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The Practice of Liberation: Radical Pedagogy in *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*

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Abstract  
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My honors thesis consists of a two-part analysis of the Costa Rican *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*. The almanac, first published in 1966, consists of yearly editions aimed at improving educational attainment and literacy for rural Central American adults. The almanac was the most widely distributed publication in Central America at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and has been in publication for fifty-three years. So far, the majority of the literature on the almanac comes from celebratory publications written exclusively by and for Central Americans. English-language academia seems to have missed what I perceive as an important Latin American educational project.<sup>1</sup> Thus, a principal motivation of my thesis is to introduce *Escuela Para Todos Almanac* to an English-speaking audience and contextualize the almanac within the broader context of popular education in Latin America. Secondly, I hope to further the collective understanding of *Escuela Para Todos* by connecting the almanac to larger pedagogical theories and evaluating the almanac within the framework of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's liberation pedagogy. In my analysis, I argue that *Escuela Para Todos* is ideologically grounded in Freire's liberation-based approach to education. Furthermore, I assert that the content of the almanac strongly reflects Freirean principles, suggesting an effective implementation of his theory. I conclude that *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* is a successful case of an educational project based in liberation pedagogy and merits more attention by scholars of Latin American and popular education.

Resumen

Mi tesis consiste en un análisis de dos partes sobre la publicación costarricense *Almanaque escuela para todos*. El almanaque, publicado por primera vez en 1966, consiste en ediciones anuales que tienen el propósito de mejorar el nivel de educación y alfabetización para los habitantes rurales de Centroamérica. El almanaque ha sido la publicación más distribuida en la región a principios del siglo 21 y ha estado en publicación continua por cincuenta y tres años. Hasta ahora, la mayoría de la recepción crítica del almanaque viene de publicaciones celebradoras escritas exclusivamente por centroamericanos para centroamericanos. Los círculos académicos anglohablantes han ignorado lo que yo percibo como un importante proyecto educacional en Latinoamérica. Consecuentemente, una motivación principal de mi tesis es introducir el *Almanaque escuela para todos* y ubicarlo dentro del contexto abarcador de la educación popular en Latinoamérica. Adicionalmente, elevaré nuestro entendimiento colectivo del almanaque al conectar el almanaque con las teorías pedagógicas y evaluar el almanaque usando la teoría de Paulo Freire de la pedagogía liberacionista. En mi análisis, postulo que *Almanaque Escuela para todos* está ideológicamente basado en las concepciones educativas de Freire. Adicionalmente, afirmo que el contenido del almanaque fuertemente refleja principios freirianos, sugiriendo una implementación efectiva de su teoría. Concluyo que *Almanaque escuela para todos* sirve como un caso fructuoso de un proyecto educacional basado en la pedagogía liberacionista y merece más atención por los académicos de la educación popular y educación Latinoamericana.

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<sup>1</sup> Julio Suñol, *Milagro en la cintura de Centroamerica* (Costa Rica: Editorial UACA, 2001) 44.

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## Preface

I remember my first experience with *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* vividly. I was around eight years old, sprawled out across my aunt's couch in San Jose, Costa Rica, watching old "Power Rangers" re-runs when my mother turned off the TV. "Here! Read this," she exclaimed, tired of watching me waste my day. "I used to read this as a kid," she added, and handed me a small paperback book. The colorful illustrations on the cover immediately caught my eye, so I decided I might as well give the book a shot. After reading the first story, I was drawn into the world of *Escuela Para Todos*. The content in the almanac was seemingly unlimited. There were enthralling fictional stories that were simple enough for me to read, interesting information about different parts of the world, and even entertainment sections made for active enjoyment. I continued to read *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* every year until my adolescence, when I considered myself too mature to read the almanac's simple language. However, the morals within each story, interesting facts on Latin America, and cute jokes remained cemented in my mind. Although I was unaware of it at the time, *Escuela Para Todos* improved my Spanish reading comprehension while simultaneously helping me form a deeper understanding of my Costa Rican identity. Furthermore, my experience with *Escuela Para Todos* is a shared one. Several hundred thousand Central Americans read *Escuela Para Todos* every year, and many generations of Central Americans, including most of my family, grew up reading the almanac.

Last summer, I was struggling to find a topic for my upcoming thesis. I knew I wanted to write about a Costa Rican topic, but there was nothing that sparked my interest. After weeks of researching, I had an epiphany. Why not write about *Escuela Para Todos*? Besides being the most widely distributed publication in Central America, the almanac was something to which I



had a close personal connection.<sup>2</sup> What's more, the almanac had never been studied in an English-speaking academic context. At that moment, I knew it was my responsibility to pursue such a unique and beautiful project and present it to U.S. academia.

While the almanac, like any ambitious and idealistic educational program, is not without its shortcomings, the ideas articulated by the almanac are revolutionary. *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* preaches a pedagogy based on care, dialogue and understanding in order to connect with the most marginalized sectors of Central America. This novel educational philosophy represents a radical departure from public school expansion, which acted as the primary method of increasing educational attainment in the region, yet the almanac has thrived for over fifty years, outlasting the era when popular education was considered a panacea to solving educational inequities.<sup>3</sup> Academically, I hope that my project demonstrates why *Escuela Para Todos* is such an important educational undertaking in Latin America. Beyond that, I truly wish that the reader sees how *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* can be so profoundly impactful for people like me who grew up anxiously awaiting its yearly publication and avidly reading the almanac.

## I. Introduction

"The little I know in life I owe to the Bible, nature and *Escuela Para Todos*" writes Fausto Ugalde. Fausto, a Costa Rican farmer who left elementary school to support his eleven siblings, typifies the impoverished, rural Central Americans excluded from traditional systems of public education. Despite a lack of formal education, these rural communities still demonstrated a desire to learn but did not have access to educational material that fit their level of comprehension. *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* (Almanac School for Everybody), the topic of this current study, is a Costa Rican almanac that aims to fill this educational gap by consistently

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<sup>2</sup> Suñol, *Milagro en la cintura de Centroamerica*, 42.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas LaBelle. "The Changing Nature of Non-formal Education in Latin America." *Comparative Education* 36 vol. 1 (2000): 21-36.

providing educational material to rural communities in Central America. The almanac works under the umbrella of the Central American Institute of Cultural Extension (ICECU), a non-profit organization dedicated to improving educational access in Central America outside of the established school system. Along with the almanac, the ICECU communicates with rural Central Americans through a radio program, called “*Oigamos la Respuesta* (Let’s Hear the Answer),” and an ongoing correspondence with readers and listeners through letters, email and telephone. Founded in 1963, the ICECU and *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* were born in the midst of the movements of non-formal and popular education that galvanized educational thought in Latin America at that time. These movements hoped to educate and alphabetize the most marginalized rural communities in the region through methods outside of the established formal school system.<sup>4</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* served the same essential functions, but focused on establishing continual education, rather than stopping the educational process after alphabetization.<sup>5</sup> While the number of large-scale popular education initiatives and the legitimacy of non-formal educational projects have diminished in the past fifty years, the ICECU and *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* continue their extensive efforts to educate Central Americans.<sup>6</sup> The almanac sells several hundred-thousand copies every year, which demonstrates significant interest in the provided educational content.<sup>7</sup> This regional success notwithstanding, the almanac has rarely been analyzed in an academic light and has not been introduced to an English-speaking audience. Part III of my project serves this introductory purpose.

*Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* serves as an important case study for non-formal education research in Latin America, and its exclusion from academic circles represents a gap in the

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<sup>4</sup> “Formal” education refers to the classroom-based, hierarchical, primary to post-secondary school system. Non-formal education encompasses any educational program outside of the formal system.

<sup>5</sup> “Publicaciones.” *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, accessed March 31, 2019.

<https://almanaqueept.org/publicaciones-ept/>

<sup>6</sup> Labelle, “Changing Nature of Nonformal Education,” 21.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Fonseca, Email to author, March 18, 2019.

academic literature on the subject. I will address this omission by analyzing *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* in the context of the theory and practice of non-formal education movements in Latin America, with a particular focus on Brazilian educator and philosopher's Paulo Freire's revolutionary theory of liberation pedagogy, which is one of the most important foundations of non-formal education; thus, locating the *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* project within liberation pedagogy will contextualize the theoretical space in which the almanac was founded and establish its guiding principles. I accomplish this contextualization by tracing the points of alignment between the ICECU organization and liberation pedagogy. The central part of my project, however, is the analysis of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* within the framework of Freire's pedagogy. My principal questions for the entire project are:

1. How do I explain the structure of content of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* to an English-speaking audience?
2. Where do *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* and the ICECU fit in Latin American educational theory?
3. To what degree does the content of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* reflect the values of liberation pedagogy?

My analysis will explore the alignment between *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* and liberation pedagogy to establish whether the almanac can be considered a successful implementation of Freirean principles. The findings of my analysis hold important implications for educators and academics in the fields of education, Latin American studies, and critical pedagogy.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Critical pedagogy is the academic field derived from Freire's philosophy. I take a closer look at the basis of critical pedagogy in Part two of the background (page 11).

## II. Background

### 1. Education in Latin America: Issues and Developments

As a developing region, Latin America has focused on improving its educational systems for the past century. Following widespread revolutionary movements at the beginning of the nineteenth century that led to independence from Spain and the formation of a number of new nations, the new national governments began implementing mass-education policies in the late nineteenth century. These policies, typified by a rapid expansion of the primary school system, were eventually adopted throughout Central and South America by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Increasing educational opportunities had a series of implications for nation-building efforts; early Independence leaders such as Simon Bolivar (and those who followed) recognized the value of nationwide education.<sup>9</sup> Politically, educational attainment tends to be linked with the democratization process. Universal access to a high-quality education facilitates equitable opportunities for social mobility and allows for citizens to become informed members of their nation. Therefore, access to high-quality education is seen as a stepping stone towards developing a democratic nation.<sup>10</sup> Apart from the political implications of educational access, education serves crucial functions in relation to personal development. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Agency (UNESCO) establishes that education should serve four fundamental purposes: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be.<sup>11</sup> Certain skills acquired by the successful implementation of the “Four Pillars”

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<sup>9</sup> Frankema, Ewout. “The Expansion of Mass Education in Twentieth Century Latin America: A Global Comparative Perspective.” *Revista de Historia Economica / Journal of Iberian and Latin American Economic History* 27, vol 3. (2009): 359-396.

