him and help him gather the peanuts (1987, p. 182).

The increased awareness of agricultural processes was important given the reliance of the Cuban economy on farming (Leiner, 1987). That the *brigadistas* lived alongside the *campesinos* during the campaign and allowed themselves to be taught about life in rural areas helped overcome the problems of shame that are so often associated with illiteracy.

This two-way learning process can be seen as being aligned with Freire’s description of the teacher-student, student-teacher, when he wrote:

> the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the student, who in turn while being taught also teaches. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow...no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. [People] teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are “owned” by the teacher (Freire, 1984, p. 67).

Raul Ferrer, a leader of the literacy campaign, told Leiner (1987):

> The National Literacy Campaign… established a direct dialogue which never existed before between the different social strata in the population…. participation became the crux of the pedagogy (p. 189).
Here Ferrer points to the fact that this dialogue did not just occur at the individual level between teacher and student, but was the impetus for a much larger dialogue and exchange through the various literacy commissions, in workplaces, and through the ‘Saturday meetings’. In these fora, everyone involved in the campaign in a local area would discuss progress and challenges on a weekly basis (Lorenzetto & Neys, 1965).

**Conscientization within social struggle**

The personal experience of connecting with different sectors of society (e.g. rural and urban, educated and uneducated, black and white) and learning and teaching to read and write alongside this exposure to different worldviews was clearly a powerful experience and can be strongly associated with conscientization. Artaraz (2012) explained this as follows:

> What the Cuban literacy campaign represented was the realization of a revolutionary form of political change, by confronting society with the reality of the extreme socio-economic inequalities that existed in the country at the time. This experience brought about the gaining of *conciencia* in the masses, regardless whether their participation in the campaign included teaching or learning to read. (p. 28)

The discussion that was initiated through the topics in *Venceremos* served to engage both the literacy learner and literacy teacher in an ongoing praxis – that is action and reflection – to implement these reforms. This is evident from the series of changes that have been undertaken and substantially defended in Cuba since the early 1960s and which simply would not have been possible without a significant level of popular participation and support. That is, the themes were chosen for their ability to engage people in the struggle, through which would come conscientization, a more critical awareness of the world and one’s ability to impact on it.

But the conscientization was not simply a realisation of the existing inequalities in society; a key purpose of the campaign was to provide the basis for the rapid upskilling of the population in a range of fields to thereby develop the productive forces of the country which had been distorted by colonialism and imperialism. As Fernando Garcia Gutierrez of the Ministry of Education explained to Leiner (1987):
to develop a country like ours, which was in a state of absolute underdevelopment, we needed technicians, middle level technicians, qualified personnel...we couldn’t wait for years. The plan worked: many of those who were illiterates in 1959 are today doctors, architects, engineers, department heads, directors, leaders (p. 187).

The process of conscientization then, although not always made explicit in accounts of the 1961 campaign, is clearly evident in the results which show a generation of people who rejected their former role as ‘objects’ of history and participated in a process in which they became subjects, directing their destiny and creating history. Thus the campaign laid the basis for the radical transformation of Cuban society from a deeply unequal and under-developed economy to the comparative example it is today for countries of both the Global South and North.

**Freire and the Cuban literacy campaign**

The commonalities between the 1961 campaign and the approach Freire would go onto develop were not simply coincidental. Perez Cruz (n.d.) writes that, Germano Coelho, the leader of the MCP was invited to visit Cuba in the early 1960s and returned to Brazil with a copy of the Cuban primer “exactly at a time when Freire and his colleagues were searching for something that was not the traditional children’s reader” (p.1). Josina Thales, a Brazilian colleague of Freire, told Perez Cruz (2010, n.d.):

> we found in the Cuban Reader what we could not find in other readers, what we called ‘keywords’ (Paulo Freire later gave them the name of word generators), around which we developed what we considered important issues for promoting awareness and politicisation of the population....Therefore, when we had in our hands the Cuban Reader, we agreed that that was what we wanted (p. 2).

In itself, the observation of similarities between teaching methods for adult literacy as applied in Cuba in 1961 and as advocated by Freire in Brazil and subsequent literacy campaigns is not particularly surprising, given the similarities in circumstances and goals. As Kenez (1982) writes when considering the literacy campaign which occurred in the USSR and the “uncanny similarity” between this and later campaigns in Cuba and Nicaragua, “the similarity results from the similarity in conditions and in the mentality.
of revolutionary leadership” rather than a conscious effort to replicate an experience (p. 172).

Nevertheless, this similarity between the Cuban experience and Freire is important to the study and reinterpretation of Freire’s work, and to the consideration of the YSP program. Overall, the methods used in 1961 can be seen to correlate strongly with a Freirean approach. By overlooking these similarities and the fact that Coelho actually brought a copy of the Cuban primer back to Brazil, writers have obscured an important part of the character and substance of the 1961 campaign. The dominant historical account of the Cuban literacy campaign, excluding its Freirean character, has in part, established the basis for the false dichotomy described in the previous chapter between two caricatures: on the one hand a liberating Freirean method and a dogmatic Cuban method on the other.

Yet the accusation of dogmatism within Cuban education is not groundless. Given the important discussions that exist around persistent instrumentalism in the Cuban education system, and the well-documented retreat to more conservative Soviet influenced teaching methods particularly during the 1970s and 80s, the National Literacy Campaign certainly needs to be understood in relation to these discussions which are examined in more detail in Chapter 3. However while an element of the 1961 Campaign was instrumental in terms of increasing human capital development, clearly that was not the only, nor necessarily the most important, element of the Campaign. The Campaign focused on the elderly who were approaching the end of their ‘productive’ working lives, demonstrating a commitment to literacy as a human right rather than merely a tool to develop the economy. Additionally, to the extent that the Campaign can be described as instrumentalism, that instrumentalism existed in the context of the developing socialist program and so was concerned with improving production, training and so on for the broader social good, and for individual benefit, and an attempt to locate individual benefit in terms of the wider socialist project and collective good. Moreover, it was political, and potentially transformative, by overtly directing the instrumentalist goals of human capital development to a project of overcoming national ‘under-development’ and dependency, and so to an explicitly politicised type of economic development. In this way, the National Literacy Campaign was an essential component of the initial transformation of Cuban society.
Given these factors and the mass involvement of the community, the scale of the success, and the results in terms of vastly improved life outcomes for the Cuban people, it seems reasonable to argue that the Campaign stood in complete contrast to Freire’s definition of banking education which serves to, “minimize or annul students’ creative powers and to stimulate their credulity [which] serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed” (Freire, 1984, p. 60). In this sense the Campaign laid the basis for the radical transformation of Cuban society from a deeply unequal and under-developed economy to the comparative example it is today for countries of both the Global South and North.

This chapter has articulated a Freirean framework based on three major aspects of Freire’s work, the concern with the interrelationships between education, oppression and liberation; a conception of knowledge as arising from dialogue rather than a static object and an understanding of conscientization as a specific social process connected to struggle. Reviewing the 1961 National Literacy Campaign through this lens, we can identify a distinct correlation between Freire’s approach to teaching initial literacy and the approach taken in the 1961 Campaign. Before moving to the consideration of YSP campaigns in four countries in terms of this framework (in Chapter 4) we now proceed to an examination of contemporary Cuban education and YSP as something of a successor to the 1961 campaign.
Chapter 3: Revolutionary education and internationalism in Cuba

This chapter will briefly outline some of the key achievements and characteristics of Cuban education since 1959. This is done to establish the historical context needed to ground our discussion of YSP and the specific political and ideological conditions from which it has arisen. To this end, the chapter briefly considers some key aspects of Cuban education in relation to the Freirean approach outlined in Chapter 2. This chapter also considers Cuba’s solidarity approach to international educational assistance, and specifically the development of ALBA as a new stage and apparent strengthening of such an approach that arguably constitutes a serious challenge to dominant modalities of ‘international aid’. It is important to establish this context prior to the deeper analysis of the nature and practice of YSP. This chapter therefore lays the basis for a more detailed examination of YSP itself in Chapter 4, by positioning it as a product of both Cuba’s national education system and Cuba’s particular approach to international assistance.

Literacy and education in Cuba

Contrary to speculation regarding mass campaigns being “flash in the pan” or people quickly lapsing back into illiteracy (Kirkendall, 2010, p.25), Cuban literacy and education levels since the 1961 National Literacy Campaign, have continued to put other countries in the world to shame. Cuba’s literacy rate of 99.8% (UNDP, 2013) serves as the basis for a very strong education sector that has been built up and defended over the last half century. Cuba’s elementary school students far outperform others in the region (Carnoy, Gove & Marshall, 2007; UNESCO OREALC, 2000). High quality education is freely available to all citizens from pre-kindergarten programs to university and other post-school systems, as well as a comprehensive system of adult education including a range of open access university courses (Kapcia, 2005). That Cuba has created such an education system with an annual GDP of less than $10,000 per person is remarkable. To give a sense of comparison, the US has a GDP of $49,000 per person, Australia $40,800 per person and Aotearoa New Zealand $28,000 per person (Index Mundi, 2012). In
order to understand Cuba’s ongoing educational success it is necessary to consider how the political approach of the 1961 campaign has been continued and developed.

The National Literacy Campaign was an initial but incredibly important step for the Revolution in that in a relatively short period of time it delivered a tangible, profoundly liberating and dignifying benefit to a previously disadvantaged population. In doing so it demonstrated the centrality of the mass expansion of education to the Cuban revolution and laid the basis for significant changes in the nature of education. Martín Sabina, Corona González and Hickling-Hudson (2012) discuss, three fundamental changes in education that the revolution engendered:

1) The mass expansion of education at all levels, an authentically universal education system;
2) The development of high level qualifications and ongoing professional development for teachers; and
3) The transformation of educational content to align with the goals and values of the revolution.

Despite varying trends and emphases these changes have been implemented in a context of ongoing commitment to education from every level of the political system, which has resulted in an education system that consistently outperforms other countries in Latin America including those who have significantly larger GDP (see Carnoy, Gove & Marshall, 2007). Yet, from a Freirean standpoint, significant questions remain regarding the nature of education in Cuba, specifically do banking methods of education still predominate, without sufficient attention being paid to develop genuinely liberating and critical teaching methods? Freire had a very clear opinion that revolutionary societies could not be maintained using banking methods of education. He wrote:

The revolutionary society which practices banking education is either misguided or mistrusting of [humans]. In either event, it is threatened by the specter of reaction ... Authentic liberation – the process of humanization – is not another deposit to be made in [people]. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of [people] upon their world in order to transform it (Freire, 1984, p 66).
The next section discusses key post-revolutionary changes within Cuban education in relation to the Freirean approach as laid out in the previous chapter, and also examines the motivations and other factors affecting Cuba’s willingness and ability to export this alternative educational model.

**An authentically universal education system**

Almost immediately after the National Literacy Campaign concluded, the effort to expand the proportion of the population with the equivalent of primary and secondary education began. These efforts, which became known as the “Battles” for Sixth Grade and Ninth Grade respectively, were spearheaded by mass organisations such as trade unions, the Federation of Cuban Women and the Organisation of Small Farmers. Alongside these efforts there was an expansion of workplace training and childcare centres in order to improve the ability of the population to engage in the economic and social development of the country. The university system was also massively expanded from the 3 public universities that existed in 1959 to the “network of 64 comprehensive, medical, technical, pedagogical, sports, and arts universities” (Martín Sabina et al., 2012, p. 64) that exist today.

The importance of the literacy campaign as a vital first step for the subsequent educational developments cannot be overstated. It engaged the whole country in an educational process – either as learners, teachers or supporters - and instilled in the entire population the idea that learning was something they could do. It provided the necessary basis to intensively train up Cuban people to take control of their destiny, to develop what Kirk and Erisman (2009) call ‘effective sovereignty’ over their country. The Cuban state built on the educational momentum generated by the literacy campaign to develop the human resources capable of best developing the national economy in line with the needs of the population.

The ongoing commitment to a different set of values, in which meeting the needs of the Cuban people, amongst them education, is prioritised above meeting the ‘needs’ of international capital has persisted to the present day and is reflected in Cuba’s significant expenditure on social services which exceeds that of the much wealthier countries of Japan, Australia and the USA (Kaiser-Lenoir, 2009, p.302). Carnoy,
Gove & Marshall (2007) discuss the importance of what they term “state-generated social capital” which includes Cuba’s relative socio-economic equality, quality health care and easy access to social services, and credit it in large part with Cuba’s superior academic performance compared to other similar states. This is to say that not only do all Cubans have access to appropriate schooling, but unlike many in the Global South and many poor in the Global North, Cuban students come to school with full bellies and go home to families who see the purpose of education (Carnoy, Gove & Marshall, 2007; Martín Sabina et al., 2012). This in turn facilitates better attendance, retention and achievement rates, which over time creates another generation of educated workers with the skills to continue to develop the national economy to meet the needs of the Cuban people. By making education genuinely accessible to all, the Cubans arguably create a context in which each individual has a significantly better chance of realising their full human potential.

Despite the challenges and mistakes which we detail below this basic prioritisation of spending on social services and education, maintained in the face of grave economic challenges, and the resultant genuinely universal system of education, can be understood to be an important factor underpinning the relative resilience and strength of the Cuban Revolution (Raby, 2009).

*High quality teaching*

The provision of a stable and high quality teaching force has been a vital aspect of the expansion of education in Cuba. While this arguably remains a central concern of the Cuban administration the ongoing economic challenges Cuba has faced since the collapse of the USSR appear to have contributed to persistent challenges in terms of continuing to realise this goal (Carnoy, Gove & Marshall, 2007). Since the early 1990s there has been an exodus of teachers from the profession, attracted by substantially higher wages available in the tourism industry and numerous government reforms to the education sector have been unable thus far to halt this exodus. This is considered to have caused a decline in teaching quality relative to what earlier post-1959 generations have experienced and is causing concerns amongst parents, leading to a growth of private tutors and religious organisations offering educational services (González, 2013).
In 2000 the Cuban government initiated a series of public events and debates under the banner of ‘The Battle of Ideas’. This generated a number of reforms to the education sector, including raising teacher salaries and reducing class sizes, however teacher retention remained a problem, particularly acute in the provinces of Havana and Matanzas where the tourist industry is concentrated (Breidlid, 2007; Carnoy, Gove & Marshall, 2007). The teacher shortage has been made even more acute by simultaneous reforms to reduce class sizes. A system of emergente (emerging) teaching was developed in response, in which high school graduates were given six to twelve months training and then placed in a classroom to teach under strict supervision and complete their university studies in teacher training while also working in a classroom (Carnoy, Gove & Marshall, 2007). Clearly, this was a compromise that resulted in younger, less experienced teachers being placed in classes. It appears this was a short-term measure to address teacher shortages, which the government has since stepped away from (González, 2013).

A number of factors still serve to maintain higher standards for teachers and schools than many other countries with similar sized economies. Notably, despite the teaching shortage in some provinces, in other provinces where there is no shortage like Pinar del Rio, Santiago de Cuba and Guatanamo, teachers who are not receiving good results are able to enrol in courses to further develop their teaching skills (González, 2013). Despite acknowledging the economic pull factor of higher wages in tourism, Carnoy, Gove & Marshall (2007) maintain that the “absence of market pricing of labor services” (p. 83) gives Cuban education the significant advantage of attracting higher performing students into teacher training courses than would be attracted to a teaching course in a market economy, leading to a “virtuous circle” in which teachers who receive a better education, are in turn, better prepared for teaching. Other simple principles focused on maintaining teacher quality include the ongoing provision of quality teacher education, particularly focused on delivering the national curriculum, extensive support for beginner teachers, and a comprehensive system of observation and constructive feedback for all teaching staff (Carnoy, Gove & Marshall, 2007).

