

# What Paulo Freire can teach us about contemporary ELT

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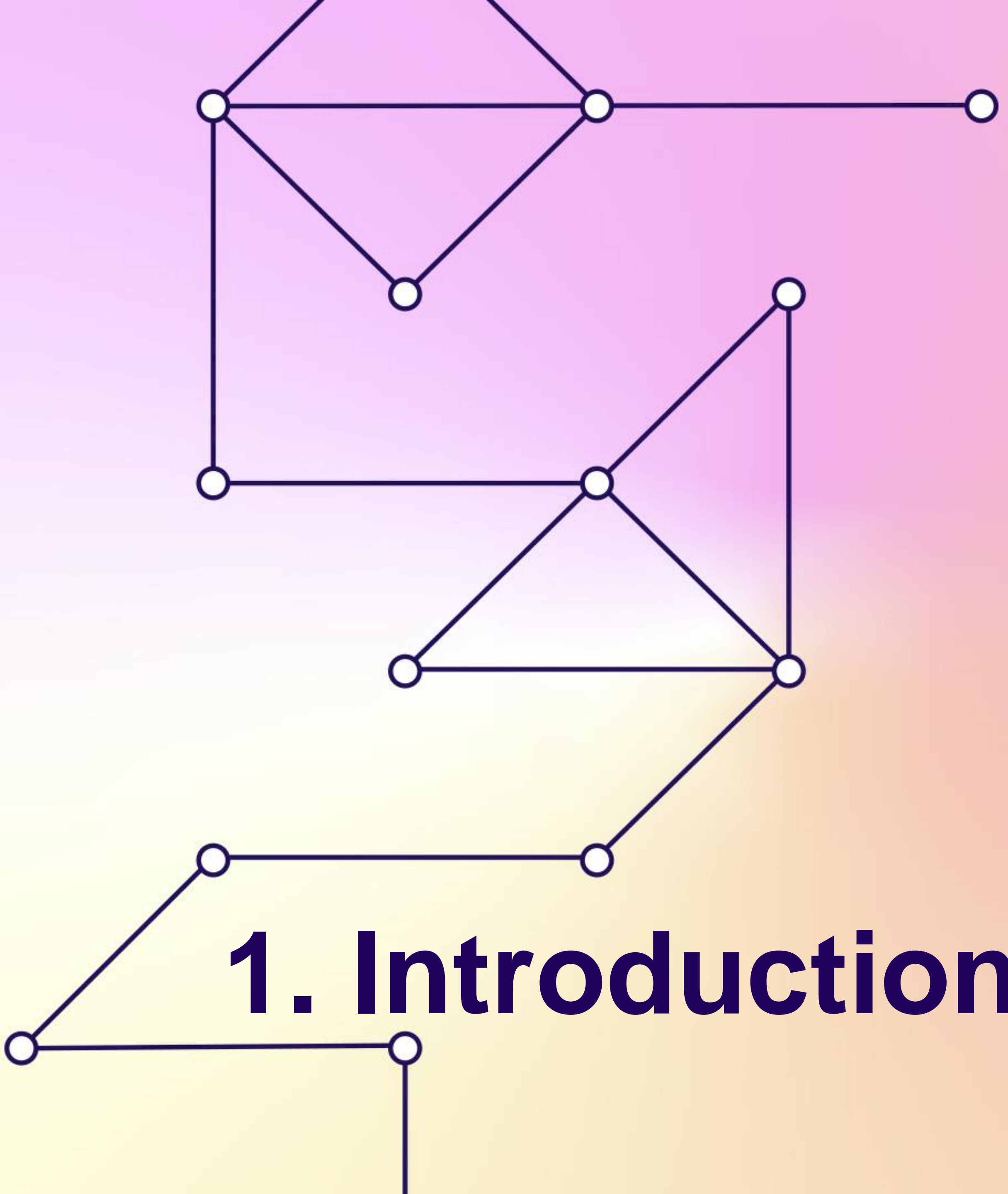
**BBELT**

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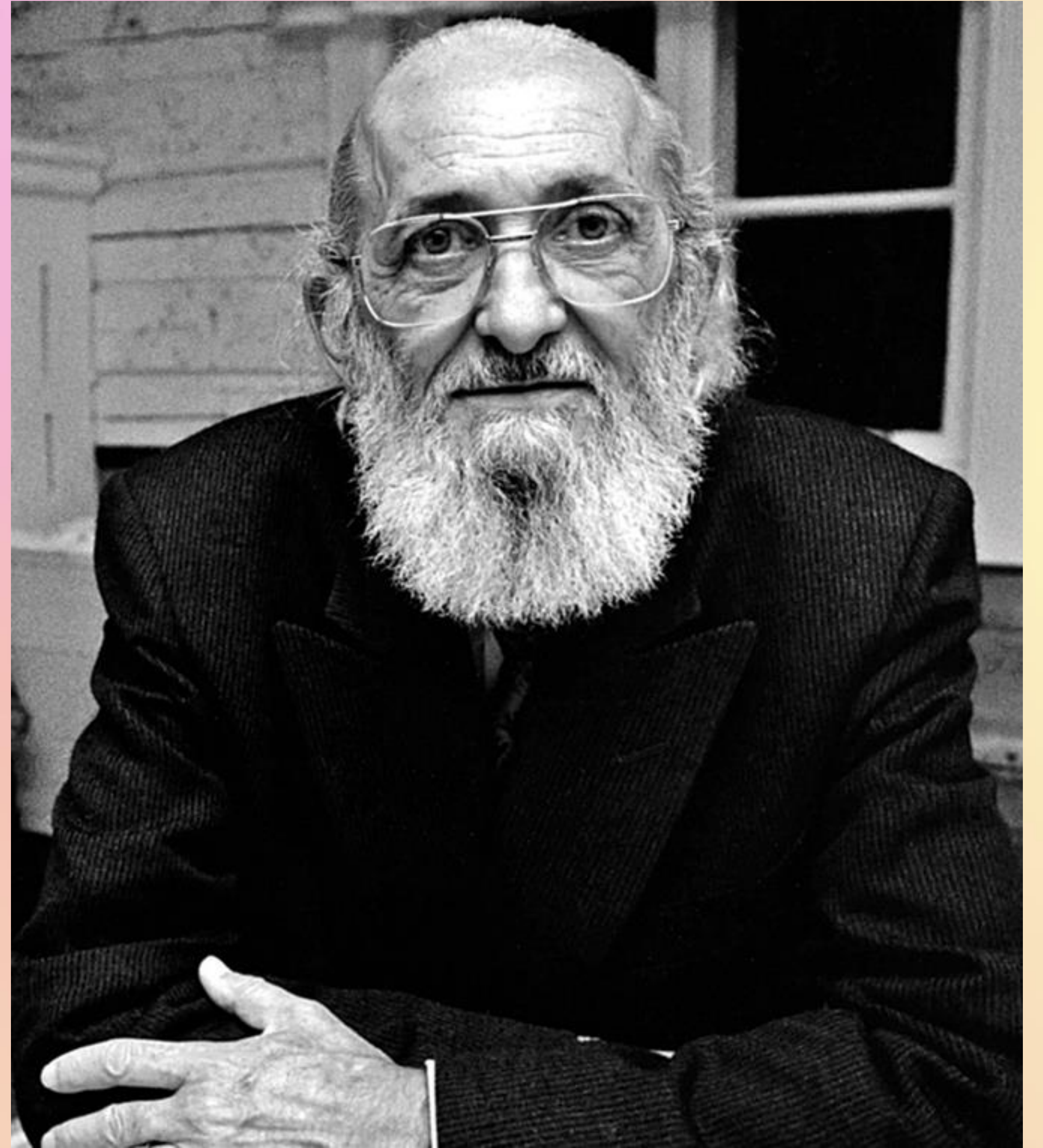
CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

1. Introduction and Rationale
2. Freirean Pedagogy
3. Contemporary ELT under a Freirean Lens
4. A Freirean ELT Agenda
5. Summary and Questions