<sup>10</sup> UNESCO. *Regional Report about Education for All in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Report. Santiago: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Guadelupe, Cesar. *The State of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean: Guaranteeing Quality Education for All: A Regional Report, Reviewing and Assessing the Progress towards Education for All within the Framework of the Regional Education Project (EFA/PRELAC) - 2007*. Santiago: Unesco, 2008.

are the ability to think critically, learning how to work in a team, and the fostering of identity and autonomy, illustrating that education has far-reaching implications beyond the simple acquisition of facts.<sup>12</sup>

Due to the integral role that education plays in human development and democratization, the United Nations stated in a 1982 report that access to a high-quality education should be a fundamental human right in Latin America.<sup>13</sup> However, despite a series of governmental initiatives, international interventions, and the implementation of widespread primary education, two chronic problems continued to plague Latin American educational expansion efforts in the twentieth century: high rates of adult illiteracy and the educational disparity between urban and rural Latin Americans.<sup>14</sup> Both were closely correlated with the overarching socioeconomic inequality throughout the region and perpetuated by the nature of the public educational system. Although there were more public schools in rural areas, these institutions did not have adequate resources to properly educate the growing impoverished rural population.<sup>15</sup>

To be sure, Latin America has seen progress in terms of literacy. In the 1960s (when *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* was first published), literacy rates were 71%.<sup>16</sup> but a recent UNESCO study found that those for Latin Americans and Caribbeans aged fifteen and up had jumped to almost 93%, a notable increase and the highest among developing regions.<sup>17</sup> The increased literacy rates, which may be attributed to increased emphasis on universal primary education in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, did not, however, eliminate the social issues correlated with

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *El desarrollo de América Latina y sus repercusiones en la educación. Alfabetismo y escolaridad básica*. Santiago de Chile, Santiago de Chile : CEPAL, 1982.

<sup>14</sup> UNESCO defines Latin America as nations in Central America, South America and the Caribbean. I will continue to use the UNESCO definition of Latin America, but I focus on Central American examples. The educational trends in Latin America reflect the trends in Central America.

<sup>15</sup> Labelle , “Changing Nature of Nonformal Education,” 24.

<sup>16</sup> CEPAL, *El desarrollo de America Latina y sus repercusiones en la educación*.

<sup>17</sup> UNESCO. *Regional Report about Education for All in Latin America*.

illiteracy. High levels of illiteracy and low levels of educational attainment are still systematically associated with indigenous, poor and rural communities, and traditional educational institutions have been unable to combat such social inequities.

Despite Latin America's status as the most literate developing region, illiteracy rates for indigenous and rural populations are still double or triple those of urban populations.<sup>18</sup> In the 1960s, only 15% of urban Latin America was illiterate as opposed to the 44.7% illiteracy rates for rural Latin Americans.<sup>19</sup> Scholars identified several reasons to explain why rural populations continually display comparatively low literacy rates. In general, rural communities tend to be economically disadvantaged, and the majority of this population lives on small farms at a level of stationary subsistence based on manual labor. This agricultural way of life depends on using urban-based intermediaries to transport, distribute and fund the farmer's products. The overwhelming dependence on urban outsiders creates a social system in which the rural farmer is left with little opportunity for autonomous social mobility. Furthermore, the relative distance between farmers and urban centers, exacerbated by the intermediary nature of the agricultural process, leaves rural communities isolated from the governments that decide on potentially impactful policies.<sup>20</sup>

The struggles of rural communities underscore the larger problem facing poor Latin Americans. Thirty-five percent of Latin Americans continue to live below the poverty line, and economic growth in the region disproportionately helps the wealthy while widening the inequality gap between the rich and the poor.<sup>21</sup> As a result, higher socioeconomic classes have more

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<sup>18</sup> Torres, C. A. and A. Puiggrós. *Latin American Education: Comparative Perspectives*. Boulder, Co.: WestviewPress, 1997.

<sup>19</sup> CEPAL, *El desarrollo de America Latina y sus repercusiones en la educación*. 43. The disparity is also notable between gender, with females having lower literacy rates across the region.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas La Belle, *Nonformal Education and Social Change in Latin America*. (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1976), 7.

<sup>21</sup> UNESCO. *Regional Report about Education for All in Latin America*.

opportunities for education and social mobility, while the poor are left behind. The disparity in educational attainment between the rich and poor in Latin America is enormous. For example, the wealthiest 20% of teenagers in Guatemala receive about three times as much schooling as the poorest 40% of the country.<sup>22</sup> While Latin American nations unilaterally increased access to primary education in the twentieth century, many scholars still assert that systems of formal education perpetuate rather than alleviate educational inequality.<sup>23</sup> After UNESCO performed an extensive analysis of the state of education in Latin America in 2007, the organization concluded that formal educational systems “have not been able to reverse social inequalities; rather they reproduce them.”<sup>24</sup>

To better understand UNESCO’s conclusion, one must trace the development of neoliberal educational policies in Latin America and consider the nature of the public-school system. Latin American nations long-believed that the most effective measure of combatting widespread illiteracy and educational inequality was through a rapid expansion of the school system.<sup>25</sup> However, in the 1980s and 1990s, the expansion was generally implemented through new conservative, economically-based neoliberal policies, which argue in favor of investing in the first four years of education while minimizing investment in secondary and post-secondary education. Additionally, neoliberal policies favored the privatization of schooling and a decentralization of the educational system, which tended to result in bureaucratic structures that operated administratively far away from rural students in urban centers, mainly in the capital cities.<sup>26</sup> The increasing educational inequities between the urban elite and the marginalized rural

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<sup>22</sup> Fernando Reimers. “Education and Poverty in Latin America: Can Schools Make Any Difference?” *David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies*, Spring 1999, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Jara, Oscar H. . “Popular education and social change in Latin America.” *Community Development Journal* 45 vol. 3 (2010), 288; Torres, C. A. and A. Puiggrós. *Latin American Education*, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Guadalupe, Cesar. *The State of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> La Belle, *Nonformal Education and Social Change*, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Torres, C. A. and A. Puiggrós. *Latin American Education*, 84.

classes are attributed in large part to this rapid expansion of the school system, combined with the neoliberal nature of regional educational policies. As scholar Robert G. Myers stated, “increasing access...and expanding mediocre schools does little to democratize them if there is stratification within a national school system and if a discriminatory mode of selection exists.”<sup>27</sup> Neoliberal policies based on school-system privatization effectively stratified the school system, and the bureaucratic gap between urban administrators and rural students increased the disconnect between educators and students. Furthermore, the lack of investment in secondary and higher education heightened the disparities of achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged groups at those levels. Equity gaps between privileged and marginalized groups are more marked at higher levels of education, demonstrating that educational inequalities at primary levels exacerbate the inequalities later on in the educational system. The end result, therefore, is a school system that adds to a “complex set of social exclusion that denies a basic purpose of education linked to the creation of equal opportunities among persons.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, neoliberal educational policies created a large public-school system that does not have adequate resources to properly educate marginalized communities. When combined with other inequities associated with poverty and rural life, formal education has perpetuated the systematic subjugation of lower-class Latin Americans for decades.

A consideration of the school system itself may also help clarify problematic issues that limit equality in universal education. In providing this overview I draw on the work of Costa Rican scholar Guillermo Malavassi Vargas, who argues that formal education has turned into a “universal trick” based on title and money rather than the human need to know.<sup>29</sup> The

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<sup>27</sup> Robert G. Myers, “The Changing Face of Education in Latin America.” *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 30 vol. 4 (1972): 54.

<sup>28</sup> Guadelupe, Cesar. *The State of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Malavassi is the author of *Comprender lo Comprensible*, which outlines the theory behind the ICECU. A further analysis of this theory is discussed in Section III.



compulsory nature of the school system turns education into a “jail of intelligence” that contrasts the fundamental right of educational liberty, while public schools and urban-based teachers can only teach an “alienated knowledge” to rural populations, contributing to the reduction of personal identity.<sup>30</sup> This alienated knowledge delivered by a coercive system causes rural populations to feel alienated from the formal school system, leading them to drop out before they are adequately educated. Overall, both the nature of formal schooling and increasingly neoliberal educational expansion efforts exacerbated the inequalities of a system that benefited the urban, privileged members of the region and persistently limited the opportunities of the rural poor.

While the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s compounded the inequalities of the public-school system, Latin American educators and scholars had recognized the inability of the public-school system to adequately educate poor, rural communities since the mid-twentieth century. In response, movements of popular and non-formal education emerged in countries such as Nicaragua, Brazil, Cuba and Bolivia and gained legitimacy throughout Latin America.<sup>31</sup> These popular education movements called for the “construction of a new educational paradigm which challenges the dominating capitalist model of an authoritarian education.”<sup>32</sup> This paradigm, which can arise in formal or non-formal educational contexts, generally encompassed “all educational processes that seek to build egalitarian and fair relationships that respect diversity and equal rights amongst people.”<sup>33</sup> The theory of popular education was implemented in a variety of educational programs to reduce adult illiteracy between the 1950s and 1980s.

While certain programs, such as the Sandinista literary campaigns in the 1980s, were implemented by national governments, most developments in popular education came through non-formal channels of education. Non-formal education, a term coined by Philip Coombs and

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<sup>30</sup> Guillermo Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*, (Costa Rica: ICECU) 45-47

<sup>31</sup> Labelle, “Changing Nature of Nonformal Education,” 21.

<sup>32</sup> Jara, “Popular education and social change in Latin America,” 290.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

Manzoor Ahmed, is defined as “any organized, systematic educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal school system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups of the population.”<sup>34</sup> In Latin America, non-formal educational initiatives were widely utilized as a strategy for change and socioeconomic progress for the poor and disenfranchised.<sup>35</sup> The initiatives were typically associated with community-based organizations, radio programs and international assistance, and were replicated in different forms regionally, but their implementation would not have been possible without parallel developments in Latin American pedagogical theory.

While scholars such as Ivan Illich, Thomas J. LaBelle and Ira Shor elaborated on the idea of popular education as a socially liberating process – an idea that became mainstream in Latin America – the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and his contributions to this field cannot be underestimated and are central to this thesis. Freire’s theory of liberating, or critical pedagogy, became a cornerstone in Latin American education and influenced the majority of popular education initiatives in the region. In the next section, I outline Freire’s educational philosophy as a basis for understanding the theory behind non-formal education, as well as begin to explore the theoretical underpinnings of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*.

## **2. Paulo Freire and Liberation Pedagogy**

Paulo Freire is arguably the most influential Latin American educational philosopher of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Beginning in 1968 with the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire introduced to a global audience innovative theories and strategies for improving literacy for poor, marginalized communities. His theories, referred to from hereinafter as liberation pedagogy, criticize the neoliberal formal education system and introduce a pedagogy that

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<sup>34</sup> M. Ginsburg., et al. “Nonformal Education and Social Reproduction/Transformation: Educational Radio in Mexico.” *Comparative Education Review* 28 vol 1 (1984), 117.