The provision of a well-trained teaching workforce has been a crucial component of Cuba’s educational success, and while the historic legacy of this persists, it also appears
to be under threat. Whether or not Cuba can solve the problems surrounding the teacher shortage, and the associated broader social and economic changes, appear to be an unresolved but very important issue for the ongoing success of education in Cuba.

**Transformation of content**

Given the Freirean framework of this research, we cannot conceive of content as being removed from teaching practice. Only a banking approach to education could contend that a simple transformation of educational content would be sufficient to develop the next generation capable of continuing to realise the goals of the revolution, and as previously outlined, a Freirean approach would strongly contend that it is impossible to maintain a revolutionary approach with a banking method of education. However rather than focusing on changes in academic curriculum content, references to the transformation of content in Cuban education tend to refer to a specific political aspect of Cuban education which seeks to orient students toward particular forms of social commitment, in which values such as ‘dedication to the national interest’, ‘internationalist solidarity’ and ‘discipline’, and ‘collaboration’ are encouraged and developed (Elejade Villalón, Hickling-Hudson & Corona Gonzáles, 2012) - that is specifically content most closely related to ideological formation. Indeed, Berman (2009) discusses the education process in Cuba in the broader sense, described by Freire as ‘cultural action’, as the totality of experiences which contribute to an individual’s ideological formation or worldview. This provides a framework in which we can better understand and analyse the life experiences which are variously provided, encouraged and mandated by the Cuban state, as a method of teaching. It is beyond the scope of this project to make a full appraisal of the transformation of the content and methods of the Cuban education system as it relates to ideological formation with regards to the functional-critical continuum, however it is necessary to make some general comments to contextualise our understanding of YSP and the educational environment from which it has emerged.

**Conservative trends**

Berman (2009) traces the trends and tendencies of ideological formation within education in revolutionary Cuba. Beginning with the basic problematic faced by the older generation of Cuban leadership, namely, that although education is often viewed
in part as the reproduction of social relations between one generation and the next, the social system they have established was formed by their rebellion against the previously existing system. This was an action, which they understandably, do not want to see replicated in future generations. Berman criticises the resultant tendency of the older generation to cultivate reverence of themselves by subsequent generations, epitomised by school children’s daily pledge to “be like Che”. Berman (2009) points out that “reverence fosters obedience” (p. 145) which in turn can create dependency and the lack of the necessary skills to continue the revolution, a problem which many Cuban leaders have also recognised. In an effort to chart a path between these tensions, the Cuban leadership has sought to consciously teach “Marxism” the interpretation of which has varied somewhat over time and, at times has suffered from significant weaknesses, particularly when judged from a Freirean standpoint.

Despite initial efforts to carve out a particularly Cuban communism, which Berman (2009) refers to as an autonomous position vis-a-vis the Soviet Union, the failure of the 1970 sugar harvest, and broader economic problems caused the Cubans to retreat to a position of close alignment with the USSR and for approximately the next 15 years there was a widespread acceptance of educational texts and ideological views imported from the USSR. Berman (2009) writes that during this time, “Official policies projected great certainty about what was the truly Marxist “scientific” interpretation of the world, and therefore what was left was to reveal it to those who did not know it yet” (p. 156).

The official texts during this time proclaimed that the progress of socialist revolution was inevitable and infallible and did not encourage a critical appraisal or engagement with the actual challenges and contradictions of building socialism in Cuba. Perez Cruz (n.d.) argues that for many years Cuban education persisted with a “bias that avoided the history of national education and underestimated the educational ideas of the Cuban tradition” (p. 5), instead elevating a mechanistic approach to Marxism and favouring Soviet authors and manuals. The formalistic, banking method of education that was encouraged during these years left no room for doubt. In discussing this, Berman (2009) cites Renaissance philosopher, Rene Descartes and his emphasis on the importance of doubt in the creation of new knowledge, a view that Freire later echoed in his emphasis on the importance of problematizing knowledge (Freire, 1984). Although a number of reassessments and reforms related to the criticality of Cuban education are assessed
below, concerns remain regarding a stultified atmosphere within many education institutions and varying levels of intolerance for disagreement or debate. Breidlid (2007) concludes that while, “different opinions and views are, at least in theory, accepted in classroom discussions... non-conformist views had to be very well argued, probably giving the teacher an easy task in imposing ‘consensus’” (p. 626). The complexities of the tensions between ideological freedom and control within Cuban education have rarely been explored with both honesty and rigour and such discussions are often impacted by the dominant international discourse about Cuba. Breidlid (2007) for example uncritically repeats several tropes regarding education and ideological control in Cuba. He states that many teachers who failed to turn up for interviews “were worried about the consequences of participating in an interview with foreign researchers” (p. 618) without explaining how he learnt this was the case. He goes on to state that there were many former teachers, now working as taxi drivers who were “not afraid to voice their often very critical opinions” (p.618) thereby suggesting that there is greater freedom of thought and expression in Cuba than other passages of his article suggest.

While acknowledging the paucity of unprejudiced data sources, it still appears that in many regards Cuban education, particularly but not only during the years 1970 to 1987, did not demonstrate key values associated with critical, Freirean education. However, we will now turn to consider some alternative aspects of Cuban education, and the efforts to correct tendencies towards domesticating education.

**Criticality within Cuban education**

One of the most significant means by which Cuban education has been transformed since 1959, the fusion of work and study, has the potential, to resonate strongly with a Freirean approach, although due to the ideological constraints discussed above, this potential hasn’t always been fully realised. The importance of the work-study principle in Cuban education is often traced back to Marti’s exhortation that students should hold “in the morning the pen, in the afternoon the plough” (cited in Breidlid, 2007, p. 626) and it has remained a well-established principle of Cuban education, as demonstrated by range of scholars (Berman, 2009; Breidlid, 2007; Griffiths & Williams, 2009; Hickling-Hudson, 2012). In the early 1970s productive work was
institutionalized as a systematic part of academic education at all levels of the Cuban system, from elementary students to university level (see Griffiths, 2009 for an overview). While food production is an important aspect of this work, other examples of work that Cuban students have engaged in include, carrying out inspections to help eradicate Dengue carrying mosquitoes from Havana, cyclone season preparations and school maintenance (Griffiths & Williams, 2009). Berman (2009) points to the importance of the work-study principle in developing an ongoing ideological commitment to the revolution, stating that the:

Cuban political leaders know well that full commitment to socialist values and beliefs can neither be transmitted nor formed through spoken and written language alone. Their insistence that theory must be complemented by praxis, that is by theoretically informed action, simply cannot be overstated (p.166).

Combining education with working towards solving the real life problems the Cuban revolution has faced resonates with a Freirean approach in that it engages the population in practical action to defend, maintain and extend various gains in human development and basic human rights (e.g. adequate nutrition, sanitation, access to medical care and education) that have been won since 1959. Importantly the work-study principle in Cuba is applied so that this work is conducted in a context of reflection on the socio-historical process (Griffiths & Williams, 2009), that is, it is a form of praxis.

However although the work-study principle has been successful insofar as helping the Cuban state achieve particular national goals, increasing debate has occurred within Cuba (reflected for English speakers by Griffiths & Williams, 2009) regarding concerns that instead of working to challenge and transform notions of work and study from a capitalist model, aspects of Cuban education have actually perpetuated similar understandings to that which exist under capitalism. More recently these queries regarding the effectiveness of the work-study principle, have combined with economic pressures, as well as concerns from parents, to end the program of escuelas en el campo (boarding schools in the countryside) (Grogg, 2009) which was one of the most renowned and systemic examples of the work-study principle. Although escuelas en el campo are being phased out, full boarding school is still provided for the poorest students (Grogg, 2009; Martin Sabina et al., 2012). Thus while the work-study principle
remains an important aspect of Cuban education, time and experience have demonstrated that it does not serve as a short cut to ideological transformation or the development of political commitment let alone criticality.

**Critiques and reformulations**

Revolutionary critiques of conservative tendencies within Cuban education have existed since early in the revolution, for example in 1965, Che Guevara wrote to Armando Hart with a critique of Soviet materials, asserting, “in Cuba there is nothing published, if we exclude the Soviet bricks that, inconveniently, don’t allow you to think ... as a method, it is not only very anti-Marxist, but the materials are also of very poor quality” (cited in Griffiths, 2009, p. 54).

However, this criticism itself was not published in Cuba until 1997. The rectification period, beginning in the second half of the 1980s, featured efforts to encourage independent and creative thinking, particularly amongst the youth as well as the opening of more positions for young people on school boards and in the National Assembly (Berman, 2009). Authoritarian classrooms and formalistic teaching methods were also criticised and replaced with more democratic methods (Griffiths & Williams, 2009). This process of reassessment that began prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union continued despite the serious economic challenges which followed its collapse in 1991. That the theory of ongoing and infallible socialist revolution that was taught in Soviet texts was so dramatically proven wrong, served to reinvigorate the effort to develop what Berman (2009) calls “an authentic Cuban brand of Marxism” (p. 164). He explains that this “has expanded to figures and authors forgotten, ostracized, or banned by the Soviet Union” (p. 164) who therefore had little exposure in Cuba for many years. Berman (2009) does not specifically mention Freire as one of these authors but makes special mention of:

the so-called super-structure authors for their emphasis on the relative autonomy of human consciousness, among them Georg Lukács and, above anybody else, Antonio Gramsci.... even the emancipatory links between Marxism and psychoanalysis have been explored, as well as the points of contact between Marxism and postmodernism..... (p. 164).
These authors and themes are also well represented in Freire’s work. Berman considers that the theoretical reformulation that is now taking place in Cuba is occurring “within a Marxist hegemony and has a common denominator in placing men and women rather than their surrounding environment at the center of their own making” (Berman, 2009, p. 164). This ideological paradigm described by Berman appears similar to Freire’s approach in which he considered the role of the individual contextualised within class struggle. Additionally Perez Cruz (n.d.) details the work of the Martin Luther King Centre and a number of other organisations in promoting and popularising Freire’s ideas in Cuba since the late 1980s demonstrating that although belatedly, Freire’s thought is now at least available in Cuba.

The process of developing and maintaining a high quality, universally accessible education system that covers a population from pre-kinder to post-graduate in the context of a developing economy such as Cuba is a significant achievement. While Cuba has demonstrated a high level of national participation and commitment to winning and defending this goal, the road has not been easy and has not been free of errors. At such points when the Cubans have turned to address such errors they have been able to do so on the basis of a rich common experience and ideological heritage. They have been able to return to the ideas of Marti, Guevara and the experience of the 1961 National Literacy Campaign and have maintained education as one of the key pillars of the Cuban revolution to the present day. The continued survival of the revolution through numerous challenges is arguably, to a significant extent, a result of this continued emphasis on education, not so much in that the education system has been used ideologically to defend the revolution (although no doubt this has happened to some extent) but more in that the continued provision of free education at all levels continues to give the mass of ordinary Cubans a stake in the revolution and therefore see the revolution as something worth defending (Raby, 2009).

**A different model of international education aid**

The international phenomenon of YSP can only be understood within the context of Cuba’s very different approach to international education aid which in turn is shaped by the alternative international values of the revolution itself. Cuba’s international
approach to education started in the earliest days of the revolution, when students from
a number of African nations were educated in Cuba from the early 1960s (Preston,
2012). Between 1980 and 1996 the Cubans provided education for thousands of
students from the Global South on the Isle of Youth (see Elejade Villajón, Hickling-
Hudson and Corona González, 2012). While Cuba’s financial difficulties since the
collapse of the Soviet Union and with the 2008 global financial crisis have resulted in a
reduction in the provision of such extensive programs, Cuba continues to demonstrate a
commitment to sharing its educational capacity. In addition to YSP, contemporary
highlights of Cuban internationalism in the education sector include a series of world
class tertiary institutions including the Latin American School of Medicine, the
International School of Physical and Sports Education, the International Film and
Television School and the Pedagogical Institute for Latin America and the
Caribbean which provide training to thousands of international students at little or no
cost to their governments (Hickling-Hudson, Corona González and Preston, 2012).

The strength of Cuba’s domestic education system lays the basis for what has been
termed Cuba’s ‘capacity to share’ (Hickling-Hudson et al., 2012). Cuba has established
a solid reputation for its provision of educational, medical and other expertise
particularly, although by no means exclusively to other countries of the Global South.
Through providing such a high quality education system and given the still-
undeveloped state of the Cuban economy, Cuba creates a surplus of trained
professionals to its own domestic requirements. This has allowed Cuba to establish an
extensive, alternative system of international aid through the export of doctors, teachers
and other trained professionals (Hickling-Hudson, Corona González, Lehr & Majoli
Viani, 2012). Although these services are increasingly recognised as an important
source of hard currency for the Cuban state, especially as more programs are set up in
collaboration with wealthier countries, it remains true that the Cuban international
assistance is underpinned by dramatically different values from that of the dominant aid
architecture.

Cuba’s approach to international work is based on an understanding that all countries
have the right to self-determination, and an appreciation of the global forces Cuba has
confronted to win that right for itself, and which any other country wanting to win real
self-determination would similarly have to withstand. Within this broad framework of
genuine human development, Cuba offers its expertise in a wide-range of fields from education to medicine to agricultural science. The scale of Cuba’s contribution, particularly when considered in proportion to the Cuban economy, stands in stark contrast to the paltry efforts of much richer countries. Wealthy countries provide a shamefully small proportion of their budget to aid, less than 1% of their GDP (Klees, 2010). It is difficult to put a financial figure on the international assistance Cuba provides, yet it has been suggested that the extent of human resources that Cuba provides internationally can be regarded as a “significant global resource” (Hickling-Hudson, Corona González, Lehr, Majoli Viani, 2012, p. 13). An example of the disparities in aid provision which exist between Cuba and much richer countries in recent times is Cuba’s medical program with Timor-Leste in which Cuba provided full scholarships for 1000 Timorese to study medicine while, in the same period Australia, a much richer country and neighbour of Timor-Leste funded a mere 8 tertiary scholarships for Timorese students (Iltis, 2008).

Even the small amount of aid that is provided by the Global North often comes with conditions that disadvantage the aid recipients (Youngman, 2000, Chapter 5). Corona González, Hickling-Hudson and Lehr (2012) point to the contradictory ways in which North-South aid is implemented, explaining that wealthy nations “counteract it by measures that deepen poverty and crisis” (p. 38). They cite examples such as the donor country encouraging migration by skilled professionals after the under-resourced country has provided expensive university education and facilitating migration for the students who travel to wealthy countries to receive university training. They also point to some of the more insidious aid conditionalities, for example insisting on education being offered in the colonial language thereby damaging the ability of indigenous languages to strengthen and creating an ongoing market for the publishing industries of the former colonial powers.