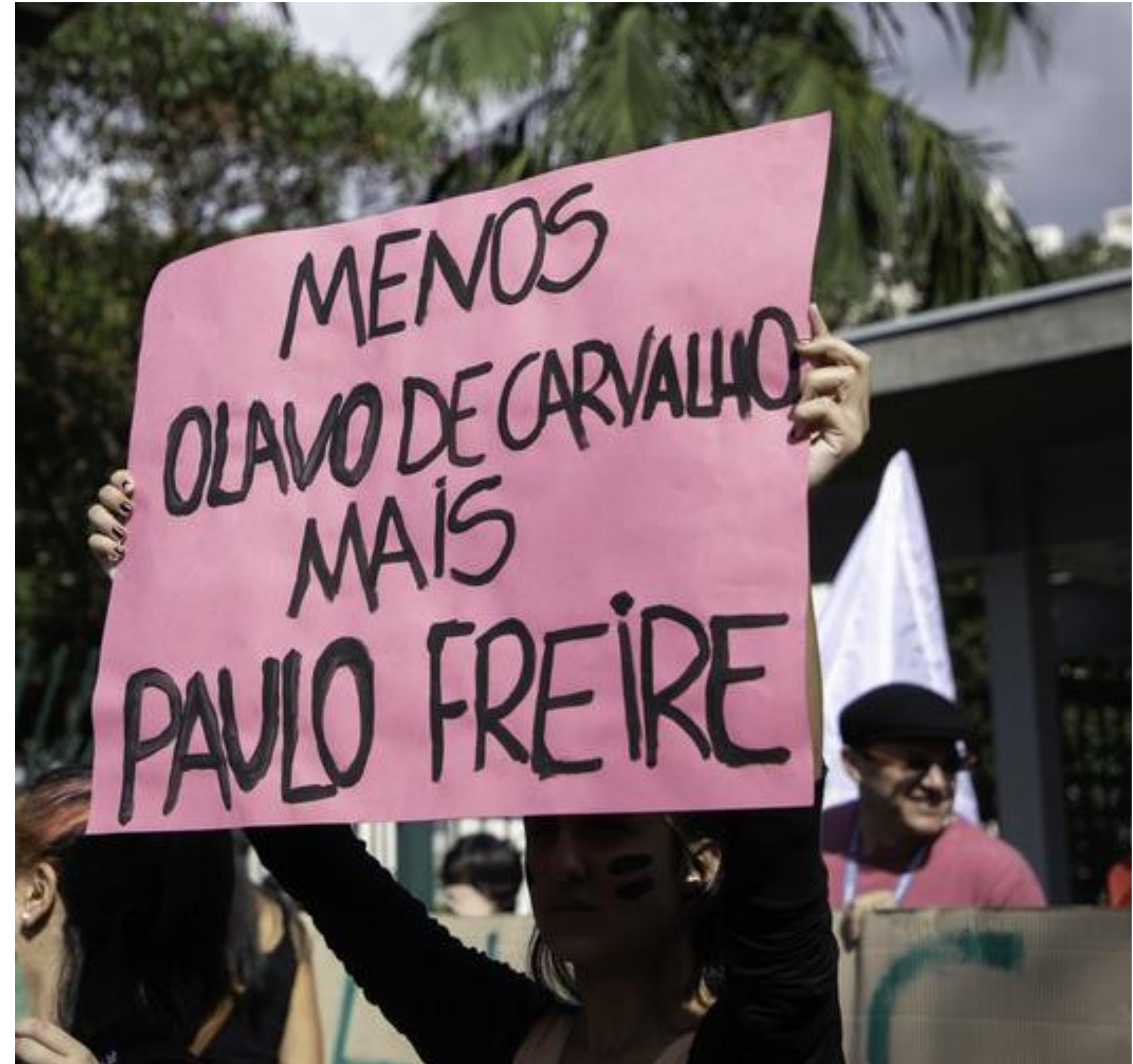
# 1. Introduction





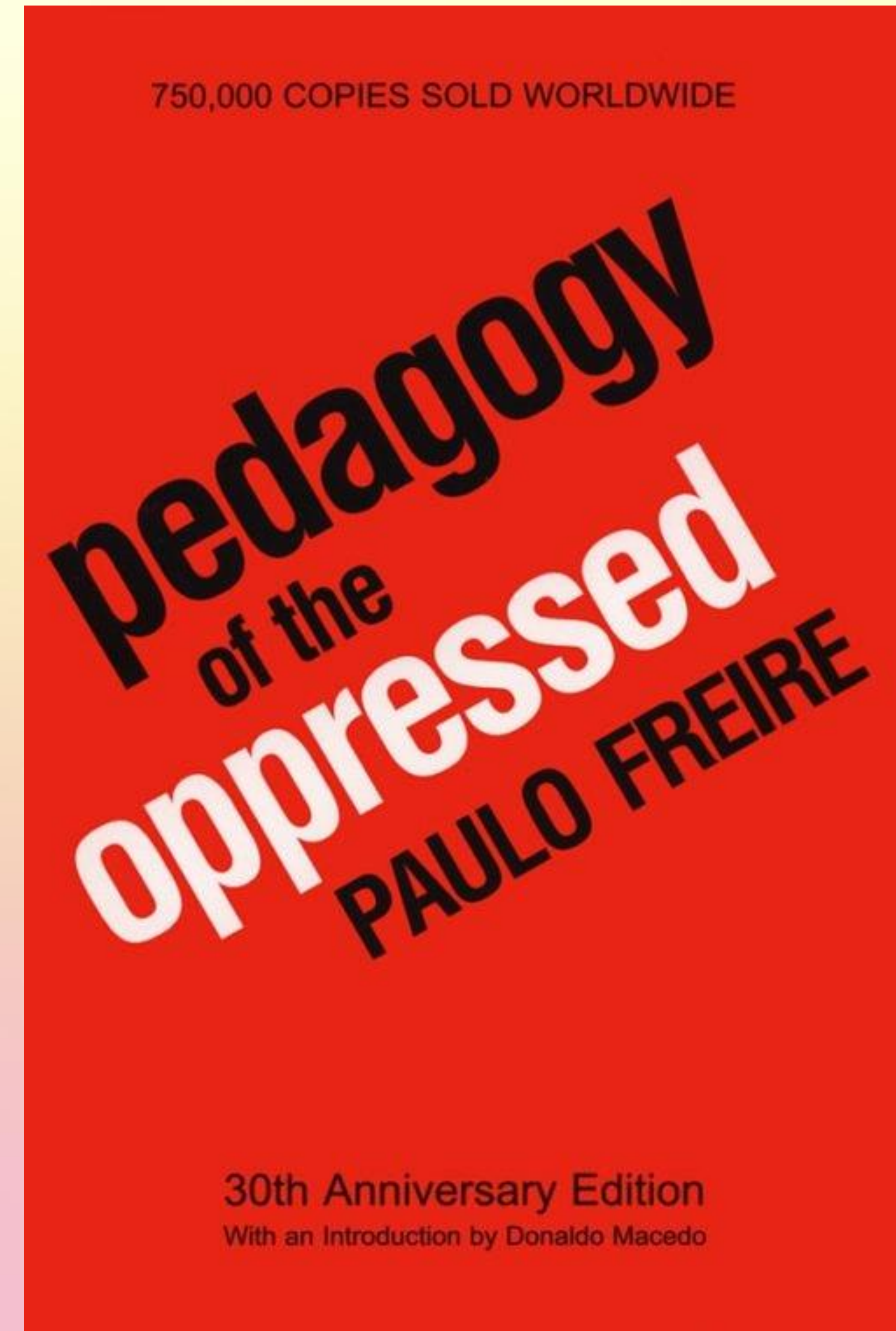
“... enter the education ministry with a flamethrower to remove Paulo Freire ...”

“... voodoo without scientific proof ...”