<sup>35</sup> Labelle, “Changing Nature of Nonformal Education,” 22.

engenders dialogue, critical thinking and social change. Although his work originally focused on Brazil, and Latin America more generally, Freire traveled the world developing popular literacy methods and disseminating his pedagogical theories until his death in 1997. Freire's political, liberation-based approach to education represented a radical departure from the dominant neoliberal discourses on education and catalyzed the field of critical pedagogy. His pedagogical influence is far-reaching, and his methods have been used in popular literacy programs and educational institutions worldwide, including in Brazil, Guinea-Bissau and the United States.<sup>36</sup> Freire's intellectual output is extensive and cannot be condensed without missing significant points. However, in what follows, I establish a baseline understanding of Freirean philosophy and methodology through the analysis of four books and a series of essays he wrote throughout his lifetime, in order to clarify his theory and illuminate the aspects of his pedagogical methods relevant to my analysis of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*.

To understand liberation pedagogy, one must begin with the theories introduced in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the cornerstone of his educational writing. In this book, Freire constructs a critique of the educational system in Latin America, calls for radical educational change to help the most marginalized communities and establishes the tenets of his educational philosophy. According to Freire, the neoliberal educational system, which he calls the "banking" system, acts as a subjugation mechanism for the ruling class, or the "oppressor," towards the lower classes, or the "oppressed." The banking concept of education revolves around the vertical relationship between teacher and student, where the teacher simply narrates the educational content, and the student is expected to memorize the content and accept it as a given. Freire explains that in the banking system, "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider know nothing. Projecting an absolute

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<sup>36</sup> Peter Roberts. "Paulo Freire." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*, 2017.

ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negations education and knowledge.”<sup>37</sup> Freire identifies other facets of the banking method that “mirror oppressive society,” such as how “the teacher thinks, and the students are thought about,” or how “the teacher chooses and enforces his choice and the students comply.”<sup>38</sup> The result of the unstimulating, prescriptive nature of banking education is the acceptance of a passive role imposed by the ruling class and a fragmented understanding of reality for those in the banking system.

Freire argued that a banking education, combined with other mechanisms of subjugation, creates an attitude of fatalism and dehumanizes the oppressed. Due to a long history of oppression, lower classes believe that their marginalization is inescapable; thus they accept their subjugated reality as a given rather than attempting to change their situation.<sup>39</sup> This fatalism, or “historical intransitivity,” leaves the oppressed in a historically marginalized state that Freire labels a form of dehumanization,<sup>40</sup> which leads him to posit that a new system of education is necessary to free the oppressed from the structure of the ruling class. Diametrically opposed to the banking concept, this progressive, liberating educational system works *with* and not *for* the oppressed in hopes of developing *conscientização*, within the oppressed class.

*Conscientização*, translated as consciousness-raising or critical consciousness, is defined as stimulation of the “*emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality.” Freire consistently identifies *conscientização* as the goal of liberation pedagogy<sup>41</sup> because for him it is not only how the oppressed can liberate themselves from historical marginalization but is also a requirement of the human condition, a precondition of which is epistemological curiosity. As

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<sup>37</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Ramos (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 58

<sup>38</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 59.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>40</sup> Paulo Freire, *Education: The Practice of Freedom* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1974), 17.

<sup>41</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 84.

such, *conscientização* is necessary to deepen the capacity for epistemological curiosity that in turn leads to a better understanding of the world<sup>42</sup> and becomes a necessary prerequisite for the oppressed to become humanized and change their reality. Inherent to the concept of *conscientização* is a critical reflection on the surrounding world, and Freire argues that it represents the development of the awakening of a critical consciousness characterized by actions that denote the development of critical thinking. For example, a critical conscience demonstrates depth in the interpretation of problems, substitutes “magical” explanations of the unknown with causal thinking, avoids preconceived notions in the analysis of a problem and rejects passive positions.<sup>43</sup> Without a critical consciousness, humans are stuck in the position of historical intransitivity, regarding with naivety the reality of their situation. The process of *conscientização*, therefore, implies the unveiling of an objective reality towards the historically intransitive mind. When the unveiling of reality is united with the “practice of transformation of reality,” *conscientização* is considered authentic.<sup>44</sup>

Freire cautions, however, that *conscientização* and a liberating educational system are impossible without dialogical action. Freire states that dialogue is “the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world.”<sup>45</sup> Continual action and reflection, together called “praxis,” are centered around genuine inter-class dialogue and act as the central pillar of Freire’s educational philosophy. A dialogical relationship between teacher and student constitutes a horizontal relationship, as opposed to the vertical relationship that defines banking education. In a horizontal relationship, the teacher cooperates with the student for the mutual unveiling of the world. The teacher, rather than being an omnipotent distributor of knowledge,

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<sup>42</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage* (Lanham: Rowman, 2001), 54.

<sup>43</sup> Paulo Freire, *Education: The Practice of Freedom*, 18.

<sup>44</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Vancouver: Langara College, 2016) 108.

<sup>45</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 76.

acts as an active learner in unison with the student.<sup>46</sup> The dialogical educator, then, must present educational content problematically, asking questions such as why and how in order to stimulate critical thinking and dialogue with the student.<sup>47</sup> Freire labels this method of teaching problem-posing education.

For the oppressed, dialogic action should engender a critical awareness about the injustice of a social situation and demonstrate that “this situation is not the immutable will of God.”<sup>48</sup> These situations, categorized by Freire as “limit situations,” refer to both the historic conditions of inequality that poor, rural Latin Americans are born into and the fatalistic outlook that results from such conditions. By raising awareness of class-based inequalities, dialogical action acts as the catalyst for *conscientização*, and consequently liberation from these limit situations. Posing inquisitive questions and engaging in genuine dialogue help students transform a naïve understanding of the world into a critical one, while the teacher simultaneously better understands the reality of the student. Despite potential contradictions in worldview between the different classes involved in any educational system, dialogical action allows for leaders and the populous to be equally influential in the liberation process, constituting a concept Freire labels cultural synthesis.<sup>49</sup> Without dialogical action, leaders cannot truly understand the reality of subjugated classes, just as teachers cannot understand students’ reality. The outcome of anti-dialogical action, therefore, is the “cultural invasion” of oppressive ideologies and continued dehumanization of the oppressed.

To stimulate dialogical education with the end goal of *conscientização*, Freire introduces a literacy methodology that revolves around the process of codification, or “the representation of

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 168.

<sup>47</sup> Freire, *Education: The Practice of Freedom*, 123.

<sup>48</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*, 75.

<sup>49</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 32.

typical existential situations of the group with which one is working.”<sup>50</sup> In Freire’s methodological model, the educator first researches words that are linked to the experiences, values and culture of the students, or the “target group.” Next, “generative words” are selected based on phonemic richness, difficulty and pragmatic tone. The selection mechanism allows for educators to both teach about the word itself and to relate it to the participant’s reality. The third phase of Freire’s literacy process is creation of the “codifications,” or illustrations linked to the aforementioned generative words. The codifications of existential situations stimulate a discussion of the target group’s reality, facilitating critical awareness while teaching how to read and write.<sup>51</sup> In the final step, the educator presents cards that illustrate phonemic families in relation to the generative words. Participants are then asked to debate the codified situation, relate the situation to the generative word, and combine the phonemic cards to create a multisyllabic word. For instance, the word *chuva* (rain) might be placed in a codification with a scene depicting man in nature, as seen in the image on the next page. A dialogue on the implications of the word and the situation may include the importance of nature in the world of the peasant or a discussion on the origins of rain. Freire’s method helps form a critical awareness of the world while serving the basic function of teaching literacy. Additionally, his literacy process allows for what he labels the essential task of using education to stimulate reflection on man in relation to the world.<sup>52</sup> Freire does not separate the literacy process from *conscientização* but rather uses his literacy method to produce a “reading of the world and the word”, which signifies connecting educational material to an overarching, critical worldview. The “reading of the world” is essential for subjects to overcome a problematic historical reality.<sup>53</sup> An education

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<sup>50</sup> Freire, *Education: The Practice of Freedom*, 51.

<sup>51</sup> Freire, *Education: The Practice of Freedom*, 51.

<sup>52</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 69.

<sup>53</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, 105.

based in dialogue, critical awareness and understanding is a prerequisite for liberation, and Freire's codification process clearly reflects his theory.



Codification: Man mediated by nature

Apart from developing a concrete pedagogical theory and method, Freire's work highlights several educational practices that are either antithetical to liberation pedagogy or correspond to Freire's philosophy. Freire classifies anti-liberation educational practices as anti-dialogical, authoritarian "banking" practices while he aligns liberation pedagogy with democratic, progressive consciousness-raising. In order to avoid the mechanistic transfer of knowledge characteristic of a banking education, Freire emphasizes that educators must eschew dogmatic ideologies and not confuse cultural extension, a process described later in the section, with genuine communication or dialogue. Freire associates dogmatic ideologies with the authoritarian nature of neoliberal discourse. While education is never completely free from ideology, as Freire believes all education is political, problems arise when the purveyors of the educational ideology prescribe an ideology as absolute and assert that to prescribe is to manipulate, which leads to the "domestication," or dehumanization, of man. Educators, then, must refrain from speaking in absolutes, such as issuing *communiqués* or sloganizing knowledge.



When an educator simply transfers dogmatic ideologies and slogans to the student, communication, and therefore dialogue, are impossible.<sup>54</sup>

In addition, Freire differentiates between dialogue and “extension,” a term he uses to denote social agents who establish permanent contact with rural communities to improve their ways of life. Freire argues that education as an act of extension functions in a similar manner as dogmatic ideologies. He states that by definition, the word “extension” implies imparting knowledge “to” and not “with” the target group, thereby functioning as a form of propaganda. Extension agents try to persuade marginalized target groups to adopt something, whether it is an agricultural technique or cultural knowledge, without consulting the groups themselves. Freire considers the persuasion inherent in extension to be a form of ideological propaganda that does not conform with the target group culture and is assumed to be absolute. Rather than engaging in dialogue, extension agents substitute one form of knowledge for another with the assumption that the extension agent’s knowledge is inherently better than that of the target group. This imposition of knowledge constitutes the cultural invasion of foreign ideas, not the cultural synthesis between the classes involved in liberation. As a result, extension cannot be associated with Freire’s pedagogy.