In contrast, Cuba’s provision of aid is negotiated with the country concerned and does not appear to be used by Cuba to pressure the behaviour of the recipient country. Furthermore it is delivered with a renowned humanity and bravery, for example during a period of serious civil unrest in Timor-Leste in 2006 almost all international personnel were evacuated, however the Cuban health workers and educators remained (Boughton, 2009, p. 6)). Such actions win the Cubans enormous respect and affection amongst the
local population. This research contends that Cuba’s approach to international assistance, including that provided through ALBA, does not represent an exercise in ‘soft power’ but rather a moral imperative when considered from a revolutionary worldview. That is not to say that there aren’t benefits that such an extensive international assistance program has for Cuba. Indeed at various junctures, Cuba’s willingness and ability to exchange its human services for goods has been crucial to the nature and development, if not the very survival, of the revolution, the oil for doctors program with Venezuela is a striking example (Feinsilver, 2008). However, Berman (2009) emphasises the important ideological role the experience of participating in many of these international brigades has and writes that, “participants in internationalist contingents often speak of their internationalist experience as a “school,” where they developed their sense of human solidarity through the contact with populations in need” (p. 172). He goes on to explain the importance of these missions in allowing citizens to see first hand the misery experienced in other developing countries resulting in participants in such brigades being “more likely to feel satisfied with their own standard of living in Cuba” (Berman, 2009, p. 172). Additionally, the skills of the Cuban workforce are developed in diverse and challenging contexts and as well as the immediate support of aid partners in international forums, the support for Cuban work extends even more broadly, providing what Corona González et al. (2012) refer to as a “measure of protection from the implacable hostility of the United States government” (p. 47).

Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA)

While Cuba has extended its international solidarity since the earliest days of the revolution, the development of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas or ALBA in recent years has allowed for clearer explication and demonstration of this approach in practice. Cuba and Venezuela founded ALBA in 2004 and since then have been joined by Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Dominica, San Vicente and the Grenadines and Antigua and Barbuda as full members. ALBA’s impact extends beyond member countries through various institutional components such as Telesur, Petrosur and Mercosur, which involve many other countries including Jamaica, Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina. ALBA is founded on basic anti-capitalist principles including: complementary action, cooperation, solidarity, and respect for the sovereignty of
nations (Cole, 2008). Artaraz (2012) argues that ALBA is more like a solidarity network, than simply a trading bloc, and that real bonds of cooperation are being forged between civil society, as well as government institutions in the member countries. ALBA has provided a framework for a significant expansion in the delivery of several Cuban led programs including YSP, which was implemented in Venezuela in 2005, Bolivia in 2008 and Nicaragua and Ecuador both in 2009. All these countries were subsequently recognised as having achieved universal literacy in the 2011 EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2011, p. 69).

ALBA and the various programs and components that sit under it are playing a significant role in helping countries disengage from the processes of imperialism and encouraging countries of the South to look to each other rather than countries of the North for solutions to their problems. The process this gives rise to amongst people has been described by Cole (2008) as:

a process of conscientización, a cultural and educational process, in which human rights become the arbiter of political democracy. Ethical consensus, as a social process, continually evolves with human experience, while individuals’ potentials and ambitions advance as participative political institutions become accomplished at arbitrating on human need rather than individual greed (p. 8).

The development of ALBA can be seen as a strengthening of a dynamic in international relations which favours the populations of the Global South and which is broadly associated with human rights and human development. While the process is centred on Latin America and the Caribbean it serves as an international example, including for the social and political movements within the Global North which are seeking social transformation.

**Introducing Yo Sí Puedo**

By the time YSP was developed in 2000, Cuban educators had accumulated almost 40 years of experience in various international literacy efforts, most notably in Nicaragua and Grenada but also in Angola, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe and Cape Verde (Canfux Gutiérrez et al., 2012). YSP was Cuba’s response to ongoing requests from
countries of the Global South for assistance with literacy campaigns and the recognition that, particularly in a more financially constrained environment, it was too difficult to continue to try to meet these needs in the same fashion as Cuba did in 1961 with a population of 1 million illiterates taught by quarter of a million volunteer teachers. In many of the countries requesting Cuban assistance with literacy, the illiteracy rate was simply too high to tackle using face to face teaching and so the idea emerged of using distance education techniques to reach more people, more effectively (Canfux Gutiérrez et al., 2012). Cuban educators worked in both Niger and Haiti to develop the YSP program building on Cuba’s previous international literacy experiences and therefore YSP demonstrates important aspects of continuity as well as points of difference with 1961 and subsequent Cuban literacy efforts. Basic principles that have continued throughout Cuba’s literacy efforts include – preliminary research into the given country’s socio-economic conditions, languages and other relevant characteristics, engagement of local educators in the development of materials and resources and in the delivery of the program and a high level of community mobilisation around the campaign (Boughton, 2010; Canfux Gutiérrez et al., 2012). However YSP is distinguished from previous programs by the delivery of classes via distance education methods (i.e. DVD or video classes or less commonly audiotapes or radio). It is also distinguished from the 1961 campaign and other international literacy efforts such as in Angola where the literacy primers were highly politicised in support of the unfolding socialist revolution, by the use of more politically neutral content.

YSP has been delivered to over 5 million people in at least 28 countries (Lamrani, 2012). At least twelve versions of the program have been produced: seven in Spanish (for Venezuela, Mexico, Argentina, Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, and Uruguay); one in Portuguese (for Brazil); one in English (for Grenada); two for use in Bolivia in the Indigenous languages of Quechua and Aymara (and possibly a third in Guarani, the literature is not clear); one in Creole (for Haiti); and one in Tetum for use in Timor-Leste. The program is recognised as dominating literacy education in Latin America (Torres, 2008) and has also been implemented in Spain, Angola, New Zealand, Australia and Canada; making it one of Cuba’s most significant international programs (Lamrani, 2012).
YSP is delivered using a unique combination of distance education and community engagement. Lamrani (2012) reports that diagnostic research is conducted beforehand to ascertain the most appropriate technology (radio, video tape, audio tape or DVD) to use depending on how communities want to learn, what technology or infrastructure is already in place, and what additional requirements there will be in order for the distance education component to be delivered. For example, in the case of Bolivia, as well as providing the video-classes, Cuba also provided 30,000 television sets and 8,000 solar panels so that the program could operate in areas that were previously without electricity (Artaraz, 2012, p. 33). The student workbook and facilitator guides were also provided by Cuba as part of the bilateral agreement.

Like other Cuban programs of international assistance YSP is implemented with a commitment of non-interference in the politics of their host country meaning that the Cuban educators refrain from becoming involved in domestic politics or to use their positions to politically advocate for socialism. Of course the very act of providing a mass literacy campaign in any nation is deeply political. As discussed in Chapter 1, all forms of literacy are political and as previously established, literacy itself is used to either liberate or domesticate, that is it is either critical or functional. That YSP is, to some degree, a standardised program delivered in a variety of socio-political contexts gives rise to a number of interesting questions – what are the differences between YSP when it is implemented in an environment where there is a relatively low level of social struggle, such as Aotearoa New Zealand and when it is implemented in Bolivia – where a broader political process of transformation is occurring? For example, Cole (2008) points to the Cultural Fund of ALBA, “an initiative to decolonize Latin American culture through the distribution of books, movies, crafts, and fine arts, and the promotion of local/indigenous cultural production” (p. 8) which would clearly complement and build upon the YSP programs implemented in ALBA countries.

These conditions, and the long and complex history of education in revolutionary Cuba, raise the question of where we can place the literacy developed by YSP on the functional-critical literacy continuum as outlined in Chapter 1. Here, however, it is worth noting that it does not fit with the Cuban’s approach to their international work to stress the politically liberatory potential of their literacy work. Instead, they emphasise
the elemental humanism of providing basic literacy to as many as possible (Boughton, 2010). Cuban educationalists have explained they approach mass illiteracy as a:

historically-determined dialectical contradiction between those who are literate, because they have received an education, and those who are illiterate, because they have not. This contradiction, they argue, which arises from past patterns of inequality, plays a fundamental role in either the perpetuation of that inequality or in overcoming it (Boughton, 2010, p. 70)

The Cuban approach as expressed through YSP is that there has to be practical action towards overcoming the contradictions between the literate and the illiterate and Boughton (2010) continues, that there has to be:

not just a theory of liberation, but a liberatory practice, a practice which bridges that contradiction, allowing teachers and learners to work together on a mass scale to produce something different, a more equal society. How that is to be done can only be decided on the basis of the real existing conditions of the society concerned, and each society will need to approach the problem in the way which suits its conditions (p. 71).

YSP is Cuba’s international offer to help address these contradictions. A simple, standard model, which is easily adapted to local conditions, and the human expertise which Cuba has accumulated through decades of work on its own national and international literacy campaigns.

Why the limited attention to YSP?

YSP was recognised by UNESCO in 2006 with the award of the Rey Sejong Literacy Prize and Miguel Livina, representative of UNESCO’s Regional Bureau for Culture in Latin America and the Caribbean, has called for governments and international institutions to give more consideration to YSP (Lamrani, 2012). In 2006 UNESCO produced the Study on the Effectiveness and Feasibility of the Literacy Training Method, Yo Sí Puedo. The study points out that “conceptualisation and systematization of the [YSP] model” have not been widely researched and therefore that a number of questions remain regarding its “theoretical and methodological approach” (2006, p. 4). The report goes on to make a number of criticisms of the program highly relevant to this
research, including that it takes “a rather traditional view of language learning” and, notably, that it “gives little attention to critical literacy” and “gives priority to learning processes that are somewhat mechanical” (UNESCO, 2006, p. 4).

Despite such high-status international recognition and calls for further research, there is a puzzling silence from the international community regarding YSP. This is manifest in the lack of academic critique of the programs and also extends into the broader public discourse. For example, Alarcón de Quesada (2011) claimed that similar to Cuba’s work in the health arena there was a “media silence surround[ing] the internationalist work being done in the field of literacy” (p. 141). The next chapter turns to the analysis of the limited amount of literature that has been produced on YSP in four diverse national settings, as foreshadowed, in order to further interrogate the research questions and generate a more accurate understanding of the significance of YSP, particularly as it relates to the development of a critical, liberatory literacy, able to contribute to transformative social change.
Chapter 4: Analysis of the literature on YSP against the Freirean framework

This chapter reports on the results of the review of English language literature on *Yo Sí Puedo* in the four target countries and analyses the data produced from this body of literature against the Freirean framework established in Chapter 2. In addition to the content analysis of the identified literature and comparative analysis in relation to the Freirean framework, a number of recurring criticisms are discussed in light of the literature. A significant gap in the literature, the absence of published academic articles on the implementation of YSP in Aotearoa New Zealand is identified and, in part, addressed.

**Broad observations on the literature**

To briefly recap the results of the database search, 26 articles were found to meet the search criteria, as outlined in Chapter 1 and another 4 unpublished theses and articles also met these criteria. The sparseness and gaps in the literature is particularly well-illustrated by the fact that despite Aotearoa New Zealand commonly being included in the lists of countries where YSP is implemented (see Alarcón de Quesada, 2011; Lamrani, 2012; Steele, 2008; and others) and despite enrolling approximately 5000 students between 2003 and 2007 (Boughton, personal communication, November 11, 2013) no published research articles on YSP, in Aotearoa New Zealand could be located. In response to such anomalies and the overall discrepancy between a broad awareness of the existence of YSP and an apparently small amount of information about and analysis of the program, my initial review and categorisation of the material was according to the depth of treatment of YSP, as shown in Figure 1.

At this point it is useful to reiterate the discussion in Chapter 1 of the deep divisions Cuba’s revolutionary society generates amongst scholars and in the wider public discourse, and which frame the context in which YSP is discussed. Artaraz (2012) describes one side of this dichotomy as being “informed by a Cold War prism which saw Cuba as a Soviet satellite” (p. 22). This overall dominant narrative associates communism with an absolute lack of democracy and no tolerance of diversity and
tends to overlook Cuba’s significant achievements in human development. However, the “pro-Cuban” side of this dichotomy also suffers from analytical weaknesses, at times serving as something of an uncritical cheer squad for Cuba. This appeared to be reflected in the results of the database search, for example, by the emphasis in the literature on the quantitative nature of Cuba’s achievements such as YSP without an accompanying level of in depth critical analysis which could serve to extend and develop the positives of the Cuban approach while also addressing areas of weakness.

**Fig. 1. Depth of treatment of YSP campaign in the literature**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cursory treatment</th>
<th>Some detail and evaluation provided</th>
<th>In depth evaluation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Baklett et al., 2011</td>
<td>Boon, 2011</td>
<td>Artaraz, 2011</td>
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<td>Kirk, 2009</td>
<td>Torres, 2008</td>
<td>Boughton, Ah Chee,</td>
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<td>Kirk, 2011</td>
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<td>Limage, 2009</td>
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<td>Boughton &amp; Durnan, 2014</td>
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<td>Lind, 2008a</td>
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<td>Fernandes, 2010a*</td>
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<td>McLaren, 2007</td>
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<td>Fernandes, 2010b*</td>
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<td>Muhr, 2012</td>
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<td>Hannan, 2012*</td>
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<td>Nijenhuis, 2010</td>
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<td>Schmelkes, 2011</td>
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<td>Weatherly, 2009*</td>
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* indicates articles were forwarded by academic sources rather than returned by the database search

The database search resulted in a small number of articles on YSP, and within this work, a notably smaller number that addressed the YSP campaign in any depth. As a consequence, it is those few articles that do provide a more detailed account of the campaign that the next section draws most heavily on and it is worth noting that some of these scholars, for example Associate Professor Bob Boughton, are clearly sympathetic to, although not uncritical of, the YSP campaigns. Although many of the articles which only made cursory reference to the YSP program were positive,
Kalman, 2008; Lind, 2008a and Schmelkes, 2011 all make some serious criticisms of YSP.

The gap in the international academic literature regarding YSP has been somewhat addressed by a new publication, *The Capacity to Share*, edited by Anne Hickling-Hudson, Jorge Corona González and Rosemary Preston (2012) which specifically addresses Cuba’s international contribution to education. I have drawn on information from this publication in order to provide the Cuban perspective on the YSP program design and rationale. Following the UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education, CONFINTEA VI, in 2009 the Latin American Group of Specialists in Literacy and Written Culture (GLEACE) released a statement entitled *On illiteracy and literacy* in response to contemporary literacy efforts in the region. This statement does not specifically name YSP but makes several references that make it clear that the harsh criticisms contained in the statement are intended, at least in part, for YSP. The GLEACE statement has been included in this discussion despite the fact that as a statement rather than an academic paper, it does not provide evidence to back up claims. It is included here in an effort to represent and discuss some broader trends of the debate over YSP that has occurred largely in Spanish. Finally when this thesis was very close to completion, I was forwarded the IPLAC report, *Evaluation of the Social Impact of the: Greenlight, Learning for Life* project, which is also included in the analysis below.

It should also be noted that several articles point to a broader debate that has occurred both at conferences and within Spanish language academia. It is to be hoped that this research highlights the need for more in depth research of YSP campaigns and therefore this problem of limited English language sources can be addressed in the near future.

**Comparing YSP to the Freirean framework**

A number of the articles generated from the database search explicitly compare YSP campaigns to a Freirean approach, however these examples were found to be limited
and contradictory. Some agree that there is an association between the two trends but differ as to who inspired who. For example the President of the Cuban National Assembly, Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada (2011) writes that, “Yo Sí Puedo applies the method pioneered by Paulo Freire in Brazil, building literacy around the needs and initiatives of communities themselves, working with people to read the word and the world” (emphasis added) (2011, p. 139). Steele (2008) also states that YSP is based on Freirean principles, whereas, Perez Cruz (n.d.) and Boughton (2010) state that it was Freire who was inspired by the political nature and broad scope of the 1961 Cuban Literacy Campaign, and Boughton goes on to explain that YSP is based on the 1961 campaign. Boughton (2010) points to the debate occurring amongst Latin American academics who question YSP’s association with Freirean popular literacy (p. 67) however while pointing to various limitations in this regard, such as a heavy reliance on a workbook, Boughton still indicates an association between YSP and Freirean campaigns.