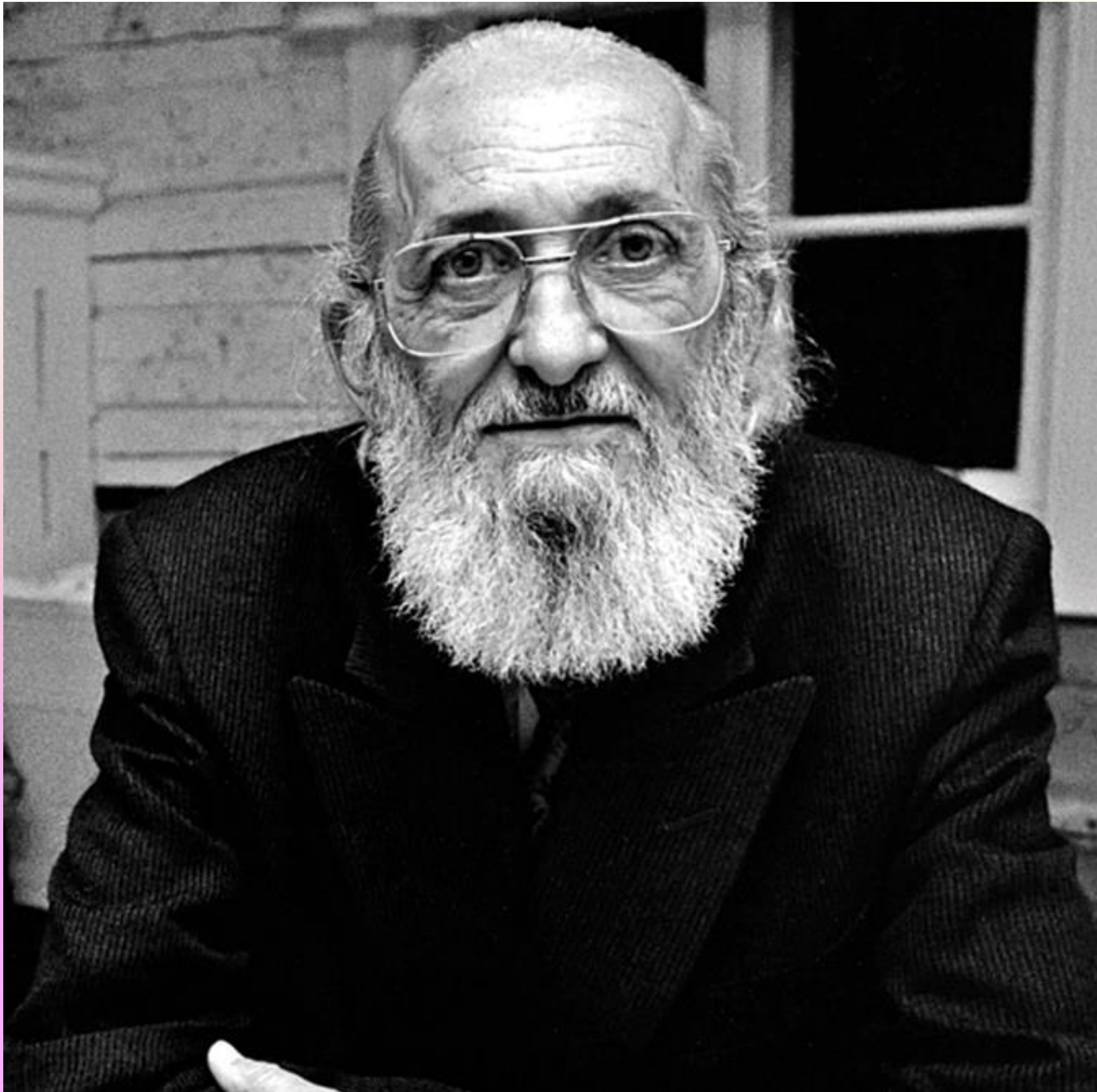




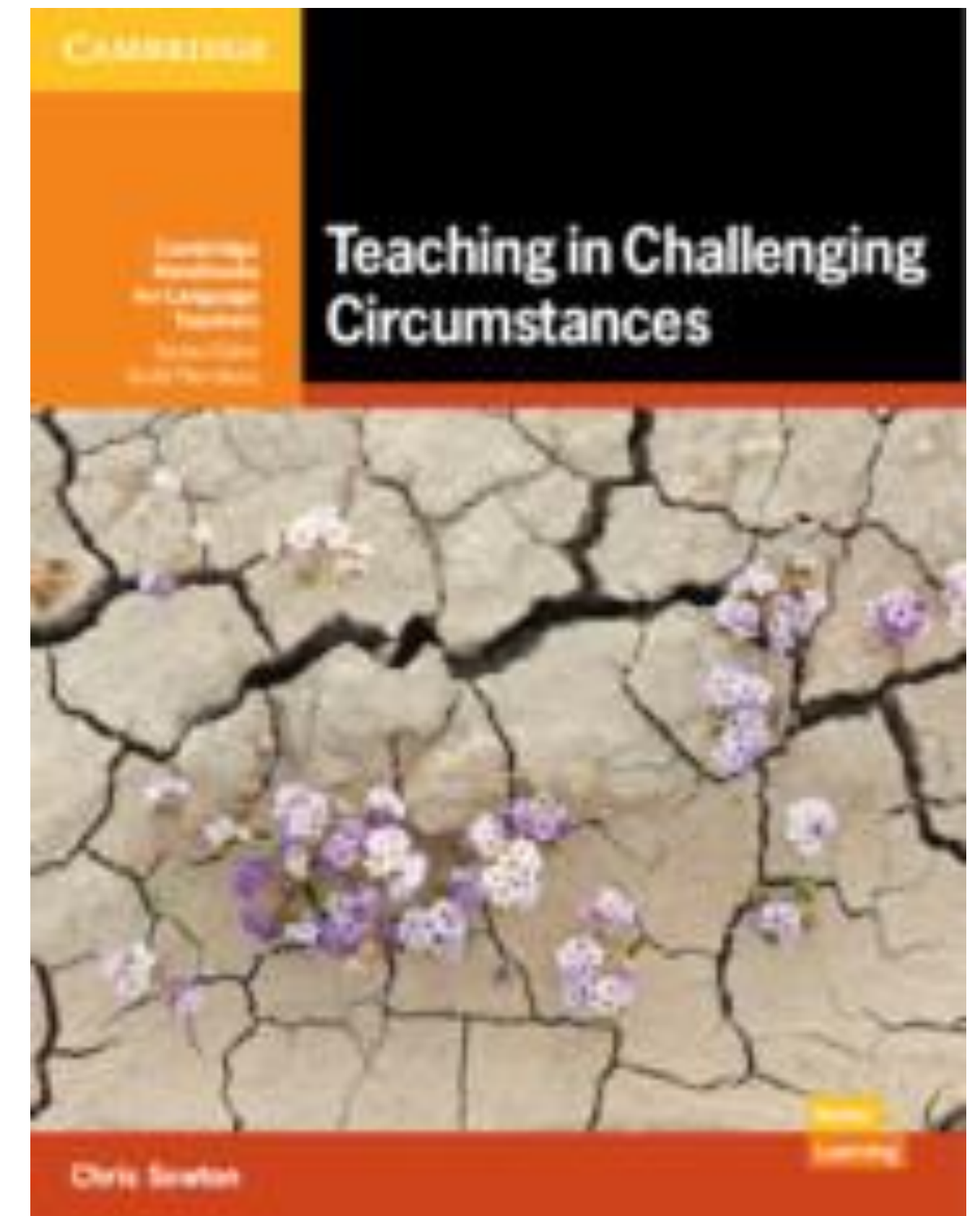
- Freire is ‘underknown’ in many parts of the world – better understanding of his work and pedagogical values would lead to better educational systems;
- Contemporary ELT faces a wide range of problems – and a Freirean approach offers potential solutions;
- The post-COVID educational landscape will present particular challenges, and there is potential for radical change.



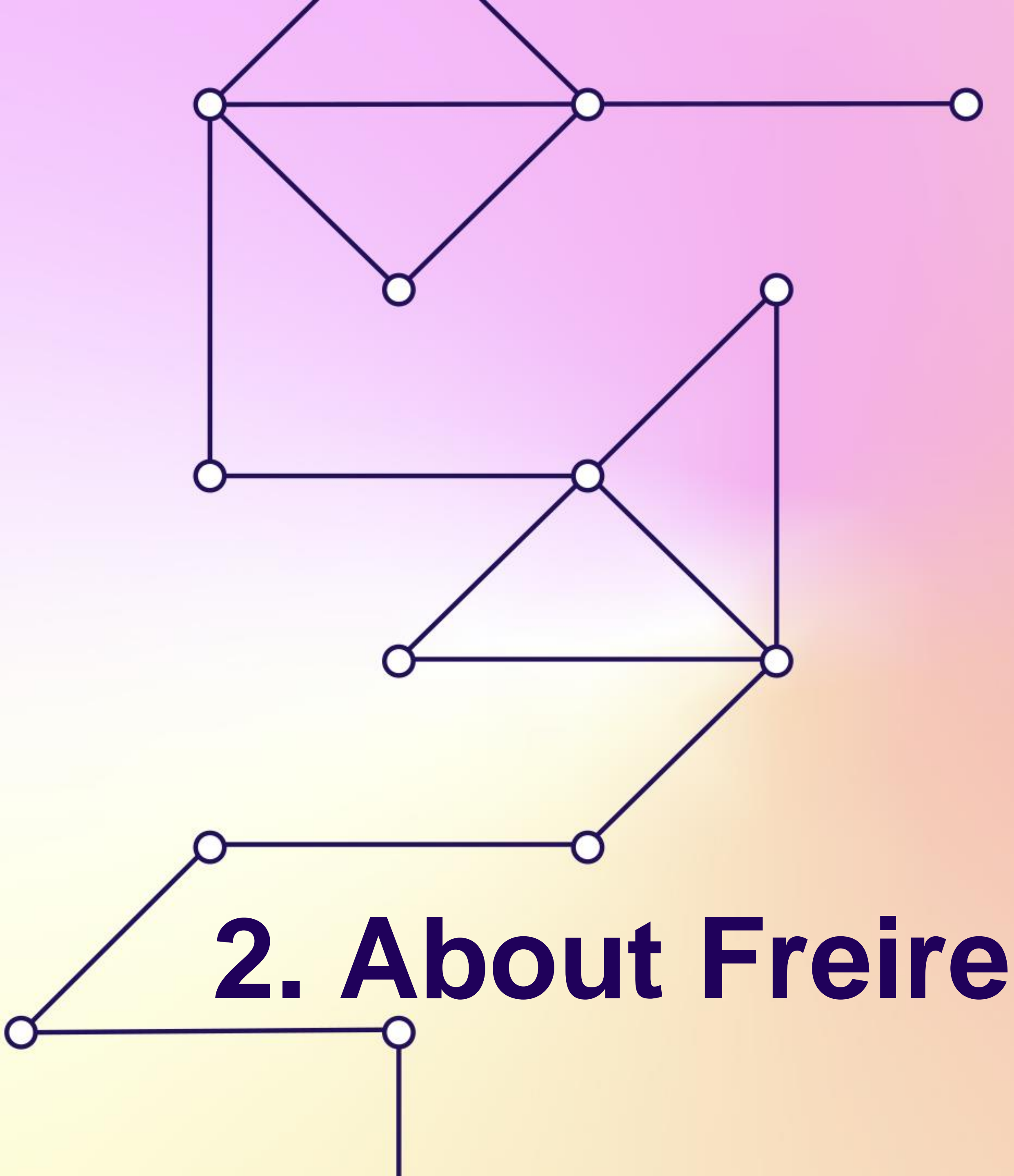




“To wash one’s hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.”







## 2. About Freire



“Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information.”

*(Pedagogy of the Oppressed)*

“To wash one’s hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.”