Freire’s work offers insight as to the tasks of a progressive educator and progressive education. He emphasizes that a liberating educator must demonstrate the utmost respect for a target group’s cultural context, allow for the students to form the curriculum and critically re-evaluate and re-examine the nature of his or her educational practice. To ensure the genuine acquisition of knowledge, Freire argues that liberation pedagogy must relate educational content to the cultural context of the target group. This cultural context, as we have seen in the

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<sup>54</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*, 43; Freire, *Education: The Practice of Freedom* 147.

discussion of codification, involves using the discourse, language, belief and general knowledge of the target group in the educational material. If an educator is to dialogue with a historically marginalized group, a respect for cultural context is necessary as it is the “point of departure [from which] they create of the world”, or the baseline by which the group learn new knowledge.<sup>55</sup> In the same line of reasoning, the progressive educator must form educational content around this cultural context by allowing students to be co-authors of their own education. Freire calls for educational programming to establish an “‘intimate’ connection between knowledge considered basic to any school, and knowledge that is the fruit of the lived experience of these students as individuals.”<sup>56</sup>

Connecting education to lived experience constitutes a form of dialogical action in which the educator forms the curriculum based on student cultural context, while students actively participate in the educational process by relating their lives to the introduced knowledge. Furthermore, to ensure that the educational practice is acting as a method of liberation, teachers must, “by means of critical understanding of the mechanisms of social conflict... further the process in which the weakness of the oppressed turns into a strength.”<sup>57</sup> In other words, educators must use praxis to ensure that the *conscientização* of the target groups is genuine; it can only be deemed so when it works towards the process of liberation. Thus, a progressive educator must dynamically re-evaluate educational practices to ensure that their dialogical action engenders social change. If not, the ends of liberation pedagogy are not met, and marginalized communities will continue in their historically subjugated state.

Lastly, Freire states that hope and love are instrumental to a liberating pedagogy. One task of the progressive educator is to unveil opportunities for hope. Additionally, the educator

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<sup>55</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, 85.

<sup>56</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*, 36.

<sup>57</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, 125.

must believe that the students have a critical capacity to learn for dialogue to be genuine.<sup>58</sup> This hope in the student helps the oppressed believe that they can change their historically intransitive state. However, hope for social change is ingenuous without love. Freire writes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that “dialogue cannot exist... in the absence of a profound love for the world and for men... Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself.” Regardless of the methodological rigor of an educational program, a successful act of liberation pedagogy must be based in love with engenders hope. Love acts as the emotional connection that unites teacher and student. Without love for the student, dialogue is incapable of being genuine, thus breaking down the framework necessary for Freirean liberation.

Paulo Freire’s impressive corpus of work lays down a concrete set of theory and guidelines for a successful liberation educational program. To liberate the oppressed, educators must use dialogue based in love, hope and respect to engender the critical awareness necessary to change a historically subjugated reality. Accomplishing this task requires using the cultural context of the target group to help them understand new knowledge and emotionally connect with the educational process. In the next section, I discuss the methodology I use to analyze how and in what degree the tenets of liberation pedagogy and Freire’s principles are inherent in *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*.

### **3. Methodology**

My critical analysis consists of two sections. First, I establish a theoretical connection between the almanac and Freire’s pedagogy based primarily on the two-volume *Comprender lo Comprensible* and the shorter *Milagro en La Cintura de América*. *Comprender lo Comprensible*, published in 1978, serves as the authoritative history of the Central American Institute of Cultural Extension (ICECU), the parent organization of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*.

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<sup>58</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, 9; Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*, 36.

*Milagro*, the only other published work on the almanac, provides a concise history of the ICECU at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Next, I analyze the alignment between the content of the almanac and liberation pedagogy through a close reading of seven almanacs that each represent one decade in the project's fifty-three-year history. The editions are 1966, 1976, 1986, 1996, 2006, 2015 and 2019. I chose to look at both the first and most recent almanacs to reflect on the scope of change over the course of the almanac's history. I replaced the 2016 edition with the 2015 edition because the 2015 edition contained special articles celebrating the almanac's fiftieth anniversary. In this section, I detail my reading methodology to highlight both the depth of my analysis and my guiding motivations for each section.

The first section in my analysis is an exposition to *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* for the purpose of understanding the almanac's history and content. Using the almanac's founding documents as a point of departure, I outline the almanac's history and codify the almanac's essential structure and content. My goal is to trace the history of the almanac within the larger context of education in Latin America in order to shed light on why the founders of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* felt the need to create a novel type of educational material, thus putting in motion subsequent developments leading to the publication of the almanac. I will explore why the founders selected an almanac as the medium for transmitting information, how they arrived at the theoretical arguments used to develop the almanac, and how the almanac fits into the larger ICECU organization. The next part of my exposition involves a systematic description of the almanac's structure and content. After explaining the basic organization of the almanac, I separate the almanac into different content-based categories and sub-categories and examine each category in detail. This process will shed light on the theory and material in *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* and act as the first step in analyzing the almanac within Freire's theoretical framework.

I then move to establishing a theoretical connection between *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* and Freire's conception of liberation pedagogy, where I argue that *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* and the ICECU can be categorized as a project of liberation pedagogy. Despite certain differences between the ICECU's institutional philosophy and Freire's pedagogy, I maintain that *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* functions as a non-traditional application of liberation pedagogy. I base my argument on a comparison between the institutional values of the ICECU and the essential characteristics of Freirean pedagogy elaborated previously. My main sources of analysis in this section come from ideological messages transmitted through both *Comprender lo Comprensible* and specific articles in the almanac. By establishing a theoretical connection, I advance to a point where I critically analyze the content of the almanac within Freire's pedagogical framework.

After providing a deep understanding of the almanac and establishing a theoretical connection to Freire's theory, my primary analytical section focuses on the degree of alignment between *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* and liberation pedagogy. I opted for a diachronic examination of the almanac's content to allow for an analysis of the articles' content over time to assess how the ICECU's applied educational philosophy. The questions that guided my analysis are as follows:

1. To what degree does the content of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* align with Freirean liberation pedagogy?
2. Where does the almanac display tendencies that might more closely align with the "banking" system of education?

In order to answer these questions, I look at the language, illustrations, themes, values and lessons displayed in the content of the almanac.

Although my methodology consists mainly of close reading, I focus on eleven markers I consider to be essential aspects of banking education and fifteen markers that characterize Freire's liberation pedagogy. The markers included are specific aspects of the larger themes in Freire's pedagogy I previously outlined and serve as a consistent point of reference in my analysis. For banking education, the markers include narration of fact, articles that purport a fragmented view of reality, memorization-based information and a lack of critical evaluation leading to a static structure and content. Markers used to signal alignment with liberation pedagogy include content that stimulates critical thinking, the use of dialogue, codifications of real-world situation and a horizontal relationship between "teacher" and "student" which the almanac develops in response to and with the student.<sup>59</sup>

While I hope my analysis of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* serves as a model for other non-formal educational institutions looking to develop their pedagogical strategy, its primary purpose is to argue that *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* is a successful implementation of liberation pedagogy in Central America and as such should be given more attention in academic circles. By highlighting the degree to which the almanac reflects liberation pedagogy, I offer a critique to which other educators can refer in order to assess how liberation pedagogy has been applied in a non-traditional educational program.

### **III. Understanding *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos***

#### **1. History and Philosophy of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos***

The development of the *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* came in response to the educational disparities between rural and urban communities in Latin America and concerns about low literacy rates in rural areas that were discussed earlier. The establishment of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* in Costa Rica is an example of how local solutions were

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<sup>59</sup> The full list of markers can be found in Figure 1 of the appendix (page 69).

proposed to regional challenges, sometimes informed by transnational educational philosophies and supported by national funding. For example, Dr. Roderich Thun, a German-born lawyer and nationalized Costa Rican citizen, observed the need for rural adult education in Central America by interacting with rural Costa Ricans on his farm. Specifically, Dr. Thun and his wife, Maria Tattenbach, noticed that although the farmers displayed high levels of intelligence and intellectual curiosity, many did not know how to read.<sup>60</sup> Dr. Thun's experiences with his neighbors led him to ask the question that would guide the institute for the following fifty years: How may we orient, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a population that has had its spiritual life -for centuries- closed to the world around it... [a world] in which a wave of information threatens to drown, uproot and depersonalize these persons that do not know how to combine this new world with theirs? <sup>61</sup>

According to Dr. Thun, the answer lay in a new form of educational institution that works separately from the established systems of formal education.<sup>62</sup> Based on his own interactions with rural Costa Ricans, Dr. Thun concluded that formal educational institutions, namely public schools, failed to educate and alphabetize a significant portion of rural Latin America. Even when literacy efforts were successful, many programs did not provide reading material after the alphabetization process, effectively stagnating the efforts to improve educational attainment. He also felt the distinct need to address his efforts to Central America due to his personal connection to the region.<sup>63</sup> To address these issues, in 1964 Dr. Thun collaborated with several regional educators to create the Central American Institute of Cultural Extension (ICECU) with the financial aid of the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly and the Republic of Germany. The founders of the ICECU identified five main problems in Central American formal education: the

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<sup>60</sup> Suñol, *Milagro en la cintura de Centroamérica*, 27.

<sup>61</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*, 103.

<sup>62</sup> Suñol, *Milagro en la cintura de Centroamérica*, 89.

<sup>63</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*, 100.

compulsory nature of the system, the dogmatism surrounding formal education, the reduction of individualism, the technical focus of modern schools and the lack of efficiency within the school system.<sup>64</sup> These issues, which are structural and resistant to change, favor the urban elite over the rural poor and create a system of education where the emphasis is on title and ability to pay rather than the necessary acquisition of knowledge. In addition, the hegemonic nature of formal education threatened to only further the knowledge gap between urban and rural populations. As a result, the creators of ICECU decided that the best means to intellectually empower marginalized rural communities was through a non-formal educational program.

The basis of ICECU's educational philosophy revolved around a humanistic and democratic approach. Addressing the needs of individuals within marginalized rural communities was at the forefront of the Institute's founding documents and continues to be the focus of the Institute today.<sup>65</sup> The ICECU argues that the principle needs of rural Central American communities are cultural expansion and access to general education. Additionally, the organization identified uneducated adults as the most marginalized communities, as their lack of continuing education perpetuates the social cleavages that affect the group. The Institute, therefore, established the "extension of general culture" with alphabetizing and educating rural adolescents and adults as its overarching pedagogical goal.<sup>66</sup> The diffusion of general culture and knowledge serves several purposes in the eyes of the ICECU. First, it provides access to educational attainment in communities where the formal educational system is inadequate or nonexistent. More importantly, cultural knowledge teaches marginalized individuals how to better interact with the world that surrounds them.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Suñol, *Milagro en la cintura de Centroamérica*, 47.