In contrast to these examples in which YSP is positively associated with Freire's work, other literature constructs Freirean and Cuban literacy approaches as opposing trends. For example, Kalman (2008) cites YSP as an example of programs that conceive of literacy, “as the process of learning letters and sounds and post literacy as the development of so called complex skills and abilities” (p. 527). She goes on to indicate a counter position between programs such as YSP on one hand and “programs [that] associate literacy with a more complex notion taken from Paulo Freire’s theories of consciousness raising and [which] orient their efforts towards building a more socially and politically aware population” (p. 527).

It is important to investigate whether the conservative aspects of YSP pedagogy hamper its ability to develop a truly critical literacy and thereby, by default, mean that YSP is actually contributing to reinforcing the political and economic status quo. On the other hand the instructional aspects of YSP may well be a necessary feature of an initial literacy program, after all Freire did not argue that instruction is inherently conservative, particularly if it is provided within a context of genuine dialogue, grounded in the realities of participants, and therefore providing the possibility of the creation of new knowledge (see Freire, 1994, p. 102). As is examined below, YSP does only bring people to a very basic level of literacy and calls for the follow up of this
through ‘post-literacy’ activities. However, I will argue below that this does not necessarily, as Kalman suggests, locate YSP in opposition to efforts to build a more socially and politically aware population.

What we see here is how a poor reading of Freire, coupled with a lack of deep analysis of YSP, can lead to misrepresentations of YSP both as Freirean in ways that it’s not (for example Steele, 2008) and non-Freirean in ways where it potentially does follow a Freirean approach (e.g. Kalman, 2008; Lind, 2008a). As I have noted earlier this research approaches its consideration of YSP from a position that aligns broadly with Allman (1994) who argues that the struggle to gain access to mainstream education (in this instance beginning literacy) by those who have previously been excluded “can have authentically radical potential if those involved in the challenge locate their approach within the broader strategy for revolutionary social transformation” (n.p.). While this study is concerned with examining YSP in relation to a Freirean framework, and to a functional-critical continuum Allman’s argument is worth bearing in mind as it reminds us that even if YSP is found to be at the functional end of the continuum, providing access to this education may still have revolutionary potential if various parties involved in this process push it in that direction.

Before moving to the analysis of YSP against the three identified dimensions of a Freirean framework it should be noted that there has been a trend amongst scholars to conceive of a Freirean method as a series of specific steps, such as a preliminary vocabulary study resulting in the selection of a number of generative words, which are first codified as images and then problematized through a dialogical discussion before the written form of the word is introduced, broken into syllables and used to construct new words. The analysis that follows recognises significant similarities between YSP and the “steps” associated with Freire’s approach to initial literacy education, but I also argue that it is not particularly useful or Freirean to reify a specific method as a blueprint, and judge the correctness or not of subsequent efforts in comparison to that blueprint. Therefore the overall approach of YSP in the four countries is examined in light of the Freirean framework established in Chapter 2 and interpreted in a manner that is flexible and context sensitive, while guarding against a domestication of Freire’s
radical intentions. As discussed in Chapter 2, a Freirean approach to literacy can be characterised by three features:

1) It is concerned with the relationship between oppression, liberation and education;
2) It views knowledge as a constantly evolving entity which results from a process of dialogue; and
3) It views conscientization as a social process that happens within the context of struggle.

The important purpose of this section of work is to compare a limited body of work against a broadly Freirean framework in order to reach a more accurate understanding of YSP. In order to do this, this work has systematically elaborated from recurring themes in the literature as well as engaged with criticisms and assessed them against the data gathered from the more detailed accounts of YSP in an effort to develop a more critical and nuanced understanding of YSP.

The relationship between education, oppression & liberation

A major theme in the literature on YSP was researchers’ characterisation of YSP campaigns as being formulated with an understanding of the strong correspondence between illiteracy and poverty, and therefore conceptualising literacy as a tool for participation in a democratic, decolonising economic development process. However the question of liberation in an overt, political sense is not prominent in YSP, and it is broadly acknowledged that the materials are politically neutral, in that they do not advocate for a specific political party or system, they do however promote a general humanist ethos. Boughton (2010) raised the question of the non-political nature of YSP materials with a number of Cuban educators who claimed that the highly politicised campaigns such as occurred in Cuba itself as well as Angola (Hatzky, 2012) and Nicaragua were “not appropriate in countries which do not have the same radical political traditions” (Boughton, 2010, p. 68). In addition, the Cuban educators emphasised that, “the key thing was to ensure that those who would otherwise be excluded were given an opportunity to enter the development process on their own terms” (Boughton, 2010, p. 68). This is a significant point, underscored by the idea that, for all the multiple differences between a Bolivian peasant and an urban Maori, while they lack literacy they share a common experience of being excluded from a wide range
of economic and political processes. The commonality here is that the act of gaining literacy is a step in achieving relative empowerment and overcoming exclusion.

As expressed by Lamrani (2012), literacy is “indispensable to achieving genuine citizenship. It is the first line of defence against exclusion and poverty” (p. 356). Consequently, as the Cuban educators put it to Boughton (2010), “unless a way can be found to bring non-literate people into the education system, then there is no hope of any progressive political change occurring” (p. 68). YSP therefore can best be characterised not as a program which explicitly promotes liberation, but as something of an introduction and complement to a subsequent or concurrent politically liberatory process.

The literature contained various forms of evidence regarding the interaction between YSP programs and a community wide process of social and political empowerment. For example, Artaraz (2012) contextualises the YSP program within the broader, politically transformative processes unfolding in Bolivia, whereby the literacy campaign was explicitly linked with the “re-foundation of Bolivia through a process of democratic and cultural revolution” (p. 94). One of the key outcomes of YSP in Bolivia, as reported by Artaraz, has been support for what is referred to in Bolivia as “the process of change”, including a series of messages that were popularised within the literacy campaign such as “education is a human right’, ‘all Bolivian cultures are equal in value’ and ‘Bolivian women have a right to live without fear of violence’” (Ministerio de Educacion y Culturas, 2006 cited in Artaraz, 2012, p. 34). That the literacy campaign itself was linked with these concepts and consequent strengthening of these ideas in society reminds us of Freire's explanation that, “every act of reading words implies a previous reading of the world and a subsequent rereading of the world” (1985b, p. 18). It appears that the implementation of a mass literacy campaign such as YSP can affect peoples’ reading of the world in a positive, emancipatory way and that this effect may be strengthened with the inclusion of conscious emancipatory values.

Yet, as previously established, the process of developing (or not developing) literacy is a deeply political process and is influenced by the socio-political context of the wider community. In a highly mobilised social context such as contemporary Bolivia, it is difficult to separate the effect of the literacy campaign from that of the mass
organisations that are continuing to drive the revolutionary process and the various social and political movements which have persistently campaigned for a number of goals, including combatting ingrained racism against Indigenous Bolivians and the other issues targeted by the key messages of the YSP campaign (Burbach, Fox & Fuentes, 2013). Drange (2011) also identifies a wider trend of decolonization within the education sector and particularly notes an increase in the valuing Indigenous knowledge, which can be presumed to have influenced the implementation of the YSP campaign.

Nevertheless, Artaraz’s observation points to an important potential of mass literacy campaigns to effect hegemonic shifts. In the same vein of the development of a politically engaged populace, Artaraz points to an interesting “side-effect” of the campaign - that through the provision of solar panels and televisions necessary for the YSP program previously isolated rural communities have “become a new politically aware section of the population” (2012, p. 34). Simply having access to televisions can hardly be equated with becoming politically aware, given the wide potential for television media in particular to be used to politically anaesthetise or misinform communities consequently this ‘side-effect’ is no guarantee that people will become more politically aware. However, this does point to ways the YSP campaign can create additional conditions, or pre-conditions, required to support greater political awareness and consequently empowerment.

In the case of Timor-Leste, former President Jose Ramos Horta stated, “[o]ur illiteracy debt is a national cause. For many years our people have been illiterate, we owe this [literacy] to the people” (cited in Fernandes, 2010a, p. 282). In this statement we hear echoes of Fidel Castro who, according to Prieto (1981) told the people of Cuba in 1961 that they, “had to realize that they owed a debt to the illiterates of the country and that they had to sacrifice in order to pay it”. According to Fernandes (2010a) sub-district coordinators of Los Hau Bele: argued that the important thing in running the campaign is to liberate our people from illiteracy. They stated that during the Resistance era, everyone talked about self-determination. Now the liberation of the nation is already in
our hands. But now there is still another fight, a fight against illiteracy (Fernandes, 2010a, p. 281).

Such statements reinforce a particular view of literacy as liberation, which as pointed out in Chapter 1, is far from being universally true, and is largely dependent on the particular social and political context in which literacy is being achieved. For a society such as Timor-Leste which has recently withstood great violence that had been conducted both overtly by a military occupation and the covert violence of under-development, the significance of local people starting the education journey in order to take on the challenge of rebuilding the country should not be underestimated (Hannan, 2012). Boughton (2010) recounts the “emancipatory and empowering” effect of the Los Hau Bele classes and states that when his monitoring team visited the classes, participants were “very vocal...not only about issues in relation to the classes themselves, such as problems with equipment and resources, but also on other issues, such as the local rice distribution processes” (p. 68). Such examples from the Los Hau Bele campaign appear to substantiate that within a politically transformative context such as Timor-Leste an apparently functional literacy program appears to take on a more political and potentially emancipatory character.

In Australia, the YSP campaign in western NSW is still operating as a pilot in three locations rather than a national campaign and Boughton, Chee, Beetson, Durnan & LeBlanch (2013) highlight the difficulties of extrapolating from the small to larger scale. There is also no national process of social and political transformation occurring in Australia, as is the case in Bolivia and Timor-Leste. As such, we would anticipate that there is less evidence of a politicised literacy practice. Yet Boughton et al. (2013) provides us with evidence of this dynamic. Firstly and most powerfully in a community riven with the kinds of problems that often result in Aboriginal communities being labelled ‘dysfunctional’ within mainstream discourse, due to issues such as chronic unemployment, alcohol and drug addiction and poor educational outcomes, the YSP campaign has provided a highly disengaged cohort with a solid level of success. Boughton et al. (2013) make the point that this success is all the more impressive when it is considered that as a result of the genuine community engagement of the campaign, the campaign itself “becomes subject to the same ups and downs as the
the chaos of life at the margins” (p.15). Given these challenges, he provides evidence of participants building their personal confidence and happiness, demonstrated for example, by one participant reporting that their graduation party was the “best day of my life” (Boughton et al., 2013, p. 23). When combined with the concrete outcomes of successful graduations, engagement in post-literacy activities and employment, YSP in this context arguably demonstrate a community moving to overcome obstacles and barriers and thereby become more ‘functional’, that is more able to engage in the mainstream workforce. Whether facilitating this type of ‘functionality’ is the end of the story for the political implications of YSP is addressed in more detail in Chapter 5. For people who have long been marginalized however indicators such as increased levels of personal happiness and confidence are profound.

IPLAC specialist, Mercedes Zamora (2013) reports that YSP participants:

Increase their self-esteem and analyse everything around them and at the same time they are happy and confident because they can participate in a better way in their community and society. As their knowledge and confidence increase their participation in different [fields of] society increase too so they have better relationship with their children’s school personnel, their children’s attendance to school is better and there is also an improvement in their health (personal communication, November, 29, 2013).

From the identified literature it seems apparent that in each country, although to varying extents depending on complex political and economic factors, that YSP is providing access to basic literacy and some indicators suggest that as part of this process, it is helping to develop a broader political engagement amongst the participants. As previously established illiteracy is disproportionately experienced in certain sectors of populations, particularly amongst the poor, women and Indigenous communities, and these are often the same sectors that have traditionally been excluded from political discussion and decision-making. Providing beginning basic literacy, objectively useful in contexts where communities have suffered from under-development, lays the basis for, but by no means ensures, that people will, as the Cuban educators discussed with Boughton (2010), “join the development process on their own terms” (p. 68). By setting an example through their own self-determination, and extending South-South solidarity, the Cuban backed YSP program appears to provide a powerful example and encourage
a form of self-determination which engages the traditionally most excluded sectors of the population in a process of decolonising development. From the literature there is evidence in all four contexts that the manner in which YSP brings a community *en masse* to a basic form of literacy, has the potential to affect how that particular community “reads the world” and thereby demonstrates YSP’s potential contribution to broader processes of liberation.

**A dialogical, problem-posing approach**

The second aspect of the YSP campaigns which was appraised to evaluate its correspondence to a Freirean approach is the extent to which a dialogical, problem posing process of inquiry is used or, whether, on the other hand teaching is characterised by a non-dialogical banking style. Gadotti (2011) characterises YSP as “notably instructional” (p. 19) and Boughton (2010) mentions that the method is heavily reliant on the workbook, and less participatory and dialogic than one might expect in a campaign which has been associated with Freire. Kalman (2008), gives emphasis to the importance of phonetics within YSP, describing the program as being “based on the letter by letter teaching (of) graphic-phonemic relations” (p. 535), and contrasts this with programs which “associate literacy with a more complex notion taken from Paulo Freire’s theories of consciousness raising” (2008, p. 527, emphasis added). The alphanumeric method in which letters are associated with a number is frequently referred to in the literature (e.g. Boon, 2011; Boughton, 2010; Lamrani, 2012). Additionally, Boon (2013) states that “part of the lesson time is spent on rote association of numbers and letters” (p. 360) and describes the use of classroom techniques such as chorus response and whole class recitation from the blackboard. Combined, such references raise the question of whether YSP is based on a strictly phonetic approach supported by numeric associations and contribute to an impression of a particularly didactic method. However other scholars, for example, Fernandes (2010b), stress the importance of class discussion, the positive relationships between participants and facilitators and the practical tasks that conclude each lesson. Boughton et al. (2013) highlight the “generative themes” or positive messages discussed in class. Some scholars have touched on the lack of consensus on YSP in this regard, for example Gadotti (2011)
observes that YSP is, “conservative with regard to its method and progressive with regard to its content” (p. 19). He goes on to point out that, “Freireans defend the coherence between content and method, between theory and method” (Gadotti, 2011, p.19). He claims that the “Cuban method” is effective, but also has “pedagogical limitations” (Gadotti, 2011, p. 19). Yet it remains unclear whether Gadotti is arguing that because YSP’s content is progressive, the method must be, or because its method is conservative its content must be. In a similar vein Allman (1994) states that, “process contains a content of its own which can either complement or contradict the explicit content...[and b]ecause of this methodological processes must be considered critically alongside the content” (n.p.). Applied to YSP this means that the overall mission of the campaign, specifically providing beginning literacy for the most marginalised communities, cannot be excluded from the evaluation of teaching methods. Yet this does not detract from the necessity of interrogating the actual teaching techniques used in YSP and whether they serve to complement or contradict the goals of improving access to literacy in the interests of a democratic development process. It is for these reasons that further research into the teaching methodologies used in YSP is crucial.

It is worth emphasising that just as a Freirean approach demands, it is important to contextualise YSP in order to appreciate its benefits, rather than isolate particular classroom practices or teaching materials as a ‘method’. The literature suggests that the efficacy of YSP results from more than the classroom teaching techniques alone. The next sub-section examines in more depth both the classroom teaching of YSP in relation to dialogical and problem-posing approaches and how this is influenced by specific human relationships which are consciously developed within the YSP campaigns.