*(The Politics of Education)*

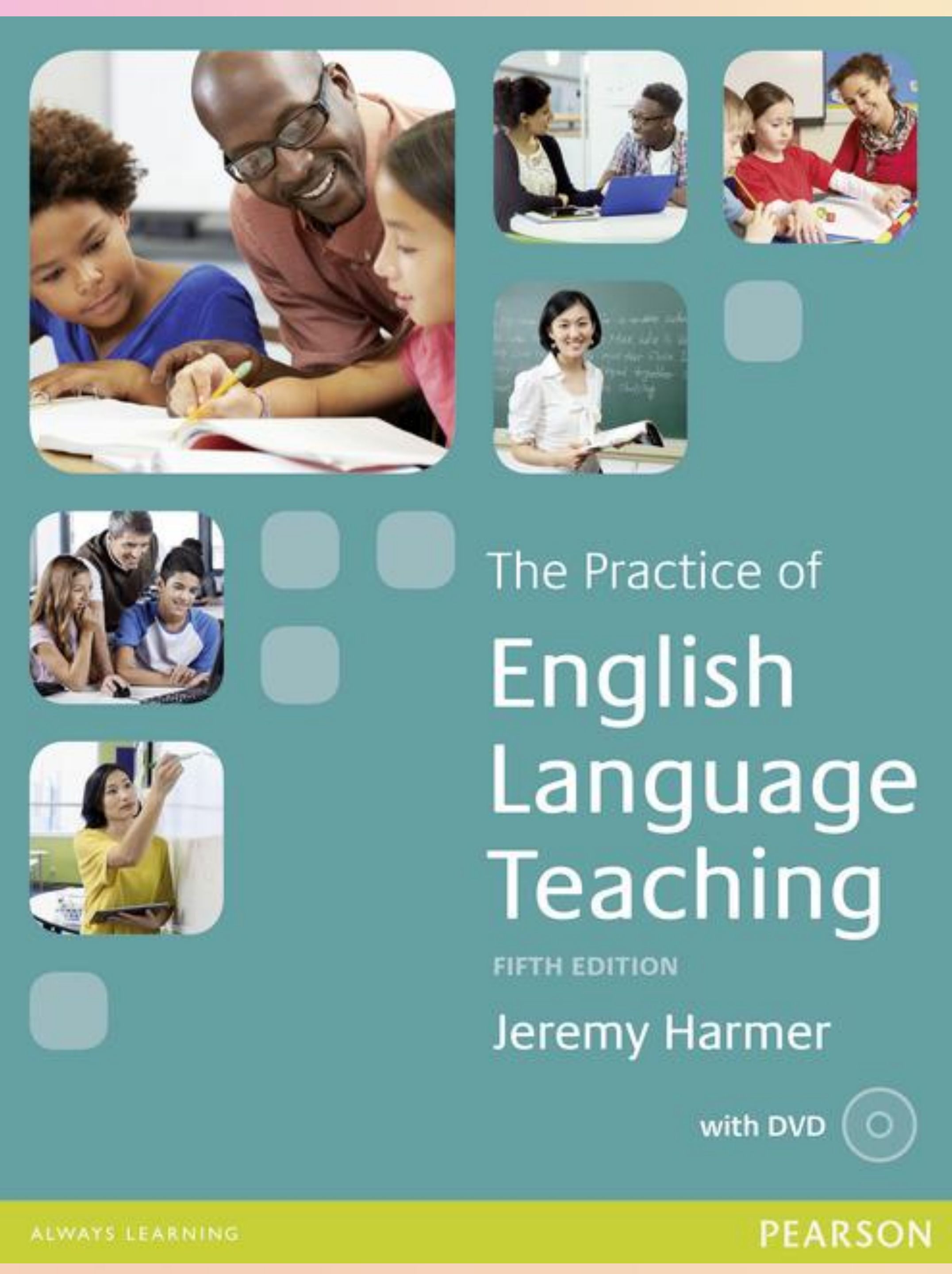
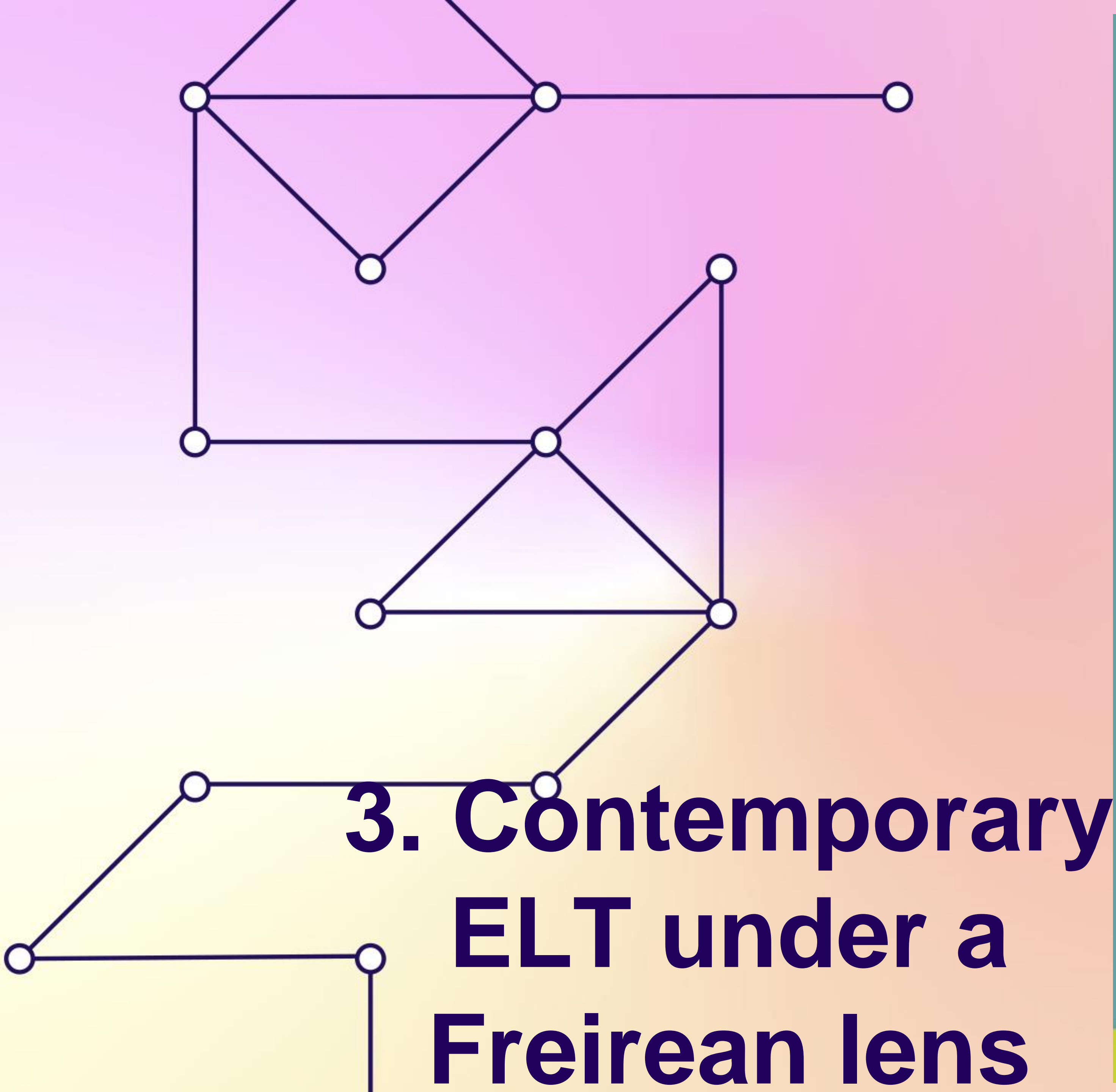
“Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people – they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress.”

*(Pedagogy of the Oppressed)*

“Language is never neutral.”

*(Pedagogy of the Oppressed)*











“Passive acceptance is a more desirable response to ideas than active criticism; Discovering knowledge is beyond the power of students and is, in any case, none of their business; Recall is the highest form of intellectual achievement, and the collection of unrelated ‘facts’ is the goal of education; The voice of authority is to be trusted and valued more than independent judgement; One’s own ideas and those of one’s classmates are inconsequential; Feelings are irrelevant in education; There is always a single, unambiguous Right Answer to a question.”

Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner  
*Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (1969)



1. Community, collaboration, and resilience
2. Learning technologies
3. Managing learning and teaching
4. The new learner and new ways of teaching
5. The Climate Connection
6. Continuous Professional Development
7. Assessment
8. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion
9. Research, evidence, and good practice
10. Curriculum, materials, and lesson planning



3. Managing learning and teaching

7. Assessment

8. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

9. Research, evidence, and good practice

10. Curriculum, materials, and lesson planning



## Theme 3. Managing learning and teaching

- STT vs TTT
- Teacher-centred, transmissive, 'jug and mug' model of pedagogy still common in many teaching contexts
- Four key reasons for this:
  - Untrained / inexperienced teachers teach as they were taught when they were at school;
  - This is the dominant approach taught in many teacher training colleges;
  - This is the approach expected by many parents, headteachers, inspectors and institutions;
  - When facing large classes and few resources, teachers find it more comfortable to adopt a teacher-centric model
- Learner-centredness overrepresented because of power issues





## Theme 3. Managing learning and teaching

- Freire was consistent about the importance of the teacher
- Teachers are “absolutely necessary” – “what is bad, what is not necessary, is authoritarianism rather than authority.” (Horton and Freire, 1990: 181)
- “The teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers”
- A teacher-centric model replicates the neoliberal paradigm (and challenges ‘language commodification’)





## Theme 7. Assessment

- High-stakes, standardised, summative assessment, often in the form of exams is common in the ELT sector
- “Teachers correct grammar and pronunciation in class to show that they know particular things about the language as they are not confident in their own pedagogy” (Jordanian teacher)
- Speaking is seldom assessed because it is complex and subjective
- Many students can display their learning ‘peacock like’ – but remain unable to use the language meaningfully





# Theme 7. Assessment

- “Today we had to give the English Language Arts state exam. That meant that I had to spend four periods reading a test out-loud first to a group of 8th grade Special-Education and English-Language Learner students and two more periods of reading out loud to [a seventh grade class] ... My voice still aches from all of the reading that I had to do.
- “Under contract with Pearson Education, my school and others across the state were required to administer “field tests” to our students to help the company “fine tune” questions for the following years’ exams.”

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Eric Ruiz Bybee 

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- “Some students reached their frustration level pretty quickly with the short answer/essay section. Since the proctoring rules prohibited me from either explaining things in Spanish or pointing to parts of the test, I ended up having to pantomime things for José, who neither speaks nor writes English well enough to do anything other than pick out cognate words.”