<sup>66</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*, 254; Suñol, *Milagro en la cintura de Centroamérica*. The discussion of "extension" and the potential contradictions to Freirean thought will be discussed in section V.



The Costa Rican anthropological philosopher Guillermo Malavassi, who worked closely with Dr. Thun in the creation of the Institute, posited that general education engenders an understanding of “human motivations, hopes and suffering to then acquire the individual’s relation with other individuals in the community.”<sup>67</sup> Cultural knowledge, therefore, serves to integrate previously marginalized communities into the globalized world of knowledge. However, the diffusion of general knowledge must be placed within the grander scheme of fundamental liberties and human equality. Above all, the creators of ICECU emphasized that the ability to investigate, receive and spread information and opinions are fundamental liberties.<sup>68</sup> Without freedom of thought and knowledge, a human can never be truly free. In turn, the ICECU’s mission to diffuse general knowledge becomes fundamentally attached to the idea of human liberation. The creators of the institution acknowledge their goal of human liberation, stating that the organization “obviously serves for human emancipation.”<sup>69</sup> The process of liberation via education is also inextricably linked to egalitarianism. By improving marginalized communities’ access to previously inaccessible processes, cultural diffusion may then be viewed as one step in minimizing the deep inequalities between urban and rural populations in Latin America.

The educational philosophy of the ICECU translated into three major substantive projects: Correspondence via letters and emails, the radio show and *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, all of which continue today.<sup>70</sup> Each project serves different pedagogical purposes, but all are guided by two fundamental principles. First, the ICECU establishes that all knowledge, no matter how technical, can be converted to a format that is easily digestible by those who have not

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<sup>67</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*, 262.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>69</sup> Suñol, *Milagro en la cintura de Centroamerica*, 44.

<sup>70</sup> Suñol, *Milagro en la cintura de Centroamerica*, 53.

been exposed to complex literature. Second, in line with humanistic principles, the Institute lets the audience, rather than the organization, determine the content of the radio show and the almanac. In this way, the target populations are exposed to the issues and information that interest them the most rather than to subjects that may not captivate their attention.<sup>71</sup> Due to the audience-guided nature of the content, establishing a dialogue between readers, listeners and the ICECU becomes an essential function of the Institute, which is evidenced by its having received and responded to over a million correspondences sent in through letters and radio.<sup>72</sup> In fact, the Institute's level of engagement in and support of the dialogical process continues to grow significantly due to the advent of email.

In addition to maintaining a dialogue between the ICECU and marginalized populations, the radio program serves the purpose of providing illiterate audiences with consistent access to comprehensible education. The program has aired six times weekly throughout Central America since its inception, informing audiences exactly when and how to access educational material. The program focuses on a different topic each airing, providing illiterate populations with a wealth of interdisciplinary knowledge throughout the week. Additionally, the Institute now uploads recent editions of the program online, further enabling continual access to general knowledge.<sup>73</sup> Lastly, the dialogue between the ICECU and listeners provides marginalized communities with a previously nonexistent connection to members of the academic elite, namely the professors at the University of Costa Rica who help answer listeners' questions. In unison, the written communications and the radio program established a strong, unique system of continual education, one where audiences were able to access a plethora of new knowledges and

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>73</sup> "Publicaciones." *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, accessed March 31, 2019.

develop knowledge based on their own interests. The third initiative sponsored by the ICECU, *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, will be explained in detail in the following section.

## 2. Structure and Content of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*

*Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* may be considered the most unique and complex output of the Central American Institute for Cultural Extension. Since 1966, the organization has published and distributed annual editions of the almanac throughout Central America in order to provide simple yet varied reading material for the readership.<sup>74</sup> As with the rest of the work of the ICECU, the distribution and sale of almanacs is targeted towards marginalized, rural communities. To reach such communities, who have traditionally felt little need to go out of their way to buy a book, the organization covers the lion's share of production and distribution costs so that the almanac remains at an affordable price and is distributed to the most rural areas of Central America via local vendor networks.<sup>75</sup> Annual editions of *Escuela Para Todos* are widely distributed to formal educational institutions as well, namely primary and secondary schools, where the varied content, immersive nature of the engagement with readers, and simple language prove exceedingly attractive. Due to high demand for the almanac over the past fifty years, *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* was the most widely distributed publication in Central America at the turn of the century.<sup>76</sup> The almanac's continual success is based on the unwavering philosophical principles outlined in the previous section, in addition to the organization's methodological approach to writing and distributing the almanac.

Under the same philosophical umbrella as the radio show and the ICECU as a whole, humanistic principles guide the content of the almanac. Rather than introducing a certain topic,

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<sup>74</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo II*, (Costa Rica: ICECU, 1978) 28.

<sup>75</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*, 38.

<sup>76</sup> Suñol, *Milagro en la cintura de Centroamérica*, 10.

the writers of *Almanaque Escuela para Todos* ask the readership to determine the inclusion of material via letters, emails and the radio program. The selection process reflects the ingenuity of the Institution's pedagogical principles. As we have seen, a key shortcoming of the formal educational system stems from the relative uselessness of the information provided by the school system.<sup>77</sup> Since the information transmitted by formal education is disconnected from the reality of rural populations, those communities have never felt attached to the educational process. To establish that connection, the ICECU focuses on the educational needs of the target readership. The reader-based approach to education materializes throughout the almanac, as seen in correspondences between the ICECU and readers at the end of each almanac and in specific articles.

A particularly illustrative case of the reader-centered approach is the cover page of each edition. Through continued dialogue, the almanac's creators found that readers were more likely to read books with front covers that contained compelling, attractive images with which they identified personally. In response to these findings, each edition of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* features rural, naturalistic scenes that connect to the culture of the readership, incite interest even before reading the almanac, and provide an avenue for readers to exercise their intellectual ability through value judgements and comparisons.<sup>78</sup>

The ICECU's pedagogical principles of writing easily digestible content for the diffusion of general knowledge guide the almanac's writing methodology. Due to the expansive range of subjects in any given edition, the almanac's collaborators come from a variety of educational and social backgrounds. The redactor's diversity may cause collaborators to insert their own opinion into subject matters, obstructing the ICECU's goal of presenting neutral information, and at

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<sup>77</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*, 70.

<sup>78</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo II*, 32.

times the collaborator's writing style may be too complex for marginalized communities to synthesize.<sup>79</sup> To ameliorate these potential issues, the ICECU created strict guidelines for writing articles called *The Redactor's Decalogue*, whose principles clearly reflect the pedagogical goals of the organization overall. First, writers are required to stay philosophically neutral and only write about objective facts rather than value judgements. Second, writers must present the content in simple, direct and captivating sentences, allowing the reader to realize that he or she has the intellectual capacities to understand the complexities of the exposed material. Writers must also create articles designed for reflection, as reflection engenders intellectual development. Most importantly, writers must believe in the institutional principle that everything, even the most complicated knowledge, can be made comprehensible.<sup>80</sup> By firmly adhering to the decalogue's guidelines, collaborators from diverse disciplines and ideologies are able to create a unified corpus of almanacs based in the shared pedagogical beliefs of the ICECU.

The structure of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* has remained essentially the same since its inception in 1964. Finding its inspiration in the strong tradition of the German "Farmer's Almanac" that has been providing varied material for a rural readership for over five hundred years, the *Almanaque* is meant to act similarly as a yearlong "companion" for readers with enough material for them to be entertained until the next edition.<sup>81</sup> The ICECU found that these farmer's almanacs, filled with calendar-based information and full-page illustrations for the illiterate, act as the most important publication for certain rural German communities and hoped *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* could function identically.<sup>82</sup> Using the structure of these

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<sup>79</sup> My sources contained little information on the redactor's background, but it seems as if most of them originally came from the University of Costa Rica.

<sup>80</sup> Suñol, *Milagro en la cintura de Centroamerica*, 49.

<sup>81</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*, 315.

<sup>82</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo II*, 39-41.

German almanacs, the creators of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* shifted the content to fit the specific needs of rural Central America, adding information specific to the problems of the region. An educational, interdisciplinary almanac constructed entirely around the context of the target group was unique in the history of Central America.

Although the material of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* varies due to the reader-response nature of the content selection, there are three major content categories seen in each edition: calendar-based information, entertainment, and interdisciplinary education for educationally marginalized rural communities. The first major content category of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* is the typical almanac characteristic of basic, valuable information for the targeted communities to use throughout the year. Items that fall under this category consist mainly of year-long calendars with the Catholic saint of each month, Central American holidays and charts illustrating moon phases.<sup>83</sup> In these charts, the almanac's year-long purpose is obvious. Specific details about each day of the month are outlined throughout the calendar, and every almanac contains space after each month for the reader to write what he or she pleases. The basic information in each almanac serves as a roadmap for the year, allowing the reader to write down weekly activity, as well as take note of any special event or seasonal change that may affect his or her day-to-day life.

The next general content category seen consistently in *Almanaque Escuela para Todos* revolves around simple educational entertainment. Each edition of the almanac contains jokes, riddles, poems and song books related to salient rural themes such as nature and God. Since the almanac is directed at adults, the riddles are meant to stimulate critical thinking, and the songs deal with mature topics including love and the death of a loved one.<sup>84</sup> There also seems to be a

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<sup>83</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* vol. 1, 2-10.

<sup>84</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* vol. 48 (Costa Rica: ICECU, 2013), 173.

didactic element engrained within the entertainment sections. For example, the almanac introduces readers to certain culturally significant Latin American songs, such as “Gracias a la vida” by Violeta Parra and an assortment of famous ranch songs by Antonio Aguilar.<sup>85</sup> The almanac also teaches readers how to play some of the songs on the guitar, illustrating the use of entertainment as a pedagogical mechanism. Furthermore, the content of each song may indirectly impart lessons for rural communities. For instance, one song, “I am a *ranchero*,” creates a sense of pride within rural communities by proclaiming that ranchers “entrust [themselves] to God” and “on my ranch I am happy.”<sup>86</sup> Although the educational functions of the entertainment section are indirect and subtle, instilling rural communities with pride may act as a method to foster social cohesion. If marginalized populations take pride in their community, they may be more inclined to come together to collectively fix the systematic issues they face.