**A simple and adaptable teaching method**

The study of the research literature revealed the use of a number of particular teaching approaches across the various YSP campaigns. Teaching methods included pre-recorded lessons delivered via audio-visual resources that corresponded with a workbook featuring exercises using both alphanumeric and analytic-synthetic techniques.4 The alphanumeric approach, which associates letters and numbers was

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4 ‘Analytic-synthetic’ refers to words and phrases being broken into component sounds and letters and then reassembled.
developed based on the understanding that many people with low literacy have more familiarity with numbers, so by associating the known (number), with the unknown (letter), learners are able to feel competent and learn faster (Boon, 2011; Boughton, 2010).

**Fig. 2. Yo Si Puedo (Yes I Can) alphanumeric guide table**

![GUIDE TABLE]

Note. From Boughton et al. 2013, p. 16.

YSP classes are organised and supervised by a local person, referred to as a monitor or facilitator, who uses a series of pre-recorded DVD-classes\(^5\) and accompanying workbook as the basis of the literacy class. The DVD-class depicts a small literacy class, including a teacher and a teaching assistant, all of whom are working to a script (Boughton et al., 2013). The teacher in the DVD explains the lessons and exercises in the workbook and the (actor) students ask questions and make comments. The YSP facilitator can stop and start the DVD-class, to allow their students to complete the exercises, discuss particular points, or repeat sections of the DVD-class if required.

YSP classes are organised around a series of “positive messages” or “generative themes” (Boughton et al., 2013). These phrases contain “the letter or letters which are the focus of that lesson, but which makes a specific point or raises an idea” (Boughton et al., 2013, p. 16). In the series run in Wilcannia the first lesson was organised around the phrase, “open the gate” and discussed the “journey” of learning literacy (Boughton et al., 2013). Other lesson themes include: the environment, nutrition, history and culture, and the role of women. The DVD-class features short film clips illustrating these themes in daily life and portray the actor-students in a discussion of these themes. After they watch these sections of the DVD, the students in the YSP class also

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\(^{5}\) I have used the term DVD classes for ease of reading. DVDs were used in Timor-Leste and Australia, whereas videos were used in Bolivia and a range of media in Aotearoa New Zealand
discuss the topic themselves (Boughton et al., 2013; Fernandes, 2010b; Hannan, 2012; Lamrani, 2012).

Boughton et al. (2013) go on to explain that the “‘positive messages’ express an underlying set of values about human development and the role of each individual within it” (p.18). This aspect of the program appears to resonate with Freire’s approach regarding the impossibility of a politically neutral teacher. Freire argued that teachers have a duty to honestly present their political views and hopes for a different world as a way of engaging students in dialogue in which they may come to adopt the teacher’s view or they may develop their own. Freire explained this as follows:

[this] does not mean that we have the right to impose on students our political choice. But we do have the duty not to hide our choice. Students have the right to know what our political dream is. They are then free to accept it, reject it, or modify it (Freire, 1985b, p. 18).

However, although Boughton et al.’s (2013) discussion of generative themes makes obvious reference to Freire's use of generative words, there are significant differences between generative themes in YSP and the very specific way which Freire advocated the use of generative words. For Freire generative words are those arising from a study of the specific circumstances and vocabulary of the literacy learners. Freire considered that a vocabulary study of potential literacy learners should occur, in which generative words were chosen primarily for their ability to engage learners in the “problematizing” of their circumstances and thus the generative words had to possess a common meaning amongst the learners. The example Freire (1985a, p. 56) provides in The Politics of Education is ‘soul’ in black communities within the US, reinforcing that cultural uniqueness is also an important aspect of the generative word. As mentioned in Chapter 1, a vocabulary study did occur in preparation for the Cuban National Literacy Campaign in 1961. Although YSP programs certainly include preliminary research on the community, this analysis of the literature did not find reference to specific vocabulary study constituting part of the preparatory process for YSP campaigns. However when I asked Mercedes Zamora about this aspect of the campaign she suggested that the preliminary research included and exceeded a vocabulary study. She stated that, “There is a diagnosis process when the team arrive at the country in order to
know the participants, their context and their culture, by means of different dimensions. It is not limited to the vocabulary, is more than that” (personal communication, November 29, 2013).

Similarly in Aotearoa New Zealand the Cuban educators first conducted a “diagnostic or exploration stage” in 2002 which, as Dr Miriam Lopez, an IPLAC specialist, explained, “determines cultural needs and issues” (Smith, personal communication, May 12, 2013). The Cubans worked with educators in New Zealand and developed a new program, Greenlight, Learning for Life, which was tailored to the needs of Maori people, but also inclusive of other sectors of NZ society (Smith, personal communication, May 12, 2013). Lessons were produced in a range of formats (audio, video and DVD) in direct response to what was found in the diagnostic stage – that is that people had access to a variety of media players (Boughton, personal communication, November 11, 2013). The program was run as a pilot in select communities before making final adjustments and was formally launched in September 2003.

Clearly there is a need for further research to better understand the relationship between vocabulary studies and authentic dialogue within YSP. Freirean scholars have cited concern regarding the practice of introducing themes or words without consulting a community and suggested that this could significantly compromise the potentially critical nature of a literacy program (Kirkendall, 2010) however there are, as indicated above by Zamora, a variety of measures taken within YSP to genuinely consult and engage with communities in order to tailor the literacy campaign to their needs. Additionally, in relation to generative words, Freire (1985a) argued that, “(w)hat is important is that the person learning words be concomitantly engaged in a critical analysis of the social framework in which [people] exists” (p.56). There is some evidence, as outlined in relation to YSP as politicised literacy practice that such critical analysis may be occurring within YSP. A Freirean approach asserts that this analysis needs to occur through genuine dialogue and we turn our attention now to better understanding how YSP might create the basis for and foster a Freirean form of dialogue.
**Human relationships, culturally appropriate adaptations and authentic dialogue**

The initial series of classes in Timor-Leste were conducted using Portuguese DVDs which had been produced for Brazil; while, in Australia the YSP version developed for the English-speaking, Caribbean island of Grenada is being utilised. Indeed at a superficial level YSP appears very much a “one size fits all” program in which genuine dialogue based on engagement with the specific reality experienced by participants might be impossible. However such a view fails to account for the role played by the facilitators, supported by a team of advisers who are charged with adapting the program to the local context and establishing an important relationship based on trust and mutual respect, vital preconditions for genuine dialogue, with the participants.

The literature highlights the complex role of the facilitator. YSP facilitators are recruited from the local community, and although as a result of better literacy, are not as socially marginalized as the participants, their connection to community still serves to significantly reduce the problem of the teacher who cannot relate to the lives of their students, which Freire so strongly criticised (see for example Freire, 1997, p. 47). The literature points to a complex role for the facilitator, including some of the functions we expect of a teacher, for instance identifying which students need more intensive assistance or initiating class discussion. However their key function could be understood more accurately as peer tutors, acting as a kind of cultural bridge between the YSP program and community.

The DVD-classes are organised and implemented by the facilitator who also judge if all lessons are necessary. For example, Boughton et al. (2013) describe how in Wilcannia, the six prescribed lessons that follow the introductory lesson (which introduces the method) were skipped. Those six lessons are aimed at people with absolutely no experience of reading or writing (activities included practice in holding a pencil for example), and so not required in the Wilcannia program where all participants had completed some schooling. The facilitator thereby helps maintain interest and engagement in the program by working to ensure it is tailored to the needs of their specific community.
It is very clear from the literature that the importance of the role of the local facilitators in helping establish the basis for genuine dialogue within the YSP campaigns stems from the relationship they already have or that they are able to establish with the participants. For example, Jack Beetson, the acting CEO of the Local Aboriginal Land Council in Wilcannia, explained:

It’s not just locals learning from locals, but family learning from family, so they understood each other, they had an empathy with each other... that you just don’t get otherwise. If you bring teachers in from Cobar or Broken Hill or anywhere else, they don’t belong in the community, they’re not from the community (whereas) these people knew what they’d all gone through, they understood that and I think that was the key factor in it working. (Jack Beetson, ABC radio interview, 10/5/12 cited in Boughton et al., 2013, p. 17)

Fernandes (2010a) found that in Timor-Leste, most students are happy with their facilitator, they have “fantastic interaction” (p. 61), they respect the facilitator even though the participants are often senior in age, and, importantly, they are open to criticism regarding aspects of the program and the class schedule (Fernandes, 2010a, 2010b).

Program advisers importantly support the complex role of the facilitator. The advisers role is variously described in the literature but can be generally understood as helping the local facilitators research, prepare and adapt YSP to the particular country or region and also to provide initial and ongoing training to the facilitators. In Timor-Leste this took the form of weekly workshops, which provided advice on program adaptations, lesson preparation and debriefing over student progress. The advisers often visit the classes “for quality control and support” (Fernandes, 2010b, p. 63). In Bolivia, the Cubans’ role was described as advising “on the pedagogical methodologies and logistics of delivery” (Artaraz, 2012, p. 33). In Wilcannia, the advisers’ role was explained similarly as follows, “to help the facilitators prepare each lesson, to discuss what had happened in a previous class and progress of each student, and to assist with ideas on how to contextualise and adapt the materials to the reality of Wilcannia” (Boughton et al., 2013, p. 17).
It is not only their technical skills that the advisers bring to the campaign. Boughton (2010) highlights the importance of the advisers living within the community where the program is being applied rather than living on over-inflated international salaries that remove them from the real hardships of local life. He discusses the respect the advisers have won in the broader community in Timor-Leste, largely stemming from their willingness to live like locals:

living and working as closely as possible to the local monitors and students they win enormous respect and it also allows them to tailor their advice and supervision of the classes and monitors to the local circumstances (Boughton, 2010, p. 65).

It appears from the identified research analysed in this project that by somewhat breaking down the traditional student-teacher dichotomy, and introducing a third role in the facilitator, YSP is well-designed with regard to encouraging genuine dialogue. Through the teacher on the DVD and the workbook, knowledge is introduced, which is then discussed and potentially problematized by the facilitator and students. Fernandes (2010b) points to what appears to be one concrete example of this sort of dialogue in Timor-Leste where inconsistencies were challenged by the students because the Tetum alphabet which was taught in Los Hau Bele only has 20 letters and thus doesn’t include some letters used in Portuguese, which caused confusion because of the many Portuguese place names students were familiar with. She also mentions students selecting various words to discuss and being able to negotiate the schedule for lessons. The latter may appear to be minor examples that without further elucidation do not constitute unequivocal ‘proof’ of genuine dialogue. They can also be read, however as indicative of an atmosphere conducive to genuine dialogue.

In Wilcannia a whole new lesson was introduced to the YSP schedule, at the suggestion of the facilitator, in order to allow participants to share aspects of their Aboriginal culture, history and social issues with the Cuban adviser and to learn more about Caribbean culture. This is further evidence of the creation of an environment, this time at the initiative of a facilitator, which appears conducive to genuine dialogue. The described use of ‘generative themes’ within YSP (Boughton et al., 2013) appears to very much align with the emphasis Freire placed on valuing and interacting with the
knowledge students bring to class in order to help them to create new knowledge about themselves and their world.

However while there are aspects of YSP which appear to reflect a problem-posing rather than a banking approach to education, no literature could be found which specifically addressed the question of whether dialogue in a Freirean sense, that is the problematization of knowledge by both teacher and student in the effort to create new knowledge about oneself and the world, was occurring. Mercedes Zamora asserts that:

The material is created according to the needs and interest of adult people that’s why they engage with it. The role of discussion and dialogue in the class is to exchange with the participants to facilitate the teaching–learning process (personal communication, November 29, 2013).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, unlike the traditional YSP model, the pre-recorded classes were not delivered by a local facilitator within a physical class, but were used by individual students in their homes. Did this prevent opportunities for dialogical learning? While not referring specifically to the Aotearoa New Zealand case, Lamrani’s (2012) work highlights the potential use of YSP in the home stating that this “encourages family cooperation and creates strong ties between the literate and the illiterate” and also “allows the student to avoid the negative psychological effects that occur when others regard his or her personal learning habits” (p. 357). Facilitators visited students in their home to conduct an initial diagnostic test and administer the assessment for each module as well as being available to assist the student in other ways if requested. The Greenlight program emphasised traditional Maori pedagogy and identity and some Maori words but the program itself was not translated into Maori (Boughton, personal communication, November 11, 2013). Nevertheless in the context of a still highly racialised education environment (see Bryant, 2010) the inclusion of Maori words and pedagogies within Greenlight are likely to have a significant positive effect for participants and their willingness to engage dialogically as part of the learning process.
The literature provides some initial, although by no means overwhelming, evidence of a dialogical process of inquiry within YSP campaigns, consequently it appears inaccurate to reduce the YSP program just to the alphanumeric technique, or to characterise it as consistently non-participatory and non-dialogical. In order to present an accurate depiction of YSP it is important to acknowledge the variety of teaching techniques used within YSP and the potential for some of them, to be closely associated with a problem-posing, dialogical approach.

**Conscientization within social struggle**

This study is grounded on the apriori position that a revolutionary disruption to the globally dominant social order is necessary in order to achieve a more humane future, indeed to regain an ecological equilibrium in which the continuation of advanced human society is possible, and is interrogating the question of how various forms of literacy hinder or contribute towards the attainment of this goal. However it is worth re-stating that, although they are connected processes, it is not valid to simply conflate the process of conscientization with the specific political consciousness of an awareness of the necessity of social revolution and willingness to engage in bringing about this new world. Indeed examples from the literature on YSP campaigns illuminate Freire's contention that people do not move from being submerged in a culture of silence, beset by a fear of freedom to a fully articulated critical consciousness without engaging in conscientization, which is a process rather than a moment, and which can also be understood as, overcoming the dehumanisation which history has done. This process is one in which people shift from viewing themselves as objects of history and come to understand their role as subjects of history and thereby recognise their agency as individuals and as members of a social class. This refined understanding of conscientization foregrounds processes of self-expression, increased personal happiness, confidence and community cohesion and is certainly connected, although not equivalent to, a developing political consciousness or criticality.

It is the idea that it is possible to achieve a form of political criticality or conscientization in isolation from the process of becoming more fully human which is at the heart of Freire's critique of much of the “revolutionary” left. The accuracy of Freire's opinions on this was highlighted by accounts in the literature which
demonstrated increased levels of personal happiness and community connectedness for participants in various YSP campaigns which resulted from a certain form of social struggle, that of engaging in the literacy campaign, even while social struggle for more articulated political change may not (yet) be manifested.

From the analysis of the literature on YSP, it appears that there are 2 key characteristics of YSP which relate to conscientization, namely:

1) It is a mass method which conceives of illiteracy not as an individual problem but as a community responsibility and therefore focuses on developing community capacity and human relationships through the “socialisation” of the campaign; and

2) It explicitly teaches the skill of “learning”, rather than assuming that the participant already has these skills and through giving participants the tools to learn thereby develops confidence in participants that they can indeed learn.

This research contends that these features interact with the socio-political conditions of various communities to create the potential for a truly radicalising, mass conscientization process to unfold, although the YSP campaign in itself is by no means a guarantee that the process of conscientization will continue to politically radical conclusions.