## Theme 8. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

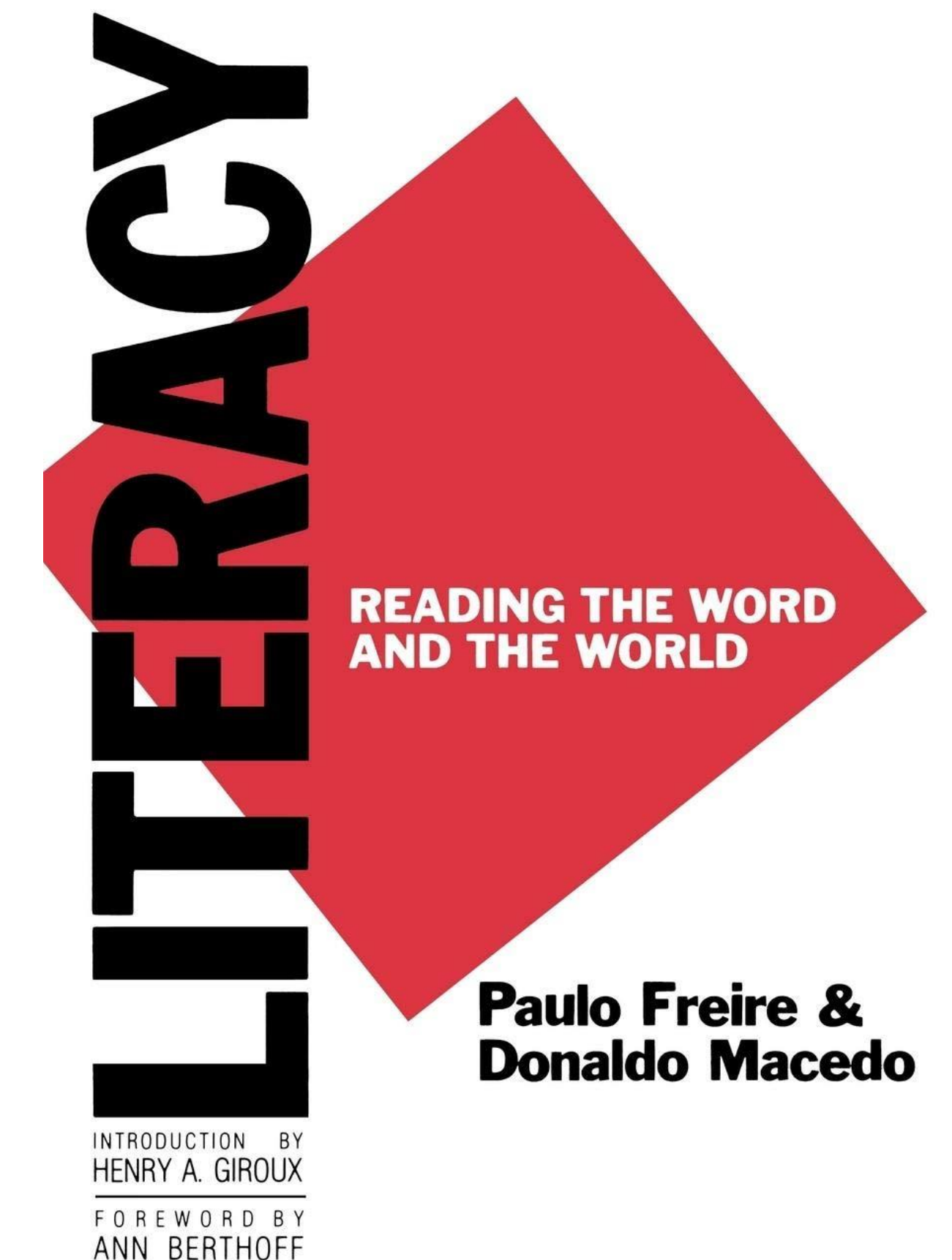


- Global drift towards EMI (English as a Medium of Instruction)
- 40% of children lack access to education in a language which they can either speak or understand
- Role of low-cost private schools
- Case of South Sudan



## Theme 8. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- “Literacy can only be emancipatory and critical to the extent that it is conducted in the language of the people.”
- “It is through the native language that students “name their world”
- “Literacy conducted in the dominant standard language empowers the ruling class by sustaining the status quo. It supports the maintenance of the elitist model of education.”



“A Culture of  
Silence”



# Theme 9. Research, Evidence and Good Practice

- “More Research is Needed’ – A Mantra Too Far?” (Maley, 2016)
- The balance of power between research and teaching is heavily weighted in favour of research
- Four reasons for this disconnect:
  - Teachers lack access (and finances to access) paywalled academic research;
  - Teachers lack time to implement evidence-led research;
  - Teachers are often not supported by other educational stakeholders in implementing changes (e.g. due to assessment pressures);
  - All the above are complicated by COVID / post-COVID landscape and emerging pressures





## Theme 9. Research, Evidence and Good Practice

- Praxis is central – research should be *for* something
- Teacher-led research, action research and reflective practice
- ‘Exploratory action research’: *“Dialogical theory requires that the world be unveiled. No one can, however, unveil the world FOR another.”*
- “Research is for teachers? You must be joking!” (Richard Smith)

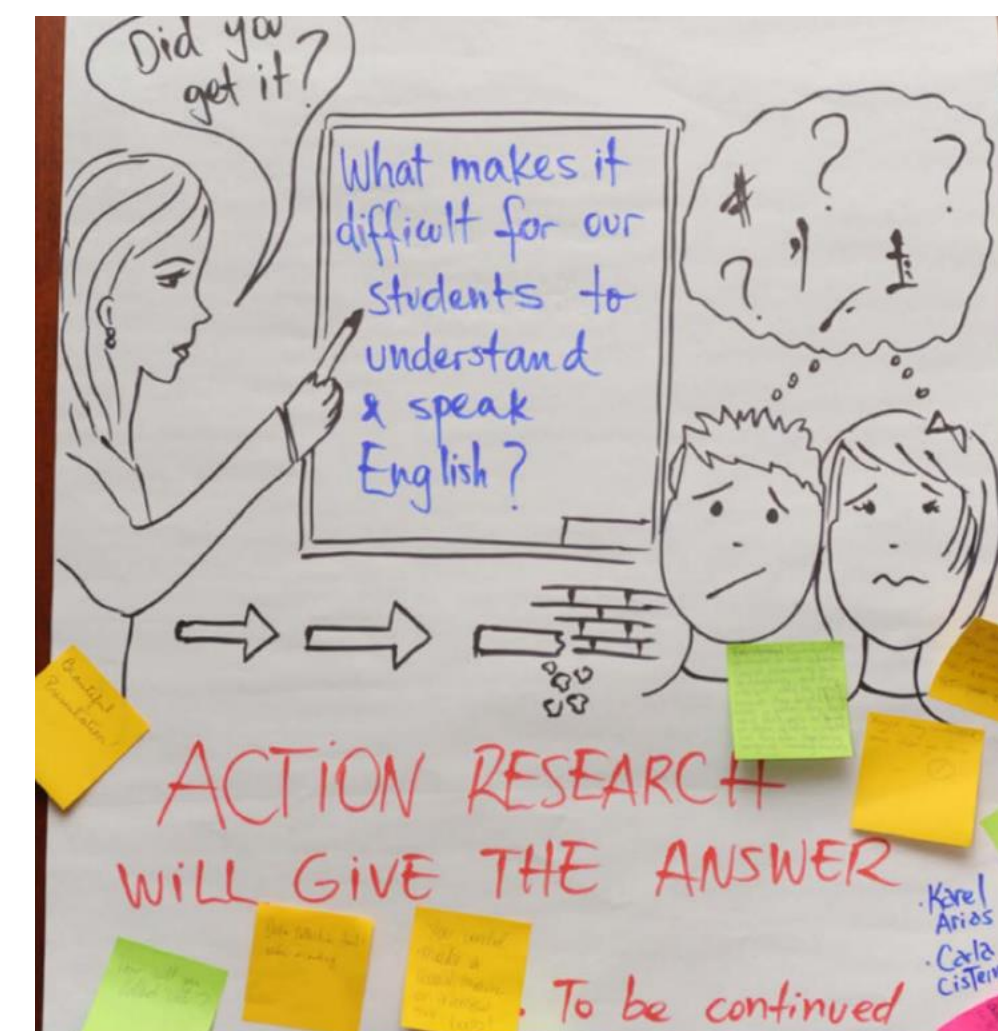
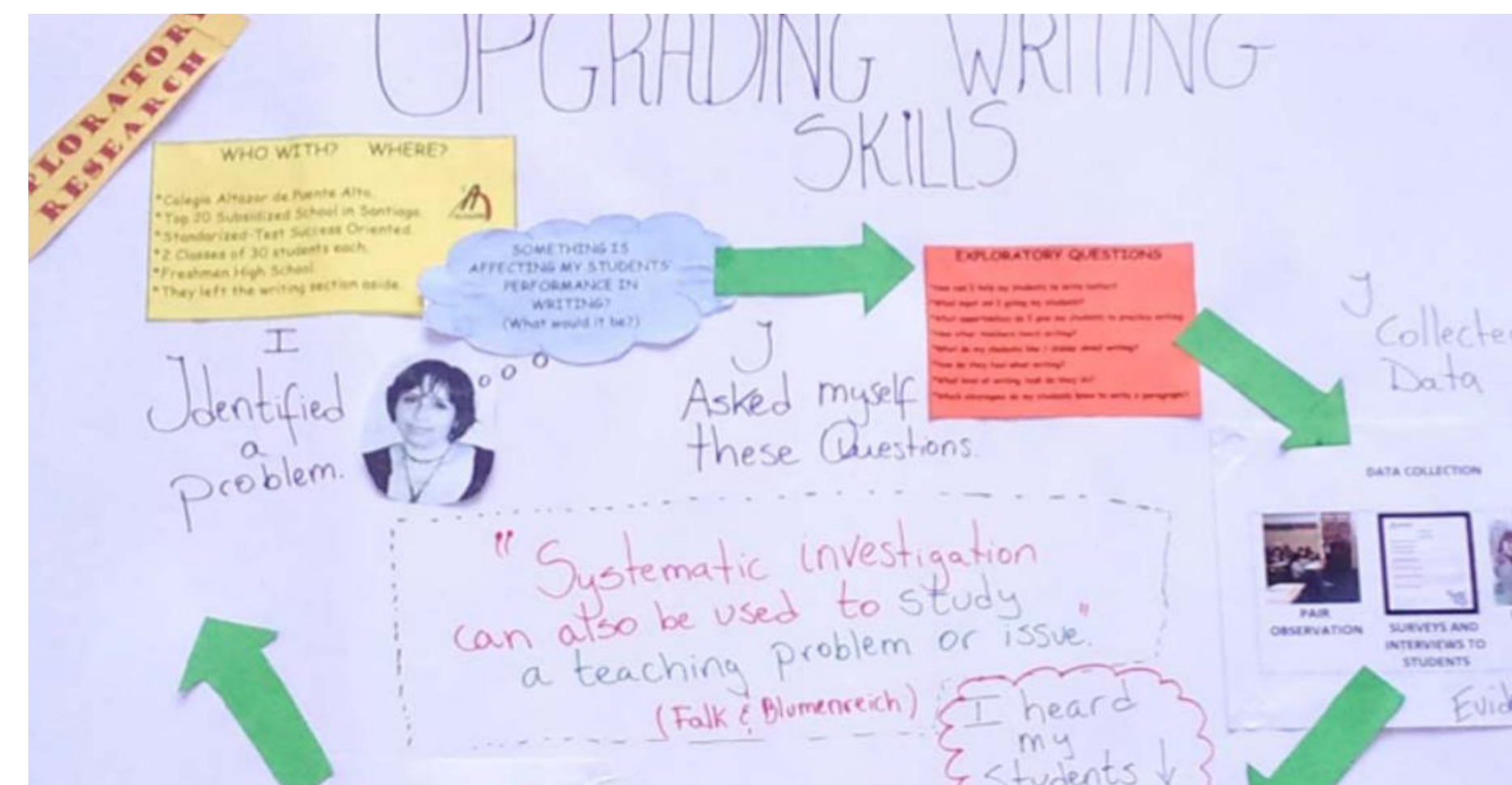




# Theme 9. Research, Evidence and Good Practice

[https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/pub\\_british\\_council\\_champion\\_teachers\\_1.pdf](https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/pub_british_council_champion_teachers_1.pdf)