The most overtly pedagogical content in the entertainment category comes from the assortment of stories, or *cuentos*, in each almanac. Since its inception, the almanac has included about eight *cuentos* in each edition. The content of the *cuentos* varies, but certain similarities can be identified. First, many take place in rural settings in order to, once again, attract rural readership. Second, they tend to be based in folklore, and particularly indigenous American folklore. Lastly, every story I read contains a clear moral that is not specifically mentioned but can be extracted through interpretation and synthesis.<sup>87</sup> By examining the consistencies in each *cuento*, the ICECU’s mission of disseminating general knowledge becomes readily apparent. *Cuentos* allow rural communities to learn more about their folkloric and mythological past, facilitating an elevated awareness of their own cultural history. However, while stories such as

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<sup>85</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* vol. 48, 2; *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* vol. 45 (Costa Rica: ICECU, 2010) 150; *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* vol. 51 (Costa Rica: ICECU, 2016), 161.

<sup>86</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* vol. 51, 162-165.

<sup>87</sup> Latin America has an engrained tradition of didactic literature, dating back to medieval Spain. The adaptation of this didactic literature tradition in the *cuentos* could be another avenue for further investigation.

“*El murciélago* (The Bat)” borrow from indigenous folklore, other stories, such as “*Las tres hilanderas* (The Three Spinners),” borrow from European and traditional Western folklore, thereby expanding marginalized communities’ awareness of cultures outside of the region.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, the *cuentos* explicitly follow the redactors’ decalogue’s principle of writing for the purpose of reflection. Each story emphasizes moral values that target rural communities including honesty, friendship and piety. Additionally, some *cuentos* contain useful advice such as how to frame a sentence or a caution that one should not be dealing with two issues at a time.<sup>89</sup> Although some material occasionally explicitly states the imparted moral message, many stories simply establish a set of facts and allow the reader to interpret the overarching moral lesson.

For instance, in “*El rey de las orejas de caballo* (The King with Horse Ears)”, a simple narrative tells the story of a king who did everything in his power to hide his embarrassing horse ears. When his barber finds out, the barber screams into a tree to ease the stress of carrying a secret. The tree was eventually used to build a violin that played at one of the king’s banquet. When the jester started playing the violin, all that came out was the barber’s voice screaming “the king has horse ears.” However, the story states “when the king realized that everyone knew his secret and he didn’t have anything to hide, he felt at ease.”<sup>90</sup> The story does not explicitly outline a moral lesson. Rather, reflection allows readers to translate the king’s realization into their own perspectives so they can extract a larger moral lesson from the specific situation presented in the *cuento*. Publishing content that provides space for reflection sharpens the critical thinking and literary analysis skills of readers who normally have little exposure to such processes. In sum, the entertainment-based content of the almanac serves two broad purposes.

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<sup>88</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 1, 100-106; vol. 45, 148-151.

<sup>89</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 47, 50-53.

<sup>90</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 41, 70-73.



Apart from the clear goal of simple entertainment, the entertainment elements of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* impart a sense of pride, cultural awareness, and space for critical reflection.

The last general content category in *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* that I have identified is the explicitly educational material. This category is the hardest to conceptualize, as the educational material in each edition varies tremendously. Since a main goal of the almanac is the dissemination of general knowledge, its creators intentionally provide little instruction on what the educational material should constitute. In “the foundations for *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*’ success,” a document that outlines the method by which the ICECU will write and distribute the almanac, the only guidance for the content is that it should include “short lectures about various subjects that interest the whole family” and should address “in general terms...the conception of the world, and the lives of the social strata for which this work was written.”<sup>91</sup> However, these same founding documents also state that the primordial ends of the work should be the impartment of general and practical knowledge.<sup>92</sup>

The founders of the ICECU gave no explicit guidelines as to what constitutes “general knowledge” but, having perused many volumes, I define the general education category of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* as articles that mirror the core value of the Institution, which is the dissemination of cultural material that allows the readership to understand their place within the universe. In the larger conception of disseminating general knowledge, two major article sub-categories can be seen throughout *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*: those containing cultural knowledge and those containing scientific knowledge. Both sub-categories provide an overarching panorama of the wealth of articles within each almanac and are indicative of the project’s remarkable diversity.

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<sup>91</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*, 324.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 108.

The Almanac's most diverse content subcategory involves cultural knowledge, which can, broadly speaking, be conceptualized as articles in the field of humanities. I use the term cultural knowledge since the humanities articles in *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* tend to revolve around one culture or place an emphasis on the cultural aspects of the subject they are outlining, such as the indigenous culture behind Paraguayan embroidery. Since cultural knowledge is such a broad term, the articles in this general grouping deal with a variety of subjects. The ICECU identified broad areas of cultural knowledge such as ancient cultures, human geography, governmental institutions, and philosophy, but the true range of subjects varies to a much larger degree.<sup>93</sup> Most articles in the cultural knowledge subcategory cover non-Latin American topics and material, such as the story of Theseus and the Minotaur, an article covering the Lalibela churches in Ethiopia and the history of the Soviet Union.<sup>94</sup> The significant presence of non-Latin American articles illustrates the ICECU's intention of "awakening" rural populations to further development through teaching about far-reaching subjects. According to the almanac's creators, lower-class intellectual and developmental indifference has led to a stagnant social position, and only through the exposition of universal knowledge will these populations become more integrated to the now globalized world.<sup>95</sup>

However, there are always several articles on Latin American culture within each edition, illustrating the almanac's specific desire to create an almanac that concretely resonates with rural Central American populations. Articles covering the feats of famous Latin American heroes, Latin American cultural productions and regional architecture serve the purpose of connecting marginalized communities with their larger culture. The emphasis of Latin American culture

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<sup>93</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*, 384.

<sup>94</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* vol. 41; *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* vol. 28 (Costa Rica: ICECU, 1993), 40-45.

<sup>95</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*, 106.

throughout the almanac reflects the ICECU's overarching goal of cultural integration, which they define as integration between "the individual with oneself, the person within the family... community... each of the Central American nations and the set of nations" is clearly evident in cultural knowledge articles, which attempt to form a connection between the individual and his or her larger history.<sup>96</sup> Via cultural knowledge articles, the ICECU connects individuals to their history within their culture and the world for the stated purpose of the extension of general culture.

In the subcategory of scientific knowledge, issues of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* cover a range of diverse scientific categories, which include but are not limited to articles on engineering, astronomy, biology and emerging technology. The purpose of these articles, as opposed to the practical scientific knowledge outlined later in the section, is to simply inform readers on culturally significant scientific concepts and developments in the pursuit of increased general knowledge. Throughout the almanac's history articles on scientific concepts have included, for example, an introduction to micrometeorites and an analysis of autism, as well as articles on more complex subjects such as the microbiomes in the human body.<sup>97</sup> Additionally, the almanac tends to identify significant scientific developments as they occur, ensuring that marginalized readers are aware of impactful information that may not appear immediately within their communities. For instance, in 2007 the almanac released an article covering the cellular phone, and in 2011 the almanac surveyed society's current understanding of climate change. While thematically varied, the style and writing are consistently simple and clearly serve the purpose of presenting easily digestible information for the target readership. The presentation of

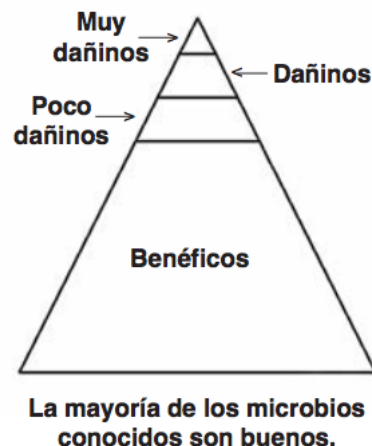
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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 381.

<sup>97</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 45, 36; vol. 44, 78; vol. 51, 150-153.

information is especially critical for scientific articles, as they explain difficult concepts to populations that may have no background in the subject or limited literacy.

The article covering the human microbiomes is an exemplary case of the almanac's didactic mechanisms. In four short pages, the author of the article manages to create a quasi-extensive report on human microbiology in extremely simple language. To set up an initial base of understanding, the author compares the human body to a building. The article states that since the human body is as complex as a large building in that there must be smaller elements that help the whole function. The article then expands to the main topic of microbes in the human body, maintaining the simple language and elaborating certain points via pictures. To illustrate the explanation that most microbes are helpful, the almanac includes a simple pyramid chart as a point of reference. By creating such a simple analogy and pairing the article with clear diagrams, the author allows for uneducated audiences to understand the basis of a complicated scientific topic. The use of analogy, simple language and visual cues mirror the redactor's decalogue, which state that readers must believe that they understand the presented material. *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* manages to introduce lower-class rural Central Americans to a range of general knowledge through the use of this pedagogical strategy, and the mechanisms used to present general knowledge reflect the strategies used to provide practical knowledge as well.



The last educational subcategory of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* consists of practical knowledge. As opposed to the subcategories that include general knowledge, the practical knowledge articles impart advice, ideas and concrete instructions that are meant to address salient issues in rural communities. While each almanac contains a page of varied "Useful

[practical] advice,” longer articles imparting practical knowledge typically include agricultural tips, medical advice, home-made engineering solutions and recipes. Examples of the aforementioned themes include articles on how to calculate a pig’s weight or those that outline the process of making an apron.<sup>98</sup> It’s worth noting that practical knowledge articles continue to change in response to modern discoveries and the relevance of certain issues. For example, one article from 2015 deals with obesity and teaches readers to measure BMI. The article teaches readers how to identify if one is overweight and lists concrete steps to remedy the situation through a combination of simple language and imagery. Furthermore, the BMI article is a quintessential example of the multitude of articles that combine general and practical knowledge to provide a multidimensional context for the imparted advice. By providing advice that stems from a general context, readers are better able to connect their issues with the larger world, aligning with the ICECU’s stated goal of creating a “critical consciousness of...his world and relationships with others” for the marginalized communities.<sup>99</sup>

However, to ensure continued interest, the knowledge provided in each article must resonate with rural communities. To do this, the almanac repeatedly addresses issues that are of particular interest to target populations, for example, remedies for gastroenteritis. Gastroenteritis is a major cause of child morbidity in Latin America, especially in lower-income populations.<sup>100</sup> In response, *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* includes information and remedies for the disease in almost every edition, including every edition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By providing different articles on the same diseases, longtime readers will have a developed view on gastroenteritis and will be prepared to remedy the disease when necessary. The practical knowledge articles in *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* develop the idea of cultural extension to include concrete

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<sup>98</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* vol. 5, 150; vol. 24, 106.

<sup>99</sup> Suñol, *Milagro en la cintura de Centroamérica*, 48.

<sup>100</sup> Alfredo Torres. *Pathogenic Escherichia Coli in Latin America*. (Bentham Science Publishers Ltd, 2010).

solutions. The practical advice issued within each almanac both increases the reader's general knowledge and allows for the reader to utilize the knowledge in everyday situations.