Mass method and the importance of socialisation

Although poor literacy rates are regularly bemoaned in international forums, serious goals demonstrating commitment to the global eradication of illiteracy, have all but disappeared from dominant international discourse (Jones, 1990; UNESCO, 2014). This shift has been accompanied by a number of overt or implied criticisms of mass campaigns from both the left and the right. Meanwhile, YSP has remained quietly committed to a mass method of developing literacy. Cuban educator, Abel Prieto has conceded that some of the criticisms of mass campaigns have validity, to a point, but argues that the goal of achieving mass literacy needs to be foregrounded. He explains, “if you pick a narrow base, you can conceivably do a better job qualitatively – but for a select, small number of people. But if you choose narrow work horizons, you’ll never get rid of illiteracy” (Prieto cited in Leiner, 1987, p. 188)
However if we state that universal literacy is our goal and we set out to achieve that then it is clear that mass methods are necessary (Leiner, 1987). YSP arguably demonstrates that “mass” does not necessarily mean “culturally uniform” which is one of the key, often implied, criticisms of mass literacy campaigns from New Literacy Studies. A defence of “mass” methods is not, therefore, an excuse for culturally or linguistically inappropriate methods.

The question of a mass method intersects with the long recognised importance of political will (Lind, 2008b, p. 34). While the countries included in this study each had their own challenges in this regard, what is clear is that both the party political neutrality of the program materials and its implementation are important in establishing the necessary broad political support and commitment to the campaign. In Bolivia, for example, the program enjoyed a high level of government support and was initiated and fully resourced and supported by the central government. Artaraz (2011) explains that the program was not implemented in a politically partisan way and was rolled out (and was well received) in the east of the country where there is extensive organised opposition to the government, just as it was in areas where government support was high. In Timor-Leste there was a change of government during the course of the program and the consequent policy changes, at one point, appeared to endanger the continuation of the campaign (Boughton, 2010). The Australian program currently operates as a pilot, with the question of explicit governmental support unresolved, while enjoying support from various institutions such as the University of New England and National Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign Steering Committee (NAALCSC) and the Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the program came to an abrupt and dramatic end when government support was withdrawn (Weatherley, 2009).

While encompassing the importance of political will at the higher levels of government, the concept of socialisation emphasises the importance of the grass roots of the entire community being involved in the campaign. This approach is based on the understanding that many illiterate adults today, particularly within countries of the Global North, have had some level of schooling. They are illiterate following an experience of “failure” at school. As Lankshear & Lawler (1987) explain this is most often (mis)understood by the illiterate person not as a failure of the school system to
teach the necessary skills for them to succeed but internalised as their own individual failure. Freire writes extensively on such processes as the “interiorization” of the dominant viewpoint within the dominated (see for example, Freire, 1985a). This sense of individual failure which leads to poor self-esteem, shame and a cascade of poor outcomes for that individual, in turn becomes a huge barrier to tackling literacy or learning again in the future. YSP confronts this problem with a broadly Freirean analysis (which in turn could also be considered a materialist analysis) of the situation, in that it works to overcome the mistaken belief on the part of the illiterate person that this is their individual failure and instead YSP emphasises that the entire community has to take responsibility for the problem of illiteracy. Yet YSP does not place responsibility for developing a community’s literacy back on the state which failed the illiterate people in the first place, rather they develop the attitude of community self-reliance, so well demonstrated in the 1961 Cuban National Literacy Campaign (see Chapter 2).

This socialisation of the campaign occurs through a number of actions, processes and events designed to encourage broad community involvement in the campaign in a variety of roles, not only as learners or facilitators. For examples, in Timor-Leste a national commission led by the Minister of Education and including other government ministers, church and civil society representatives and sub-commissions at a district level work to generate support for the campaign in the broader community, in a similar organisational model to the 1961 Cuban Literacy Campaign (Boughton, 2010). Community celebrations to launch the program, celebrate graduates and welcome new cohorts were also an important feature of the campaigns that involved and demonstrated the various levels of human solidarity and political commitment that the YSP campaign generated. Other important features of the socialisation process mentioned in the literature were, the establishment of an inclusive working group and investing resources in community events in which family members of participants and campaign staff can be involved (Boughton et al., 2013; Fernandes, 2010b).

Implementing the campaign with this approach means that not only is the community involved in the project, but they actually lead it in reality, and not simply through token community representation or other superficial measures. This is a carefully supported
process, as outlined by the Central School Principal at Wilcannia, who told Boughton et al. (2013):

This project ... is actually for the community, by the community. And, it’s actually the community that is running the program. There’s support there, like a lot of support obviously, but the leadership roles are being held by community members ... It’s the care with that that has made it successful. (Michelle Nicholson, Interview, 27/7/12 cited in Boughton et al., 2013, p. 26).

The literature suggests that this conscious cultivation of grassroots community ownership of the campaign is an important factor in YSP's success and connected to the process of conscientization. By generating a community wide mobilisation around the campaign, a level of political priority and will can be manifested, that would be more difficult with a smaller, more targeted program. This research contends that the mass campaign approach also establishes the basis for a potential dynamic amongst the community grassroots, created when many people in a community become aware of their greater human capacity at the same time and can thus assist and inspire each other. This has the potential to begin a dynamic process in which individuals and community relationships are further strengthened and deepened as people both assist and inspire each other to continue to learn, develop new skills and develop their individual human potential. Implementing the campaign on a mass basis gives people a kind of “insurance” against the setbacks and challenges they will encounter in their journey to improve their circumstances, in that when they turn to family or friends for support – these friends and family are more likely to be able to provide support in a variety of ways as they are more likely to be moving forward in their own life and learning journey.

Such an understanding of the importance of the human relationships is reinforced by evidence from the literature which suggests that, similar to the 1961 Cuban National Literacy Campaign, YSP is characterised by an important and dynamic relationship between the participant and the facilitator. In performing their role, the facilitators undergo their own powerful learning processes and develop a new role in the community, which in turn can become a source of empowerment. Fernandes (2010b) writes that “they learn a lot of things through this program. They can increase their skills and knowledge” (p. 61). A facilitator from Wilcannia reported to Boughton et al.:
... when they approached me about this, about being a facilitator, I jumped at the chance ... It’s a good feeling in your heart, because you know you’re doing something for your people. And you feel proud on the inside, and there’s no better feeling than that (Owen Whyman, cited in Boughton et al., 2013, p. 27).

The importance of developing the morale of a community and consciously and carefully building relationships of solidarity is also illustrated by Hannan (2012) who cites Bob Boughton’s comments regarding facilitators and advisers in Timor-Leste, “they learn more about the poorest of the poor. Often the teachers are the people who’ve had a bit of education and the organisers are the district officials … so I reckon there’s more ... social solidarity that develops” (p.41). These features of YSP campaigns resonate with Freire's understanding of liberating teaching and conscientization as a two-way process in which teaching and learning are undertaken by both the teacher and the student (Freire, 1984, p. 67)

The evaluation of the Greenlight program in Aotearoa New Zealand substantiates the claim that positive human relationships are important to the success of YSP stating, “The programme encourages communication within the family context, with friends and increases confidence in the family and social life. It develops skills for work and results in people functioning better in society”. In this regard YSP appears to demonstrate a very strong commitment to the Freirean concept of cultural action for freedom, that is working for shifts in power relations between groups of people in preparation for the more decisive shifts represented by political or cultural revolution (Freire, 1985a, p. 90). The importance of developing a sense of hope in previously marginalised communities and a belief in a better future also resonates through accounts of YSP campaigns and Freire’s work.

Significantly the Greenlight evaluation found that 98% of participants “felt capable of offering some help to their families, friends and community members” (Canfux Gutierrez, n.d., p. 69). The Greenlight evaluation also reports specific areas in which participants felt better equipped after completing the course which included improved skills in the following areas: finding information in a newspaper, better prepared for their work or for new jobs, more prepared to write letters to other people, more prepared
to help others with literacy skills, better prepared to start new tasks and face new problems in life, organising family tasks better, responding more to health campaigns and better understandings around health, increased knowledge about using natural resources appropriately, and a better understanding of personal needs (Canfux Gutierrez, n.d., p. 102). Significantly, 247 of 459 responses “indicated [a belief] that through the programme, new community leaders would emerge” (Canfux Gutierrez, n.d., p.14). These aspects of the evaluation appear to support the idea that YSP serves an important role in developing individual and community capacity which while improving peoples' ability to function in the current society may also transcend conventional notions of functionality as the socialisation of the campaign develops community empowerment in ways that contradict peoples' functionality to capitalism. As a consequence of the focus on the socialisation of the campaign, a sense of solidarity and capacity across the whole community is fostered and developed. By empowering the community and engaging many people in such a positive project, “the campaign generated a spirit of respect, compassion and solidarity for everyone involved, so that people felt safe and supported, not judged or ‘put down’, and began to believe in the possibility of a better future” (Boughton et al., 2013, p. 27).

**Teaching the skill of learning**

Lankshear & Lawler (1987) provides examples of how particular cohorts of students are failed by the school system and a range of other scholars have discussed the importance of a range of skill sets that are often assumed by mainstream schools but in fact are often lacking amongst students from particular social backgrounds (see Lankshear & Lawler, 1987, Chapter 4). It appears from the research that carefully addressing the development of the skills related to learning is an important feature of YSP's success.

The YSP campaign in Wilcannia was independently assessed against the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) and all participants who completed the course were found to have made a dramatic improvement in one or more of the three core-skills the assessment considered, reading, writing and learning (Boughton et al., 2013). It appears that as well as tackling the problem of shame and low self-esteem serving as a barrier to participation, through the socialisation of the campaign, the individual courage and effort which it takes to engage in a learning program is recognised within YSP.
framework. This is well-illustrated by chair of the Local Aboriginal Land Council and key YSP campaign leader in Wilcannia, Jack Beetson’s speech to the graduation ceremony:

I am proud of this campaign for many reasons but one reason is because over 40 adults were courageous enough to step through the classroom door to take a look; ... today we are honouring the 16 who finished the course. In a community like Wilcannia this is no small achievement. Let us not forget that for a person who doesn’t read and write even taking that first step to come into the room is a giant step. So I say to you all... be proud of what you have done for yourself and for your kids and for your community. I know you have discovered learning and it is so exciting. It fills me with immense pride when I see you all now doing your post literacy classes, using the computers, cooking healthy food and soon some of you’ll be doing the Certificate II course in Catering (Beetson, 2012, cited in Boughton et al., 2013, p. 22).

The ACSF assessment of YSP claims that it doesn’t emphasise risk taking (McLean, 2012, cited in Boughton et al., 2013, p. 20), however perhaps its importance lies in the fact that it acknowledges the enormous risk learners have already taken by being there and the risks people with low literacy take every day in order to survive, what Freire referred to as their “precarious existence”. It appears that this acknowledgement is an important precursor to teaching the skill of learning. As explained in the ACSF the skill of learning is underpinned by a number of factors including, self-esteem, motivation and engagement. The ACSF also explains that, “[s]ome adults have developed negative perceptions of themselves as learners. This can act as a barrier to further learning, particularly in formal contexts” (ACSF, 2012, p. 20). Therefore addressing the learner’s self-perception and developing their self-esteem is an essential component of any adult literacy program. Boughton & Durnan (2014, p. 8) suggest that participants learn some of what it means to be a student through watching the behaviours of the students in the DVD. Canfux Gutiérrez et al. (2012) reinforce that YSP has been carefully designed to align with these understandings about adult learning when he explains that the objective of YSP is “for the students to succeed. If adults experience failure, most of them won’t return to the lesson” (p. 257).
The extremely limited information available on Greenlight, suggests the program shared a similar emphasis on developing personal and community engagement and empowerment as demonstrated in the other countries examined in this research. Confidence and self-esteem are themes that recur regularly in the evaluation of the social impact of the Greenlight program, demonstrating that this was a key success in Aotearoa New Zealand. Some examples of these participant reflections as reported to interviewers include:

[Greenlight] has helped her grow in self worth and confidence. She never realised the impact a better standard of reading, writing and numeracy would have on her normal day routine... She has more confidence to express herself through the forms of writing and speech. She feels confident enough that she can offer her opinion to others without feeling “dumb”... [Greenlight] has re-awoken the desire to further on studying. R believes now that she has the skills for studying full-time (Canfux Gutiérrez, n.d. pp. 24-26)

According to a discussion paper by Wetere (2009) “ninety-six per cent of [Greenlight] students said the course was extremely valuable and a life-changing experience. In fact, many students enrolled in follow-up courses and several others looked for and gained better employment”. Despite such successes the Greenlight program ended in 2007 amidst a wider political controversy surrounding the Maori run university Te Wananga O Aotearoa (TWOA) that initiated the Greenlight program. This broader controversy is well explained by Weatherly (2009). TWOA came under sustained attack from the media and government with accusations of corruption and mismanagement. Greenlight itself was targeted with negative slurs attacking its Cuban and socialist roots (Haines, cited in Weatherly, 2009, p. 73). An investigation of TWOA by the New Zealand Auditor-General found no evidence of corruption, although criticism of conflicts of interest and inappropriate use of taxpayer funds were noted by the Auditor-General (Weatherly, 2009). While there is not enough information to draw firm conclusions the very specific nature in which the program was ended potentially suggests that Greenlight was viewed, along with TWOA as a whole, as being “too successful” in educating Maori people (see Bryant, 2010; Weatherly, 2009).
Overall this research into YSP in the four contexts suggests that through the process of developing basic literacy skills YSP participants learn experientially that literacy improves their lives in many ways, from allowing them to enrol in new courses or apply for work, to organising household tasks, to simply communicating better with family and friends. Then on the basis of a more connected and satisfying personal life, people are more able to consider ongoing learning in academic and vocational senses and in the socio-political sense of learning about the world. As Boughton et al. (2013) convey an important aspect of YSP lies in its ability to develop the very basic but absolutely essential quality within learners, of developing their confidence in their capacity to learn and through learning to take action to improve their own situation.

However the literature also demonstrated some serious and recurring concerns with the YSP approach. Many of these criticisms concern aspects of YSP that appear to diverge from the broad acceptance of a Freirean approach within adult education. Given the importance of these to the overall evaluation of the YSP program they are examined in detail below.

Criticisms of YSP in the literature

In this compilation and analysis of the academic material on YSP in the four target countries, particular themes of concern and criticism became evident. Three areas of criticism appeared to recur in the literature namely, 1) YSP doesn't provide a high enough level of literacy, 2) YSP facilitators are not sufficiently trained, and 3) YSP is a one-size fits all model and is thus often culturally inappropriate. These criticisms are outlined and considered below in relation to the accumulated evidence gathered through the Freirean analysis of YSP and in regards to broader trends and concerns within adult literacy.

Does YSP bring people to a “high enough” level of literacy?

One of the most significant controversies related to YSP in the identified literature is that it doesn’t bring people to a “high enough” level of literacy or that the literacy is too tenuous given the short time frame of YSP. Torres (2008) refers to YSP’s conception of literacy as “very basic reading and writing skills, to be achieved in a few weeks” with a
The criticism of YSP for not achieving a higher level of literacy is something of a straw man, however, since YSP does not claim to develop a level of literacy that is self-sustaining. Indeed Boughton (2010) acknowledges that it is a “very basic, introductory course” which does not achieve “literacy in the functional sense” (p. 63). Here Boughton is using the term ‘functional’ to refer to the competent and independent use of literacy in everyday interactions. The Bolivian course, for example, is explicitly designed to bring students to the literacy level of 9 year olds (Artaraz, 2012). The course in Wilcannia was assessed as taking students from below level 1 to achieving level 1 and some aspects of level 2 on the Australian Core Skills Framework (Boughton et al., 2013). The completion requirements of YSP align with one of the UNESCO definitions of literacy, namely “the ability to read and write, with understanding, a short, simple sentence about one’s everyday life” (UNESCO, 2005, p. 29). Yet nothing in the literature argues that YSP alone could provide the environment in which initial literacy can be maintained. Boughton (2010), Boughton et al. (2013), Hannan (2012), Artaraz (2012) and Fernandes (2010b) all stress the need for post-literacy activities and the development of literacy rich environments in order to maintain the momentum that YSP establishes. Therefore this appraisal concurs with a critique of YSP which includes a heightened awareness of the need for additional efforts beyond YSP and not assume that YSP, in and of itself can bring literacy to communities. This however should not impact on our analysis of YSP as a program designed to bring people to a beginning level of literacy.
However it is important to note, that this is another area where Cuban educators have demonstrated responsiveness to the requirements and possibilities presented in different contexts. In Aotearoa New Zealand YSP was adapted significantly and expanded into four modules. The first of these, like other YSP campaigns covered basic literacy while the subsequent three covered more advanced literacy as well as numeracy, social studies and science (Boughton, personal communication, November 11, 2013). It was designed to take students from level 1 to level 3 on the NZ Qualifications Framework – essentially to university entrance standard.