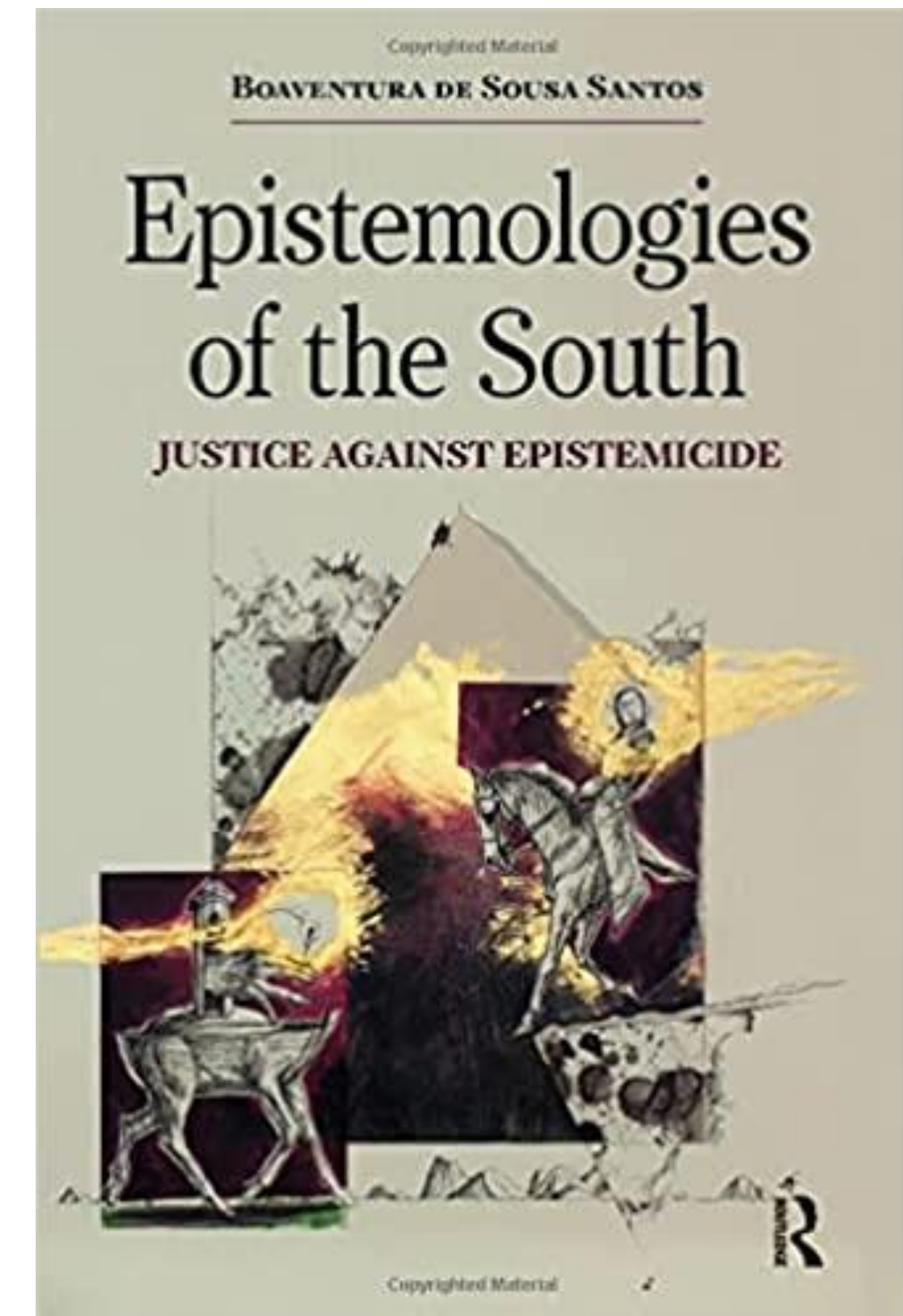
- The Champion Teachers project in Chile (Richard Smith)
- “My research journey started with a feeling, just a feeling that something wasn’t right. Going from that feeling to asking why, and finding out what works is the key.”
- “Action research is important because it lights a spark in the darkness of the system; it lights a spark in the mentality of the people who do not want to change”
- “I heard my students. I saw myself.”



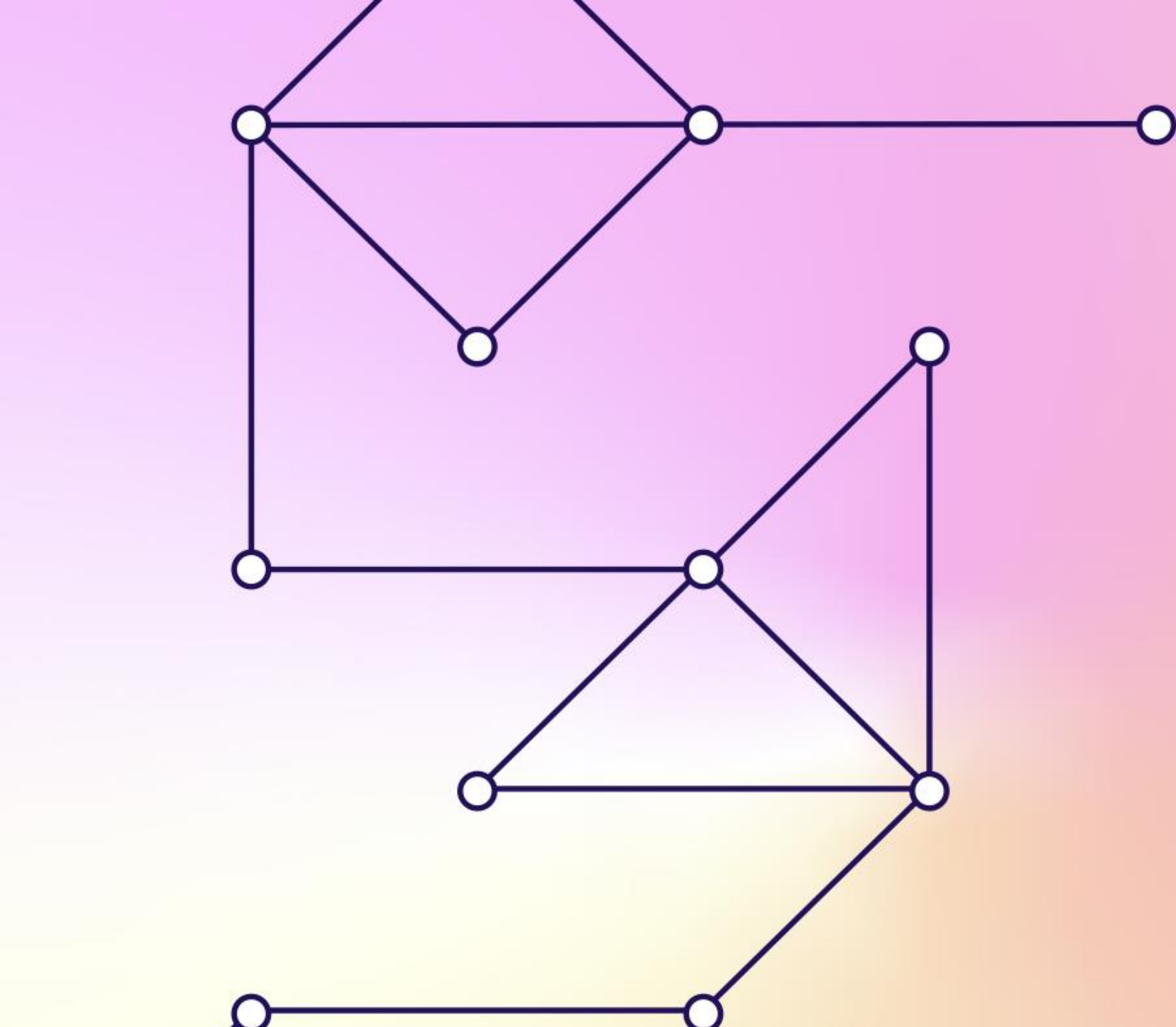


# Theme 10. Curriculum, Materials and Lesson Planning

- Synthetic syllabuses are common – resulting in a grammar / lexis focus
- Freire vs the idea of a formal curriculum – a relic of Brazil’s colonial past
- Decolonising the curriculum – *Epistemologies of the South* (de Sousa Santos)
- Language and social / epistemic justice
- “Abyssal thinking” – where Western modes of thinking have a “monopoly of the universal distinction between true and false to the detriment of ... alternative bodies of knowledge”







# 4. A Freirean ELT Agenda



# CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION



PAULO FREIRE  
FREEDOM SCHOOL

<https://www.paulofreireschool.org/about/academicprogram/>

- “All humans deserve a life of dignity and all of us are stewards of the planet.”
- “We design our curricula ‘backwards’ ... we begin by designating what learning is essential and then plan how to get students to demonstrate those desired learning outcomes [using] essential questions that are provocative, relevant and multifaceted.”
- “We use Project Based Learning, additionally, we incorporate Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) into our integrated units of instruction.”



# EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING



PAULO FREIRE  
FREEDOM SCHOOL

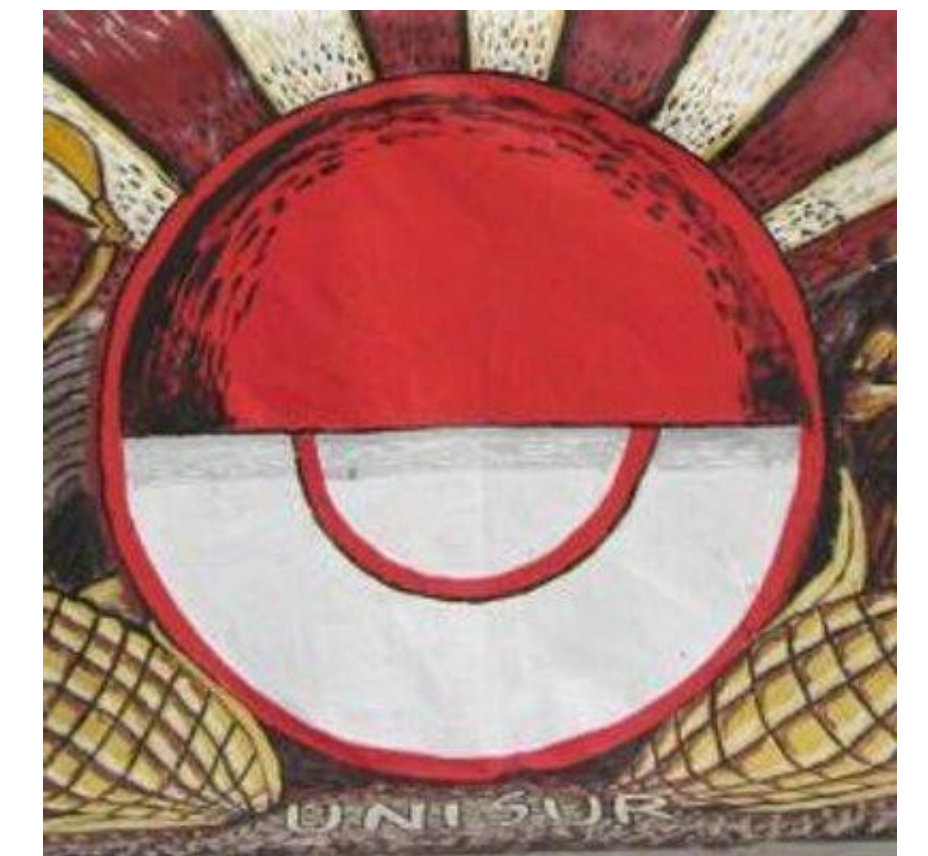
<https://www.paulofreireschool.org/about/academicprogram/>

- “Twice a year we break from regular classroom instruction to instead pursue topics of interest in depth for a week, e.g. Political Musical Theater, Law, Urban Gardening.”
- “On a regular basis students explore their community in field trips that build background knowledge, connect school learning to real world experiences, and help prepare students for life in the adult world.”
- “Service Learning is woven into all aspects of our school.”



# UNISUR (Universidad de los Pueblos del Sur)

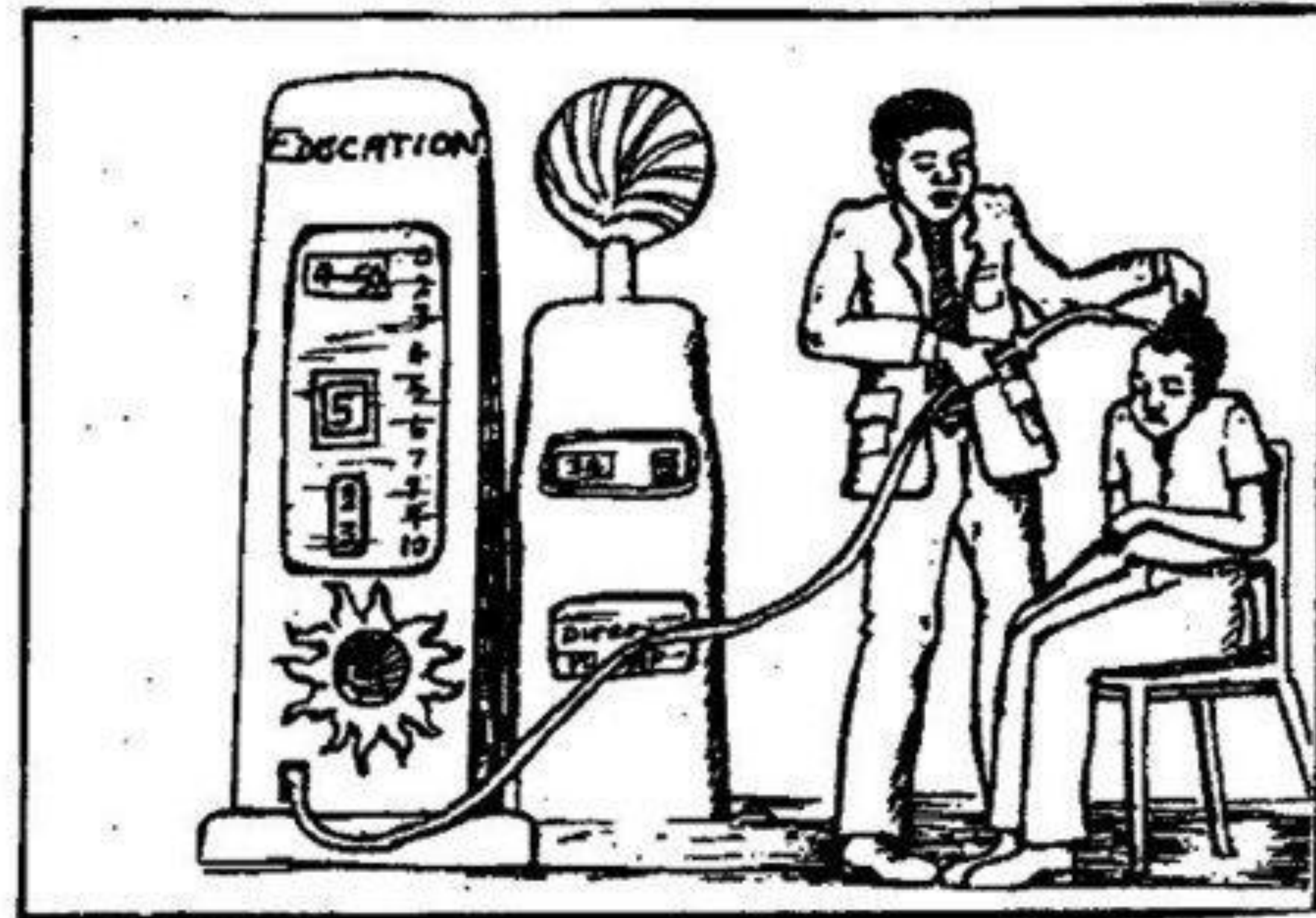
- Established with the aim of providing higher education with a humanistic, ethical focus in the Freirean tradition;
- Totally independent of governmental authorities;
- Teaching is provided free, in solidarity;
- The learning and pedagogy is connected to its surroundings, its culture and its needs.





# 1. Genuinely critical pedagogy

- STT ⇒ SDT (discussion) / SAT (analytical) / SRT (reflection) time
- Teacher: instructor / knower ⇒ organizer / coach
- Postmethodology – “Method is a prescriptive concept that articulates a positivist, progressivist, and patriarchal understanding of teaching” (Pennycook)





## 2. Socially-active learning

- Learning should be linked to social activism
- The outside world of the community should be brought into the classroom, and vice-versa
- The classroom and the community are overlapping entities





## 3. Participatory language policy

- Importance of local / minority / non-dominant languages
- Multilingual practices such as code-switching and translanguaging would be normalised and encouraged
- Changes to assessment practices to ensure epistemic and linguistic justice





## 4. Pro-learner content

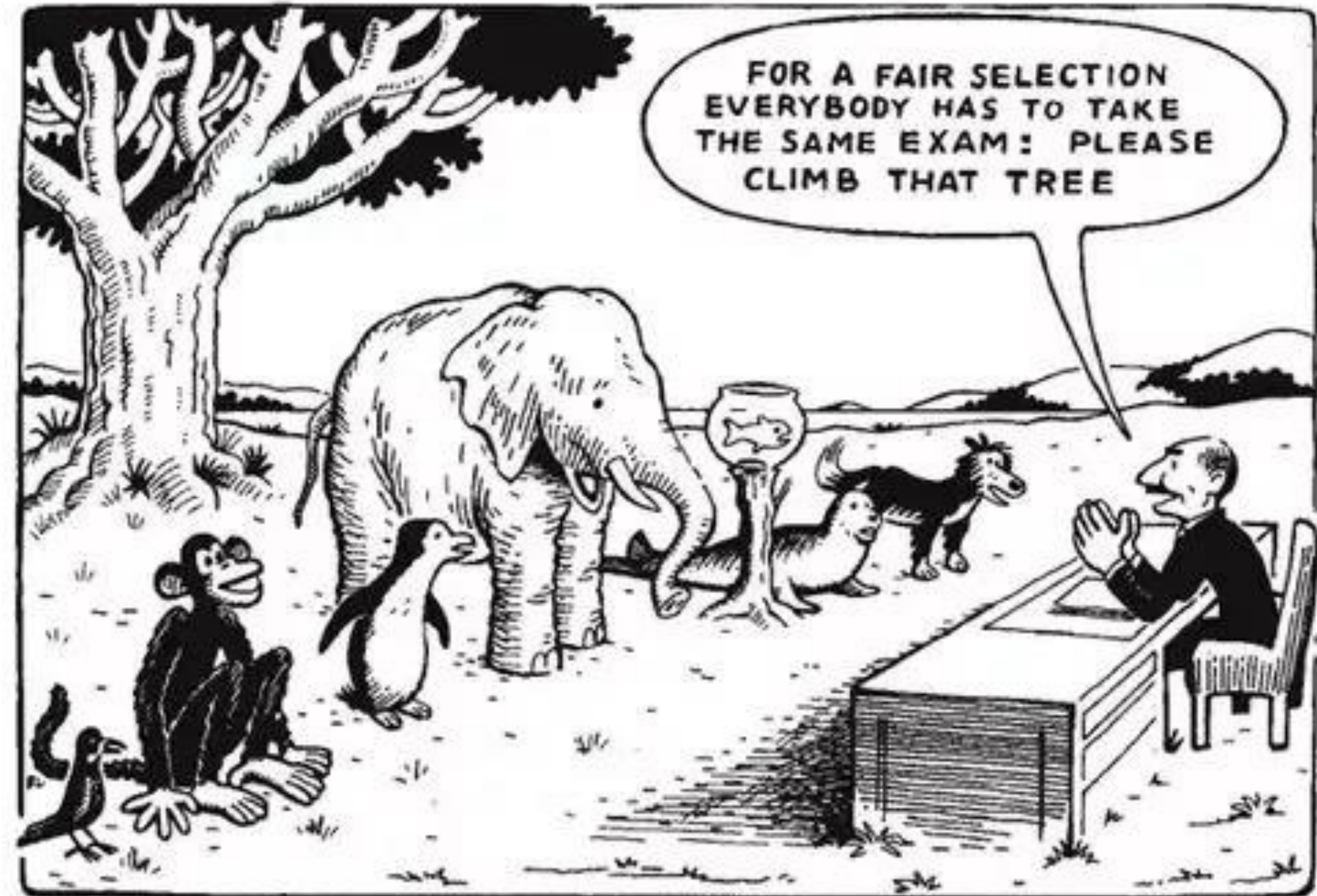
- Coursebooks should not simply represent the views and interests of dominant groups
- Move towards competency-based syllabuses / curriculums
- Co-construction of content
- Dogme ELT, dialogism and the 'state of grace'
- Content should be additive not deficit – pro-learner rather than anti-materials





# 5. Differently-measured progress

- Valorise different forms of ‘progress’, including ‘softer’ indicators
- Reforms to consider to mainstream ELT assessment include:
  - More emphasis on formative rather than summative assessment
  - Multilingualism normalised within the assessment process;
  - Assessment should be continuous not one-off, high-stakes;
  - Assessment should evaluate competencies – what students can do with the language, not what they can performatively demonstrate they know about it
  - Speaking should form a core component of assessment.