In sum, *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, a project born out of the need for new educational material in Central America, represents a new medium firmly planted in egalitarian principles. The content in the almanac, while extremely varied, displays several notable consistencies. First, the almanac maintains a continual dialogue between the reader and the ICECU, which ensures that the content in the almanac remains salient with its readership. Secondly, the almanac ensures comprehension of material through simple language and consistent visual accompaniment. Lastly, the material in the almanac almost always serves a pedagogical purpose. Whether the goal is imparting a moral lesson, teaching a new technical skill or stimulating critical thinking, each article is designed to teach the reader. The combination of ICECU's humanistic pedagogical philosophy and its consistent application in *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* resulted in an unprecedented educational project capable of connecting with the most marginalized rural communities in Central America.

#### **IV. Connecting *Escuela Para Todos* with Freire**

After examining the pedagogical philosophy of the Central American Institute of Cultural Extension, I find that the Institute is firmly rooted in Freirean principles. It follows, therefore, that *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* might be considered a practical application of liberation pedagogy. Although the ICECU was founded in 1964 when Freire was still writing *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the theory presented by the Institute closely mirrors fundamental principles of liberation pedagogy. The parallels between ICECU's educational philosophy and liberation pedagogy may partially be the result of the progressive educational thought that appeared throughout Latin America at the time. However, Paulo Freire was directly involved in creating the ICECU's *Right to Education* doctrine, which establishes general education as a human right

in 1971, illustrating both his indirect and direct association with the ICECU and consequently, his connection to *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*.<sup>101</sup> The doctrine is ideologically grounded in liberation pedagogy, as will be discussed later in the section. While it would be interesting to explore if Freire directly participated in other aspects of the almanac, the limited availability of historical sources hinders further analysis. However, it is possible to establish a theoretical link between the theory guiding *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* and liberation pedagogy, and I assert that the ICECU's educational philosophy reflects liberation pedagogy's key pillars of dialogue, critical consciousness, and relating the "word" to the "world" for the purpose of liberation and humanization. Additionally, I will clarify the distinction between the ICECU's idea of extension and Freire's critique of extension to demonstrate, against what might initially seem to be the case, that ICECU's definition of the term aligns with liberation pedagogy. By illustrating the similarities between the ICECU's pedagogy to liberation pedagogy, I establish the argumentative foundation that allows me to appropriately analyze *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* as a project of liberation pedagogy.

Again, Freire sees dialogue as the mechanism needed to achieve the educational ends of *conscientização*. A lack of dialogue perpetuates the vertical relationship between teacher and student, effectively limiting the acquisition of true knowledge and reinforcing the oppressive mechanisms that have affected rural communities for generations. Freire asserts that dialogue serves several essential purposes in progressive education. First, dialogue facilitates comprehension of the student's cultural context. This awareness of the target group's "reading of the world" levels the field of comprehension between teacher and student, effectively creating a horizontal teacher-student relationship.<sup>102</sup> Additionally, by creating content based on the

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<sup>101</sup> Suñol, *Milagro en la cintura de Centroamérica*, 41.

<sup>102</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 109.

student's cultural context, the teacher produces material that is more likely to resonate with the student and stimulate critical thinking. This process constitutes both the dialogical acquisition of knowledge and the first step in Freire's codification-based literacy method. The dialogical process also helps teacher and student learn mutually, resulting in a continual improvement of an educational program.

The ICECU highlights similar ideas about dialogue in their educational philosophy, stating that the continual correspondence between reader and redactor is the central aspect of their organization.<sup>103</sup> The purpose of ICECU's dialogue highlights the goal of creating horizontal relationship between teacher and student. Costa Rican historian Julio Suñol explains that "the institution spiritually and intellectually 'feeds' the readers...who retroactively 'feed' the ICECU officials with their questions and critical analyses."<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, the ICECU states that the best way to engage in cultural dialogue is by "comprehending their own system of life and don't invade nor impose, for that...constitutes a shove to human dignity, as well as impedes communication."<sup>105</sup> The emphasis on cultural respect in the dialogical process acts as a point of emphasis for both the ICECU and Freire. Both agree that establishing a continual communication using the values, language and ideals of the target group is a fundamental step for educating marginalized communities; both emphasize dialogue and codification as key to their pedagogical practice. The ICECU's *Right to General Education* doctrine includes the following statement: to "pull away the existential discomfort of the popular sectors...the listener...fundamentally inspires the content of the program. From this point of view begins the comprehension of all the comprehensible."<sup>106</sup> The statement highlights that a key property of liberation pedagogy is

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<sup>103</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*, 99.

<sup>104</sup> Suñol, *Milagro en la cintura de Centroamérica*, 53.

<sup>105</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*, 281.

<sup>106</sup> Suñol, *Milagro en la cintura de Centroamérica*, 45.



necessary to “comprehend the comprehensible” -- a phrase that acts as the ICECU’s motto.<sup>107</sup>

The intimate connection between the ICECU’s motto and liberation pedagogy insinuates that the ends of the Institute must be achieved using a liberationist education.

The idea of “pulling away from existential discomfort” highlights the second point of convergence between the ICECU’s philosophy and liberation pedagogy: the ends of *conscientização*. The link between the ICECU and *conscientização* is readily apparent in the organization’s founding doctrines. Indeed, “pulling away from existential discomfort” may be thought of as an alternative definition of the *conscientização* process. The “existential discomfort” mentioned in the doctrine represents the state of historical intransitivity and fatalism affecting marginalized comfort. To “pull away” from this discomfort, therefore, signifies a shift away from the fatalistic mentality towards the awakening of a critical consciousness.

The characteristics of a critical conscience are presented as educational objectives throughout the ICECU’s theory. For instance, the *Redactor’s Decalogue* explains that an article must include “elements for reflection,” as “reflection is the base of human development.”<sup>108</sup> An insistence on reflection highlights the epistemological necessity of human curiosity, creating a direct connection to Freire’s definition of *conscientização*. Furthermore, stimulating curiosity is stated as a direct goal of the organization. The founding doctrine affirms that the ICECU’s purpose is “not to inform, but to interest.”<sup>109</sup> Apart from representing dialogical principles, the statement implies that educational content should stimulate intellectual curiosity. The rationale used to support the assertion mirrors Freire’s notion of *conscientização*. “The desire to know, intellectual curiosity...belongs to the essence of the human soul”, writes Guillermo Malavassi in his theoretical explanation of the ICECU doctrine.<sup>110</sup> The ICECU establishes that the

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<sup>107</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*.

<sup>108</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 471.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 472.

construction of epistemological curiosity is essential for humanization and development, echoing Freire's relationship between intellectual curiosity, *conscientização* and human liberation. Lastly, the organization does explicitly use the term "critical consciousness" in the *Right to General Education*, where general education is defined as "the process that permits man to take a critical conscience of himself, his world and his relationships with others."<sup>111</sup> The direct adaptation of "critical conscience" in the ICECU's philosophy highlights the ideological alignment between Freire and the Institute. Although the ICECU began before Freire reached international acclaim, the eventual adaptation of his term in an official document signifies the organization's appreciation and adaptation of liberation pedagogy. By explicitly using the term critical conscience, the ICECU establishes a goal of *conscientização* and elaborates on the conscientization process in the founding doctrines.

The aforementioned *Right to General Education* expresses another practice that links *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* and liberation pedagogy: reading the world and the word. Freire explains that by relating a newly learned word to the surrounding reality, the uneducated "decipher, more and more critically, the 'limit situation'."<sup>112</sup> More generally, relating educational content to an interconnected global context allows for a deeper comprehension of one's place in the world. The reading of the world through the word acts to fix the fragmented, uncritical worldview perpetuated by a banking education and works towards the formation of a critical conscience. The ICECU insists that its educational material must always relate to a global perspective. I found that the ICECU emphasized this point more than Freire, alluding to the Institute's slightly divergent goal of diffusing general culture, as opposed to Freire's goal of radical liberation. The ICECU *Exposition of Motives* explains that "man can be defined as inter-

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<sup>111</sup> Suñol, *Milagro en la cintura de Centroamérica*, 44

<sup>112</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 105

relational... with the world, other [humans], the infinite horizon.<sup>113</sup>” Humanity cannot be separated from the world, and any educational program that separates humans and the collective world imposes a false view of reality. To present an unfragmented view of reality, the ICECU strives for “the integration of knowing.” This integration strives to illustrate humanity’s “intrinsic unity” by teaching about “the person’s relation to oneself...family...workplace...community...each Central American nation and their conjunct.”<sup>114</sup> However, the integration of knowledge has “creationist ends that are placed in front of natural determinism.”<sup>115</sup> The end goal of creation in the face of a seemingly set, or deterministic, reality highlights the similar ends for education as Freire’s reading of the world and the word: liberating marginalized persons from an isolated, fatalistic worldview towards a critical comprehension that enables them to create their own destiny.

Humanistic liberation serves as another key similarity between Freirean pedagogy and the ICECU’s educational philosophy, and humanistic principles guide the theory behind both the ICECU and liberation pedagogy. The Institute affirms that the key to a fundamental education is “the consideration of the human being as a person.”<sup>116</sup> Similarly, Freire states that a progressive education must be motivated by humanism.<sup>117</sup> The functions of the ICECU are centered around a progressive conception of man with the end goal of maintaining human dignity and helping “those who want to develop the full human capacity via education.”<sup>118</sup> The development of “human capacity” alludes to the Freirean goal of humanizing the oppressed, and a full human capacity indicates that one is “the most human,” representing the finished process of humanization. Both theories place the person at the center of educational practice, demonstrate a

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<sup>113</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*, 213.

<sup>114</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*, 381.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 376.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 196.

<sup>117</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 28.

<sup>118</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*, 202.

progressive valuation of man based in respect, and use virtually identical methods to achieve humanization.

For both the ICECU and Freire, humanization of the target group indicates human liberation, and this mutual objective is the final connection I highlight between Freire's pedagogy and the ICECU. As we have seen, Freirean dialogue is the process by which the oppressed achieve *conscientização*, which then leads to a mutual humanization that liberates the oppressor and the oppressed from an authoritarian system. Genuine *conscientização* implies the transformation of, or liberation from, a historically oppressive reality. While liberation isn't explicitly mentioned in ICECU doctrines, it is nevertheless implicit as a fundamental function of the organization. Despite its apolitical nature, the organization's representatives dedicate themselves to "the permanent defense and erection of dignity and liberty of human beings," highlighting a direct connection to liberation pedagogy.