**Training of facilitators**

The level of training provided to facilitators is another aspect of YSP that has come under criticism. The GLEACE statement (2009) criticises the delivery of courses by “educators with little or no training” (p. 1). Rosa Maria Torres (2008) stated that within YSP there is “little importance and time dedicated to the training of the facilitators” (2008, p. 553). Although she does acknowledge that as teaching is provided through the pre-recorded class, there is a “different profile and role for the facilitator” (2008, p. 553). Artaraz (2012) refers to facilitators requiring “minimal” training, but this is in the context of discussing not only the role of the video-classes but also the fact that many of the Bolivian facilitators were final year university students or already qualified teachers. Additionally, such criticisms do not appear to take into account the role of the advisors in supporting the facilitators, as discussed earlier in this chapter (pp. 75-76).

While recent fast-tracked teacher training programs such as Teach for America have been widely criticised (e.g. Korn, 2013). It is worth recalling the observation made by Gillette (1987), based on the EWLP, which found that in the case of adult literacy campaigns “long pre-service training with no systematic follow up was not as effective as short initial training followed by regular refresher sessions“ (1987, p. 208). Gillette explains the advantages in utilising a method of ongoing training including that examples of classroom interactions can become raw materials for training sessions and building a sense of solidarity and support amongst the trainers.
While inadequate pre-service training for facilitators appears to have been a weakness of the Greenlight campaign (Canfux Gutiérrez, n.d., p. 14) in the other 3 countries both pre-service and follow up training appear to have been provided to some extent (Artaraz, 2012; Boughton, 2010; Boughton et al., 2013; Fernandes, 2010b; Hannan, 2012). Again, this is an areas of YSP where the literacy community would benefit from more research and documentation. The evidence provided in the literature to date suggests that facilitators are substantially supported by the advisers and by the DVD-classes and the facilitators are understood to be on their own learning journey (as are the advisers). Additionally, the fact that facilitators are not highly trained and thus more removed from the community context is intended to support the participants on their own learning journey. Consequently if there are criticisms to be made of YSP in regard to the level of training provided to facilitators, they could be made more convincingly if they accounted for these other aspects of YSP's operation.

**Is YSP really context sensitive?**

The literature revealed that YSP has been translated into multiple languages, and as a consequence adapted to and applied in multiple local contexts. However, this aspect is somewhat contested in the literature. The critique of YSP on this question stems from a well-founded sensitivity to the inappropriateness of one size fits all literacy approaches, given the well documented need for education generally, and literacy programs in particular, to be culturally and linguistically relevant in order to be useful (Schmelkes, 2011). This in turn relates to Freire’s emphasis on teaching literacy through words that have relevance and meaning for the learners. The issue of language is particularly fraught in literacy campaigns in multi-lingual societies, given the historic role of literacy campaigns in standardizing languages (see Arno and Graff, 1987).

While no direct criticism of YSP on this issue was found in the literature, two examples of a strongly implied criticism of YSP include, the GLEACE (2009) statement, which criticises programs which operate “without taking into account the linguistic and cultural diversity of the students” (p. 1) and Gadotti (2011) who appears to be referring to YSP when he states that, “Generally campaigns, which are often undertaken with the help of volunteers and are very much based in the media, fail to respect the different regional contexts and the diversity of learners” (p. 20).
As well as these criticisms, in the context of the well-founded priority on linguistic and cultural appropriateness, references to “the Cuban method” (a term used by Gadotti), or accounts that the initial program in Timor-Leste used the Brazilian YSP materials (e.g. Boon, 2011) appear to reinforce the implicit criticism that YSP is not context sensitive.

The preceding analysis found, however, significant substantiation that YSP is responsive to linguistic and cultural context. As discussed, earlier, a key point that recurs in the literature is the crucial role of facilitators and advisers in ensuring that, in addition to the provided materials, campaign workers locate “local pictures, words and themes to use in lessons as a substitute for unfamiliar words” (Boughton et al., 2013, p. 17). The extent and quality of this adaptation is obviously dependent upon the facilitators and advisers, and consequently will almost inevitably be uneven. Interestingly, Schmelkes (2011), when discussing the complexities of working with language groups in which there are a range of dialects, suggests that materials should be produced on site “in order to avoid provoking rejection” (p. 99). Arguably, this is partly what YSP advisers and facilitators do when they adapt the existing material while also utilising the high level training and teaching skills represented in the DVD-classes (Canfux Gutiérrez et al., 2012). This approach would thereby prevent unnecessary duplication and an unachievable work-load which could be anticipated if the responsibility of developing teaching materials from scratch were placed with the local facilitators. Reinforcing the workability of this approach, Boughton et al. (2013) report that far from being a point of dissonance, the fact that the DVD-classes used in Australia feature Grenadian people and aspects of culture, actually served as “a point of interest and attraction, as people discovered that they were part of a wider adult literacy movement among ‘people of colour’ in countries of the Global South” (p. 27). This argument suggests that marginalised, illiterate groups of people may, under specific circumstances, have greater identification with illiterates in other countries than with literates in their own country.

The experience of YSP in Timor-Leste also provides specific evidence of adaptation to local context. Although a number of adaptations were made to the program while it was being delivered in Portuguese, once it was clear that there was sufficient community and political support for the program, the Cuban advisers set about producing a YSP version in the other official language, the more widely spoken Tetum (Boughton, 2010).
The program is now generally known by its Tetum name, ‘Los Hau Bele’. Boughton (2010) explains the production of the new program in some detail, including how Timorese medical students studying in Cuba were recruited as actors in the new DVDs. Although the production of the Tetum version of YSP was a major step forward, the complex language situation in Timor-Leste means that many learners are still not able to learn in their mother tongue. This point is highlighted by Boon (2013) in her analysis of multi-lingual classroom talk within two Los Hau Bele classes in which none of the participants are native speakers of Tetum. Nevertheless it seems that the commitment demonstrated by the creation of Los Hau Bele was broadly appreciated in Timorese society. One of Hannan’s informants, Kirsty Sword Gusmao, first lady of Timor-Leste and advocate for education for women and girls, stated:

The Cuban adult literacy program has been remarkably successful and has shown responsiveness to the needs and wishes of learners in terms of its language-use model. It could perhaps, resources permitting, become an even more exemplary model if it were to incorporate mother tongue literacy as an option in future (cited in Hannan, 2012, p. 45).

The Bolivian program also operated in an exceedingly complex language situation, as there are an estimated 30 Indigenous languages in Bolivia. Of the 820,000 people who graduated from YSP in Bolivia, 14,000 did so in Quechua and 25,000 in Aymara (two of the major Indigenous languages of Bolivia) however there is very little elaboration on this significant achievement to be found in the literature. According to a Bolivian newspaper article (Claure, 2007), a specific set of YSP tapes were created in Aymara and Quechua and launched in March 2007, with plans for a set in Guarani (another major language) to be launched by mid-2007. Lamrani (2012) notes that the YSP program has been taught in Guarani, indicating that this translation did go ahead, but no further reference to the Guarani translation could be found. In a further example of adaptation to local context Steele (2008) explains that, prior to the Quechua and Aymara tapes being launched the facilitators conducted the classes through on site translations from the Spanish donated materials to the local Indigenous languages. It is not clear whether this process continued for other Indigenous languages besides Quechua, Aymara and Guarani.
In the aforementioned context of prioritising the cultural and linguistic appropriateness of education and literacy efforts, it is significant that these evident adaptations of YSP have received little or no academic attention. This is particularly noteworthy, given their statistically significant results in the number of new literates in Indigenous languages. One of the few scholars who does make reference to these adaptations, Schmelkes (2011) refers to these translations favourably, but only does so cursorily as “a very interesting recent project” (2011, p. 92). Apart from that, no English language literature was found on these versions of YSP.

By committing to a simple philosophy and methodology and sticking with it, the Cubans have been able to build up resources over time which allow them to deliver effective pilot programs while simultaneously making adaptations and conducting research to improve the program’s relevance in different settings. In fact it appears that a key success of the YSP campaign is that it provides a very basic, to a certain extent standardized program, with the recognition that it will be tailored as necessary at the local level. Versions of YSP exist in a number of major world languages, including Spanish, English, Portuguese and French (Lamrani, 2012), which can and have been deployed in multiple settings. Additionally YSP programs have been developed in a range of indigenous languages that, by their nature, are highly specific to a particular region and thus are unlikely to be used again in a different country and consequently represent a significant commitment to literacy in indigenous languages. On the other hand, there is very limited elucidation in the research literature of claims like Lamrani’s (2012) that “a full diagnosis designed to assess the socioeconomic, geographic, political, cultural and religious characteristics of the region to be educated is conducted first” (p. 357).

The literacy community still needs to understand more about how this diagnosis is conducted and acted upon, both in the development of the new versions of YSP, and in the adaptations of existing versions. In addition, the question of teaching literacy in what have traditionally been largely oral languages (which is the case with Aymara, Quechua and Tetum) raises issues which link with other important questions such as developing a literacy rich environment in which new literates can consolidate and extend their skills. At present, while noting these questions and areas of potential future study and elaboration, based on the academic literature in English it appears that YSP is
highly adaptable to various linguistic and cultural contexts, and that this has been a feature of its successful application in Timor-Leste, Bolivia, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

**Summary of correspondence with Freirean framework**

From this critical review of the literature it appears that there are substantial points of correspondence between YSP and a Freirean approach. YSP is formulated with a particular understanding of the relationship between poverty/oppression and illiteracy and conceptualises literacy as one tool facilitating participation in a democratic, decolonising economic development process in which the question of human liberation is implicit, that is YSP is a politicised literacy practice; and is thus deeply concerned with the relationship between oppression, liberation and education.

YSP employs a range of specific and identifiable teaching methods, including alphanumeric associations, DVD-classes and participatory discussion around generative themes. Some of these techniques appear to demonstrate a dialogical, problem posing approach while others suggest a more conservative, banking approach. This research suggests however that the important role of strong human relationships of solidarity and community engagement within YSP campaigns, may create a dialogical process which echoes Freire’s concept of cultural action and which occurs both within and beyond the classroom.

In providing beginning literacy within a socialised process, YSP appears to be broadly associated with developing conscientization in specific ways, related to improving participants' confidence, engagement and happiness. Although YSP provides opportunities for students to discuss and develop opinions around a series of relevant topics, this research suggests that the relative political criticality of the participants' conscientization is influenced more by social and political factors external to, although not disconnected from, the YSP campaign, than the messages promoted within the YSP program itself.

The design of YSP demonstrates a strong awareness of the relationship between education, oppression and liberation and is particularly concerned with bridging the
historical divide between those who have gained access to basic literacy and those who haven't. There is evidence of genuine dialogue occurring within YSP and various aspects of the method – particularly using local facilitators, working in collaboration with skilled and politically conscious advisers, to adapt the program to a given community - appear to be strongly aligned with a broadly Freirean approach. The literature also provides evidence that YSP develops important practical experience of community empowerment and self-reliance. These aspects along with the generalisation of a minimum of basic literacy skills across a community, appear to move the characterisation of YSP further along the continuum towards criticality, as while the reading and writing skills developed within YSP are not advanced, strengths associated with community empowerment appear to be developed across the community. On the other hand this research also notes that aspects of classroom practice appear conservative and somewhat didactic.

The examination of the literature on YSP demonstrates that the YSP program has provided an avenue to basic literacy and through that, a sense of dignity, empowerment and achievement for millions of the world’s most disadvantaged people. Through the analysis of the literature the potential for YSP to contribute to processes of decolonising development can be seen, conditioned by a number of broader social and economic factors.

This chapter has drawn a number of conclusions regarding the political and pedagogical approach of YSP in relation to a Freirean framework. While acknowledging a number of important conditionalities and external factors, particularly that any literacy campaign is only one factor within highly complex socio-political contexts, overall, it is asserted that by developing basic literacy skills through a community supported and driven, mass campaign, there is a strong, if broad, correlation between YSP and a Freirean framework as established in Chapter 2.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

In a global context of deepening crisis and inequality, Cuba is setting an example of an alternative path which challenges dominant modalities and importantly emphasises working within the ecological limits of our planet rather than a dictatorship of the market. The process of developing the Cuban alternative has not been without some serious errors, yet there is consistent evidence that errors have been reviewed and often revised subsequently (Kaiser-Lenoir, 2009).

Education, both in the sense of access to formal schooling, and in the broader sense of learning through practical struggle and experience, has been central to the development and resilience of the Cuban alternative, notwithstanding various trends towards domesticating education. The challenges and variations in approach that the Cubans have undertaken reinforce the importance of accurate and explicit acknowledgement of the ideological influences on our educational practice, hence the historical reference point of the 1961 Cuban National Literacy Campaign and the Freirean framework which this study has used. At the same time, emerging trends such as eco-pedagogy remind us that authors such as Freire and efforts such as the 1961 Literacy Campaign are most useful when they are built upon and adapted to contemporary conditions rather than reified and used as blueprints.

This research contends that YSP is an example that has both consciously built on previous experience and adapted to today's conditions and is arguably achieving significant successes on a global scale. The Cuban government’s offer of the YSP program to assist the worldwide effort to eradicate illiteracy should generate both excitement and many questions for literacy advocates. As it is, the literature suggests that this offer is yet to be seriously discussed by the international community. In this final chapter I summarise the main conclusions from this study as a contribution to extending the limited international dialogue about YSP.

**A global system unable to prioritise universal literacy**

*Teaching and Learning: Achieving equality for all, the 2013-14 Education for All Global Monitoring Report* makes very sobering reading for advocates of adult literacy
and educational equity. The foreword bluntly states that none of the EFA goals set for 2015 will be achieved. The EFA target for adult literacy was a modest 50% reduction in adult literacy rather than universal literacy, however the 50% reduction is considered on a global scale and the progress of individual countries towards universal adult literacy is analysed. The report maintains that universal adult literacy will be reached by improving access to primary education and thereby improving youth literacy, however given the failure of the global community to meet the EFA goals to date, the statement that “universal adult literacy is unlikely to be achieved for at least another generation” (UNESCO, 2014, p. 71) appears, at best hopeful and at worst disingenuous.

The latest EFA Report reveals further questions regarding the consistency of any internationally agreed definition of literacy as Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua are all listed as being “far from the target” of universal adult literacy, where previously UNESCO has recognised these nations as “territories free of illiteracy” (Erisman, 2011; Lamrani, 2012; UNESCO, 2011). Venezuela, the other ALBA nation often cited as being a territory free of illiteracy, is recognised as having achieved universal literacy in the 2014 EFA Report. With regard to this study of YSP it is also worth noting that both Timor-Leste and Bolivia are recognised as making “strong relative progress” (UNESCO, 2014, p. 75) towards the target of universal adult literacy. However the report does not mention Cuba's contribution to adult literacy, apart from listing it as a country that has achieved universal adult literacy, nor does the report contain any reference to Freire.