## 6. Gap-bridging technology

- “It is not the media themselves which I criticize, but the way they are used”
- “The powerful role that electronically mediated culture plays in shaping identities, and the importance of the changing nature of the production of knowledge in the age of computer-based technologies”
- Affordable technology and open source platforms can be emancipatory





# 7. Empowering physical learning space





## 8. Impactful, participatory professional development

- CPD models should follow and adapt the same principles as with students
- All relevant stakeholders should be actively engaged, as co-producers and co-consumers
- Emphasis should be on the impact of training – not just the act of doing it





## 9. Reimagined rationale for learning English

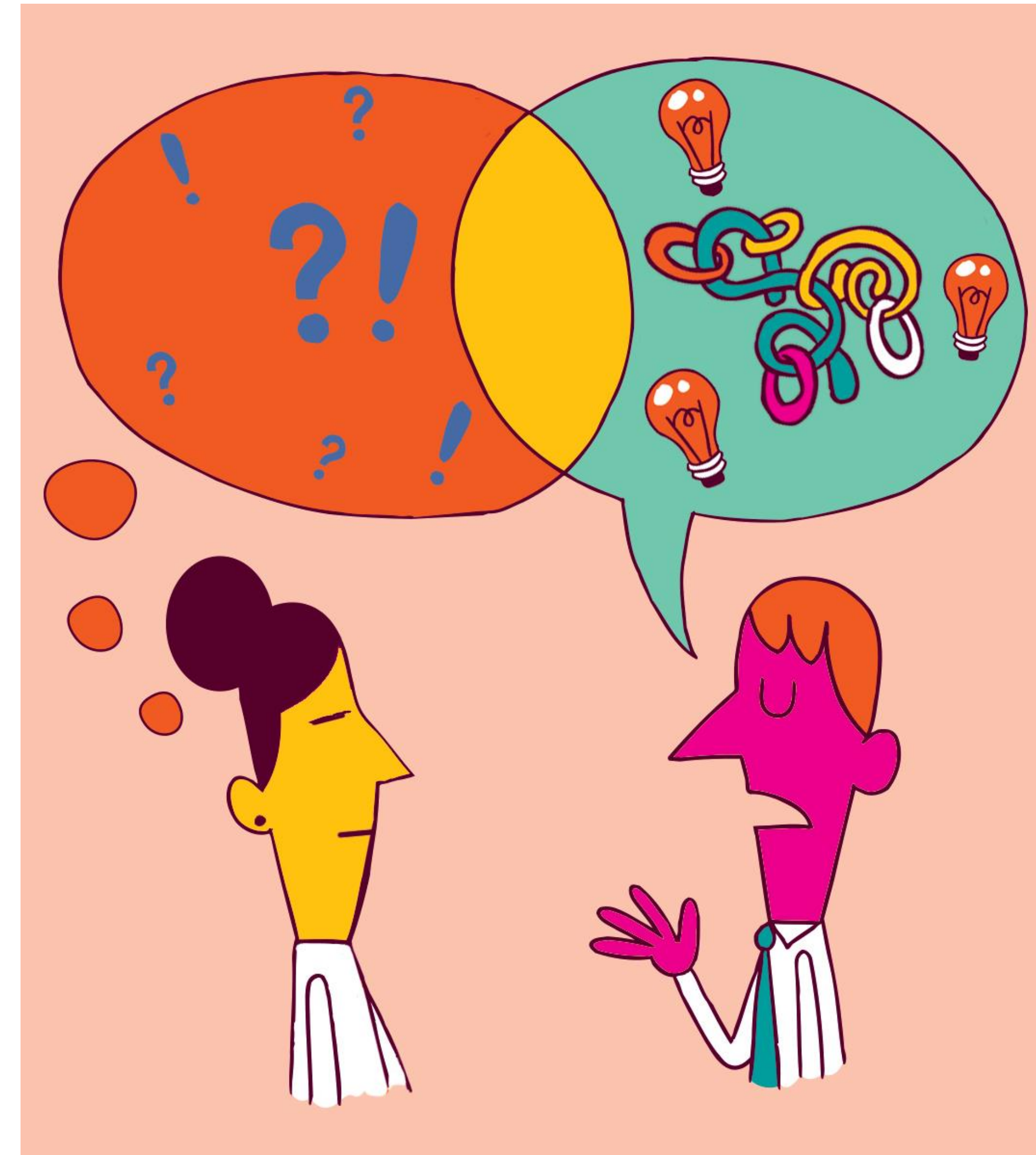
- Should not be a positional good or ticket into the global elite
- An additional linguistic resource for participating in a global conversation about positive social change
- Vs prestige forms of English
- Vs Native-speakerism





# 10. Revised nomenclature

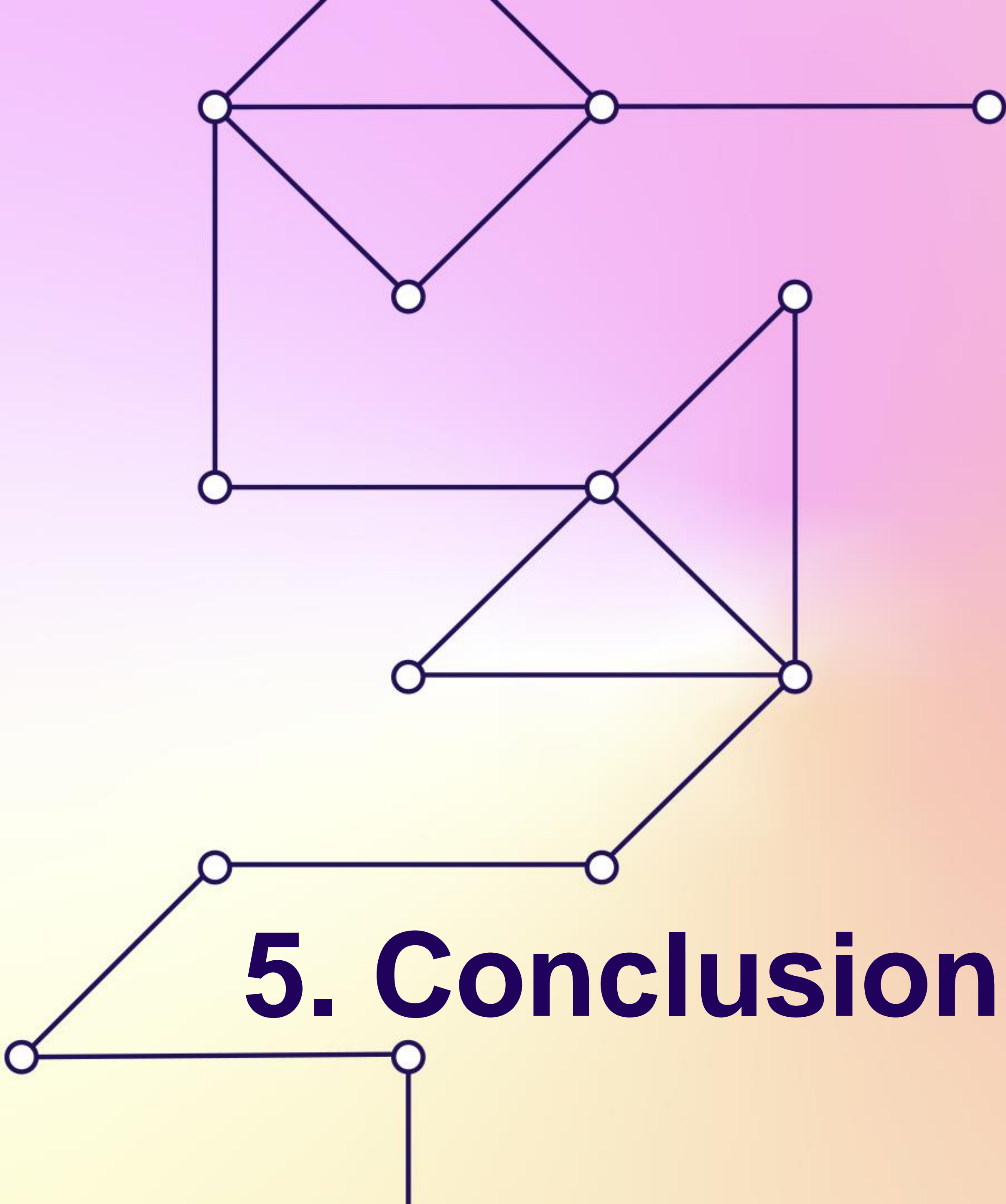
- Words such as *inspector*, *instruction* and *scheme of work* have particular connotations – q.v. hierarchical relations, a prescriptive curriculum, and an atomised concept of learning
- “Critical thinking”
- Learning vs teaching; support vs feedback; change vs progress**





1. Genuinely critical pedagogy
2. Socially-active learning
3. Participatory language policy
4. Pro-learner content
5. Differently-measured progress
6. Gap-bridging technology
7. Empowering physical learning space
8. Impactful, participatory professional development
9. Reimagined rationale for learning English
10. Revised nomenclature





# 5. Conclusion





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**Thank you  
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