The report takes a particular, mechanistic view of education claiming, “education reduces poverty and boosts jobs and growth” (UNESCO, 2014, p. 13). It states that it is “only by investing in equitable education – making sure that the poorest complete more years in school – can countries achieve the kind of growth that banishes poverty” (UNESCO, 2014, p. 14). This sort of human capital logic suggests that the abject poverty of the world's least developed countries is the fault of poor people who do not complete more years in school. This approach in which education is viewed as a solution to poverty contradicts an alternative view in which addressing poverty is viewed as a solution to illiteracy and poor education. For example the GLEACE statement criticises the “continued separation of illiteracy from its structural conditions of reproduction, principally poverty” (2009, p. 2). Similarly Lind (2008a) explains that
literacy is not a “magic” solution to poverty, as may be suggested by various international institutions, but rather that, “literacy is fostered by overall human development and poverty elimination” (p. 61). As outlined in Chapter 3, such comments are verified by Cuba’s experience of prioritising human development, including publicly accessible, quality education; which has allowed them to maintain and develop the literacy gains of the 1961 campaign.

Overall the latest EFA report can be read as further evidence that the current global system, defined by capitalism, is neither committed to nor capable of overcoming illiteracy and the social problems with which it is interwoven. A critical analysis of contemporary power relations and the past practice of those currently in power does not support the idea that these forces are committed to ending illiteracy. This view is reinforced by the fact that the EFA goals only ever aimed to reduce illiteracy, with the more profound goal of ending illiteracy always pushed back to a non-specified future.

The report makes a number of observations regarding the ongoing lack of funding and aid for education and identifies a $26 billion dollar spending gap towards achieving the EFA goals (UNESCO, 2014, p. 8). This amount is a little less than was spent on online advertising alone in the US in 2011 (Strategy Analytics, 2012). The influence of capitalist modalities exemplified by more money being spent on online advertising in one country than in meeting the global financing gap for education should be considered as a potentially significant factor contributing to the failure of the global community to achieve the EFA targets. Lankshear (1993) explains that within the current system the, “‘proper’ ends” for economic resources are not social spending but “capital accumulation and optimizing private profits” (p. 104). Such observations reinforce the view, established in Chapter 1, that those of us who are truly committed to universal literacy need to look beyond the current dominant paradigm to achieve this goal. In this regard, it is noteworthy that one example cited by UNESCO as having particular success in education funding is ALBA member Ecuador. The Ecuadorian government renegotiated contracts with oil companies, widened the tax base and tripled education expenditure between 2003 and 2010 (UNESCO, 2014, p. 10).
Conclusions from the research

This research has set out to analyse YSP in terms of a Freirean framework, and through this in terms of its location along a functional-critical literacy continuum. Hence, the work has been underpinned by the question of whether the literacy developed in the YSP campaigns encourages participants to experience their “creative potency and (emerging) critical perspective”? (Lankshear, 1993, p. 114) or whether YSP should be compared to the, “innumerable, well-intentioned bank-clerk teachers who do not realise that they are serving only to dehumanise” (Freire, 1984, p. 61).

In order to better understand the nature of YSP, this research has sought to unpack the relationships between classroom practices, the social dynamics created by mass literacy campaigns and the broader social and political context surrounding the YSP campaign and the way these aspects interact and act on each other. Although inter-related with a high degree of complexity, it is important to attempt to separate and analyse these aspects in order to develop a deeper understanding of YSP as it relates to functional and critical literacy.

It has become evident through this research that there is an apparent contradiction between what can be described as some fairly conservative classroom practices which suggest that YSP may be focused on initial literacy for functional participation in existing society; but this is contrasted with other evidence of more politically radical characteristics of the program, not least the results of the program, namely the extension of basic literacy to millions within a neo-liberal context. It is not easy to draw firm conclusions about whether a given literacy process has a liberatory or domesticating trajectory. McLaren (2000) speaks to this difficulty in determining the nature of various literacy campaigns when he refers to Freire's opinion, “that we cannot know for certain the historical significance of a particular practice in advance, because every action is the product of its conjunctural position within a system of differences – in other words, within an ensemble of social relations and contradictions” (p. 154). Additionally, as is very much evident within YSP, different aspects of one literacy program may be contradictory, that is some aspects appear to foster functional literacy while others encourage more criticality. With these limitations in mind, I will now summarise my conclusions.
The political and pedagogical approaches and methods of YSP

The literature demonstrated that YSP campaigns were strongly associated with real and practical improvements in the ability of participants to more fully experience basic human rights, particularly in terms of being able to engage more fully in one’s community and being able to access government services, employment and/or ongoing education (Boughton et al., 2013; Canfux-Gutiérrez, n.d.). However such advances were generally removed from overt politically advocacy of “liberation” as a concept. That is to say, while the YSP material focuses on basic humanist values, rather than advanced articulations of freedom, the campaigns appear to result in an increase in people’s ability to engage with existing society, meaning that the marginalised become less marginal.

This is demonstrated in improved levels of happiness, confidence, ongoing study, community cohesion and engagement in the workforce (Boughton et al., 2013; Canfux Gutiérrez, n.d.; Hannan, 2012). It is also evident in the broader shifts in social consciousness and community capacity. For example, Boughton & Durnan (2014) state that the Los Hau Bele campaign in Timor-Leste:

… increased the self-confidence and capacity of students, facilitators and local coordinators to play more active roles at the community level in development activities. It also succeeded in rebuilding networks of cooperation among people at village, district and national level who had previously been divided by the legacy of the occupation and conflict (2014, p. 12).

Notwithstanding the various conservative teaching methods the program utilises, other aspects such as the emphasis on socialisation, the use of generative themes and providing a solid basis of dialogue, all contribute to a characterisation of YSP as containing significant politically and pedagogically progressive aspects.

The relationship between YSP and a Freirean approach

This work has systematically compared YSP to three important aspects of Freire’s work (see Chapter 4) and found significant areas of correspondence as well as particular divergences. It is also worth emphasising some more general points of correspondence between Freire’s work and YSP.
YSP is based on an approach, shared with Freirean analysis, in which illiteracy is understood as the result of a particular set of historic circumstances. Through engaging in YSP a community has the opportunity to gain perspective on their situation. As Freire (1985a) explains “the literacy process, as cultural action for freedom...is a courageous endeavour to demythologise reality, a process through which [people] who had previously been submerged in reality begin to emerge in order to reinsert themselves into it with critical awareness” (p. 49). Through coming to understand that illiteracy is not the result of multiple, individual failings but the result of a particular set of political and historical processes, participants are also able to recognise, the possibility of different political and historical processes that could change a community which suffers from high levels of illiteracy into a literate community. More specifically, they may then consider the possibility of their playing a role in this process, not only as a learner of initial literacy but in a multitude of possible ways in the future. That is the learners are engaged in a process of conscientization.

In unpacking this point, we are also unpacking the aspect of YSP which has the potential to further push its characterisation towards the critical end of the functional-critical literacy continuum and which, as suggested above, may well have influenced the dramatic ending of the Greenlight campaign in Aotearoa New Zealand. In revealing to a community that illiteracy is not a personal deficit but the result of a specific set of social and historical processes, YSP provides an ideological opening for people to ask two very important questions: what are the social and historical factors that resulted in illiteracy for this community?; and what are the social and historical forces that are ending this illiteracy and facilitating literacy? Potentially, the process of learning literacy through the various generative themes and subsequent discussion, allows students to connect the dots between their daily reality affected variously by poverty, dispossession, imperialism and racism and their illiteracy. As Lankshear (1993) writes, “by achieving print competence within the process of becoming committed to remaking history, learners will actually experience their own potency in the act of understanding what it means to be(come) a potent historical force (p. 111).

Further, the fact that YSP is brought to these communities by a country which is poorer than many of the countries which benefit from YSP, for no other apparent reason than a
practical commitment to the human right to literacy, and that this nation operates with a
social organisation that is not primarily determined by market relations is another
example of some of the real life problem posing education that YSP engenders. Such
fundamental questions, posed alongside the acquisition of literacy, have profound
radicalising potential.

**YSP and the functional-critical literacy continuum**

YSP campaigns were found to provide access to a form of beginning literacy which
illustrated aspects of both functional and critical literacy and yet was neither wholly
functional nor critical as the terms are either commonly understood nor as they are more
precisely defined in this research project.

Teaching techniques such as rote learning, a largely pre-determined work-book and
whole-class recitation of passages, indicate a functional or domesticating approach to
education, perceiving the student as an empty vessel to be filled with pre-determined
knowledge which they are expected to remember rather than understand and can
certainly be characterised towards the functional end of the continuum. Although YSP
provided skills that improved people’s functioning in daily life, it also requires
extensive follow up in order to achieve a level of literacy that could be understood to be
self-sustaining or functional within a literate community.

On the other hand, the literacy initially established by YSP appears to genuinely
empower communities and thus does not appear to serve the purpose of functional
literacy in terms of ideologically integrating people more closely to capitalism or
making the exploitation of them more efficient. This may well change following the
end of the YSP campaign, in the sense that is the literacy could become functionalised
at a later date. Yet the evidence from the literature suggested that the socialised and
mass approach of the YSP campaign and the documentation in some cases of dialogical
discussion of human rights as related to local participants and their particular contexts,
suggests that YSP does promote aspects of critical literacy. However the evidence in
the existing literature for such criticality is not well-established.
This research suggests that within the process of achieving universal beginning literacy in a community through an approach that is at least, in part liberatory, a higher level of critical literacy may be attained than is suggested either by the nature of the work-book or by domesticating teaching practices such as rote learning. Evidence from the literature including, the engagement of members of the Wilcannia community in education and the workforce, the assertiveness of class participants in Timor-Leste, the shifting of previously ingrained, conservative ideas in Bolivia, the apparent success in terms of graduates and participant approval in Aotearoa New Zealand and the spread of technology such as electricity and TV which often accompanies a YSP campaign - all appear to have made some contribution to a more socially and politically aware population. This research found that the community mobilisation and connections thus formed appear crucial to support learners to engage and remain with the program. In doing this the program potentially achieves a sense of hope and momentum within a community whose destiny is changing. Similarly experiential facets of the campaign such as the Cuban advisors living respectfully amongst people who have been marginalised in their own countries, should be understood to be in an interactive relationship with the YSP campaigns and potentially contributing to the development of critical literacy amongst participants. Overall this research contends that through awakening people to their own agency as individuals and as a community, participant's beginning literacy may be established further towards the critical literacy end of the continuum than may be initially apparent from an investigation of the classroom teaching material.

**Directions for future research**

There is clearly an urgent need for scholarly attention to YSP as it appears to have the capacity to provide genuinely universal access to beginning literacy and in doing so, also provide the basis for more empowered and liberatory ways of reading, writing and making our world. In this final section I outline some possible lines of inquiry for future research.

This research has detailed several examples of YSP campaigns which have demonstrated some significant success yet have attracted very limited academic attention in the English research literature. The Greenlight program in Aotearoa New
Zealand and the Aymara, Quechua and Guarani versions of YSP, which were implemented in Bolivia both appear to have been important events in the development of adult literacy in those countries and with potential to contribute to international knowledge and efforts to achieve truly universal literacy. In Aotearoa New Zealand the political controversy around TWOA that the Greenlight program was embroiled in caused substantial trauma for many involved (see Weatherly, 2009). These political sensitivities and other factors such as the lack of availability of materials seven years after the program has ended may present some challenges for researchers in this area.

Yet it is important for researchers to study and glean important information from long-completed literacy campaigns. For example, when Abendroth (2009) revisited the 1961 Cuban Literacy Campaign he was able to draw on the letters to Fidel Castro which were a graduating requirement of the campaign. He found that nearly every letter contained two words “thanks” and “revolution” (Abendroth, 2009, p. 86). YSP graduates are similarly required to write a short passage about their life in order to graduate from the program. Exploring what themes emerge from an analysis of these passages and the insights that could provide into YSP and the forms of literacy and worldview it develops is work that remains to be done.

Another important area for future research is the follow-up or post-literacy stage. IPLAC has developed a second program, Yo Sí Puedo Seguir (Yes, I can continue) specifically designed to develop and strengthen the beginning literacy established during YSP. It appears that while the field of academic literature on YSP is limited, it is even more limited for Yo Sí Puedo Seguir or other post-literacy programs that have followed YSP.

The evidence gathered in this study suggests that the beginning literacy which participants develop in YSP campaigns needs to be developed both in the sense of consolidating and extending literacy skills and deepening political criticality. It is well-established that new literates need opportunities to engage in the on-going use of literacy in order to consolidate and extend their skills (UNESCO, 2014, p. 73). Similarly it is also important to ensure opportunities for individuals and communities who have taken steps towards social empowerment and cohesiveness to maintain these new-found skills. Without opportunities in these areas it seems likely that communities
will lapse back into both illiteracy and a perception of political powerlessness. This emphasises the importance of establishing effective programs following YSP campaigns. Whether social movements and popular educators in the given country are in a position of strength to continue the work of YSP on this trajectory is, as previously mentioned, a significant variable which should not be confused with the YSP campaign itself. Research into what does or does not occur following a YSP campaign would clearly contribute to our understanding of YSP and its potential, particularly given the acknowledgement that YSP is not intended to achieve an independent level of literacy amongst participants but only to begin the journey towards that.

Finally, more information and research is needed to determine the extent to which the liberatory influence of the social practice of the campaign potentially outweighs the domesticating elements. Through wider and diversified implementation of YSP campaigns it may be possible to compare the impact of such measures through trialling YSP classes that specifically seek to move beyond the domesticating classroom practices.

There is a need, particularly for those interested in advancing critical literacy for capitalist transformation, to go beyond one-dimensional critiques to a deeper engagement with the potential of the YSP programs, and others that may follow, to move in critical directions under particular conditions. There is similarly a need to expand the body of research in order to get a fuller sense of the effects of such programs in terms of critical literacy objectives. Further there is the possibility that popular educators could innovate from the YSP model, drawing on aspects such as its approach to socialisation and the explicit teaching of the skill of learning and combine this with aspects of eco-literacy or other more explicitly critical or Freirean approaches in order to support social and structural change.

In summary with 774 million adults in the world lacking even basic literacy skills and international progress to reduce this number slowing (UNESCO, 2014), the international community needs to urgently consider the examples where communities have experienced success in reducing illiteracy. Yo Si Puedo is an important international example that has provided success to communities in diverse settings. Yet
there is remarkably little documentation and even less critical analysis of these various campaigns.

This study has drawn together the existing literature on YSP in four of the countries in which it has been implemented as well as a variety of other documentation to draw a number of tentative conclusions regarding the political and pedagogical approach and methods of YSP. By analysing YSP in relation a Freirean framework, this research has uncovered significant congruence between key aspects of the approach to initial literacy teaching which Freire advocated and the Cuban approach, historically represented in the 1961 National Literacy Campaign and contemporarily manifested in YSP. In seeking to better understand YSP in relation to the functional-critical literacy continuum this research has considered how classroom methods interact with the wider organisation of a literacy campaign and the relationship between outcome and process. Importantly, this research has begun to document some of what was achieved in Aotearoa New Zealand with the Greenlight Learning for Life program which had previously not been written about by other scholars. A number of specific areas for potential future research related to YSP have also been highlighted.
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