In addition, the *Right to General Education* doctrine states that the ICECU obviously serves "human emancipation," citing Article Number 4 in the law that created the Institute. Article Number four relays the purpose of the ICECU: "diffusing general culture to adolescents and adults of all social classes, but especially those who have had little or no possibility of benefiting from the regular systems of education."<sup>119</sup> The ICECU seems to interpret liberation as an avenue to escape from an isolated reality. While this conception of liberation is not as radical as Freire's pedagogy, the two philosophies offer the idea that a critical understanding of the world is a form of liberation. By learning more about themselves in relation to the world, marginalized populations are liberated from a deterministic worldview. Replacing the fatalistic view of reality is an interconnected, critical comprehension of man in relation to the world that enables the liberated to transform the course of their own lives.

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<sup>119</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*, 106; Suñol, *Milagro en la cintura de Centroamérica*, 44.

The many theoretical similarities between the ICECU's educational philosophy and Freire's pedagogy strongly suggest that the ICECU, and consequently *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, are a project of liberation pedagogy. At the same time, two theoretical inconsistencies, or even points of tension, merit attention: use of "extension" in the ICECU's name, and the ICECU's explicit rejection of the term "pedagogy." As has been previously discussed, Freire rejects any association between the term "extension" and a liberating education, insisting that the idea of extension implies dogmatism and inherently negates dialogical action. Freire's stance on extension may seem problematic since the ICECU participates in a form of extension work in relaying agricultural techniques to readers. Additionally, the ICECU cannot completely disassociate itself from the connotations surrounding extension because it includes the term in the organization's name. Nevertheless, the use of "extension" does not negate the ICECU's liberationist foundation based on the Institute's rejection of the term "pedagogy."

The ICECU founding doctrine states that "pedagogy" carries a similar semantic charge as "extension" and argues that "pedagogy" implies "conducting, taking, implicitly dominating." It thus stands to reason that pedagogical methodology tends to be presented dogmatically. To avoid the implications of "pedagogy," then, ICECU uses the terms "communication," "information" and "illustration" to explain their institutional function.<sup>120</sup> By denying the traditional implications of "pedagogy," the ICECU clarifies a liberationist stance that address Freire's concerns regarding extension. The ICECU's reaction to the term "pedagogy" parallels Freire's rejection of "extension." Both positions argue that the semantic charge of a term implies the prescription of a foreign ideology over the target group, constituting a vertical-teacher student relationship. While the specific word differs, the ICECU and Freire reject the exact same implications, illustrating ideological congruence between the two philosophies. Therefore, despite the use of the term

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<sup>120</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*, 452.

“extension,” the ICECU’s educational framework should still be categorized as distinctly Freirean.

The ICECU’s founding doctrines and theory are firmly rooted in liberation pedagogy. The organization affirms the values of dialogue, *conscientização*, relating knowledge to the world and humanistic liberation while simultaneously rejecting dogmatism and cultural imposition. The need for love, hope and respect are also emphasized by the ICECU, but highlighting the processes, means and ends of liberation pedagogy establishes a stronger theoretical connection between the two. While the ICECU’s philosophy does not align perfectly with Freire, key similarities lead me to conclude that the Institute is a practical application of liberation pedagogy. In turn, the organization’s cultural outputs – the radio show, written correspondences and *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* – should be considered as projects of liberation pedagogy. In the next section, I evaluate whether the Freirean principles are applied to the content of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, i.e., if *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* functions successfully as a project of liberation pedagogy. A strong alignment between *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* and liberation pedagogy implies a successful implementation of the program, while a pedagogical tension between liberating and banking education in the almanac may demonstrate the anti-dialogical action Freire argues is inherent to extension. An anti-dialogical implementation of liberation pedagogy may indicate the continual dehumanization of man, thus negating certain fundamental functions of the almanac.

#### **V. Analysis of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos***

After reading the seven editions of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, I found an exceptionally strong alignment between liberation pedagogy and content of the almanac. The almanac’s articles reflected core principles of liberation pedagogy within each edition, and the almanac maintained a strict adherence to these principles over time. I was surprised by the

degree of alignment between liberationist theory and the the content of the almanac, as I expected that in practice, a strict adherence to liberation pedagogy would be improbable. Establishing a long-standing dialogue, creating educational programming based entirely on the target group and engendering social change seem to be lofty goals for the almanac to have accomplished consistently over the course of fifty years. However, I was proved wrong, and in my analysis elaborate on how the content of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* successfully implemented six liberationist principles: dialogue, codification, unified knowledge, developing a critical conscience, liberation, as well as the moral considerations of love, hope and respect. In addition, I illustrate an adherence to liberation pedagogy over time by presenting items that suggest a critical re-evaluation of the educational program.

While I maintain that the almanac shows an overwhelmingly positive association to liberation pedagogy, I also highlight occasional inconsistencies that might be considered more appropriate to banking education: certain structural elements, the focus on religion and the extension-based practice of providing practical knowledge, but these do not necessarily preclude adherence to liberation pedagogy. The pedagogical tension displayed in these inconsistencies is intrinsic to the almanac's guiding principles and target group and on closer analysis do not negate a liberationist approach to education. The sum of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, therefore, is an interconnected corpus of dialogical work.

The almanac has used language that implies dialogical communication since its inception. This language establishes a horizontal relationship between redactor and reader and encourages readers to communicate with the Institute. One of the most impressive findings that emerged from my close reading of the editions was the quality of the language used in virtually every explicitly educational article. Rather than falling into a narrative discourse typical of informative articles, the almanac uses language that implies informal, interpersonal communication. From the

first edition to 2019, *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* uses the *nosotros* (our) verb form to suggest a communication together *with*, and not *to* the reader. By stating that *we* can understand why a part of the moon is dark or explaining that an old indigenous market holds a special cultural value for *our* community, the redactors imply that the learning process is mutual and that there is no difference between the redactor and reader.<sup>121</sup>

The use of inclusive language sets up the next dialogical maneuver seen in the almanac: the establishment of a horizontal teacher-student relationship. Certain articles elaborate on the mutual learning process facilitated by dialogue, demonstrating to the reader that communication engenders mutual learning. The horizontal relationship may even be mentioned briefly in some articles, as when the ICECU visited a farmer to learn about his silo storage technique, or when a lesson on how a homemade tool can be used to remove work boots (*sacabotas*) was inspired by a reader.<sup>122</sup> Sometimes the reader even becomes the center of an educational article. For example, one scientific article revolves around a never-seen-before fly that was sent to the almanac by a Honduran reader named Amelia Larios Corea. When the specimen was sent to the University of Costa Rica, scientists there discovered that the fly had never been seen before in Central America. The article concludes that, “[t]he spirit of observation by Ms. Corea has made it possible for scientists to know of a new species... in our lands. Once again, the listeners of *Escuela Para Todos* have helped science with their observation.”<sup>123</sup> The quote celebrates intellectual curiosity in an unschooled observer and highlights the horizontal relationship between *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* and the reader. Corea directly inspired content in the almanac and helped the redactors learn something as well.

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<sup>121</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 11 (Costa Rica: ICECU 1976).

<sup>122</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 41 (Costa Rica: ICECU, 2006), 145.

<sup>123</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 11, 142.



Lastly, the almanac stresses the value of dialogue in specific articles and its *cartas al lector* (Letters to the reader). One article, titled “Tolerance,” explains that, “[t]hrough dialogue we understand each other... we can learn to listen to others and try and resolve problems by reaching an agreement... to overcome conflict.... That is why it is important to learn how to listen and respect others.”<sup>124</sup> The quote reflects the dialogical principles outlined by both ICECU and Freire, and implicitly refers to liberationist ideals by mentioning conflict. The importance of dialogue is also every year in the section titled “Letters to the Reader.” Each edition includes an exhortation that urges readers to write the almanac, as this will guide the ICECU in selecting educational material. Moreover, the correspondence “strengthens the bonds of friendship that unite us.”<sup>125</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* displays a powerful commitment to dialogical action, and the dialogically-driven content reflects a Freirean ideal of a horizontal teacher-student relationship.

Freire’s conception of codification is also mirrored in the methodology and content of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*. The almanac does an exceptional job at introducing new knowledge and terminology through illustrations that represent concrete situations which might resonate with the target group. In doing so, the almanac demonstrates respect for a group’s cultural context in the educational process, reflected by the simple language of each article and continual frame of reference to rural Central America. I believe the cover page of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* is a perfect illustration of codification in practice. The 2015 almanac explains in an article titled “Our Covers” that the inspiration for cover pages are “the representation of our Central American life, with the beauty of its countries and inhabitants, its customs and traditions.”<sup>126</sup> By presenting concrete images of rural Central American situations,

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<sup>124</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 45, 68.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 190.

<sup>126</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 50 (Costa Rica: ICECU), 100.

the redactor invites the reader to explore the implications of each image by reading the almanac. Sometimes, the almanac uses the cover page as an introduction to articles, as seen in 1976 almanac, which contains an image of colored toy carts, accompanied by an article that explains what they are, why they are useful and how to make them.<sup>127</sup>

The almanac also uses codification practices to introduce readers to a new word. Usually, the almanac introduces new terminology through contextualization and related images. For example, before introducing the word “robot,” one article explains that robots are essentially automatic machines and elaborates what their purpose might be in agriculture. The article then provides a picture of a robot at work right next to the term.<sup>128</sup> The robot article also demonstrates how the almanac uses the target group’s cultural context to introduce new knowledge.<sup>129</sup>

Most articles use rural themes as points of references for readers to visualize and digest unfamiliar concepts. When teaching about drought in Africa, the editors explain that the affected zone is two times the size of Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama combined. When explaining historical events, the almanac uses the birth of Jesus as a point of reference rather than stating the total number of years.<sup>130</sup> The almanac’s grounding in the readership’s cultural context also becomes readily apparent in the language used in each article. *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* recognizes the readership’s limited education and tends to use simple syntax and grammar in the content, using words that mirror rural syntax such as *animalillo* (little animal) or *pueblo* (town) for city and maintaining a simple, informal style of writing, as seen in an article about gas prices that explains that “[s]ome thirty-years ago the price

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<sup>127</sup> Every *portada* and the 1976 article based on the *portada* can be found in Pictures 2 and 3 of the Appendix on pages 71-73.

<sup>128</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 45 (Costa Rica: ICECU), 52.

<sup>129</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 41, 53)

<sup>130</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 11, 64-67.

of petroleum rose and rose.”<sup>131</sup> However, the emphasis placed on the target group’s cultural knowledge can be seen by the fact that a relatively high level of agricultural knowledge on the part of the reader is generally assumed. The almanac does not explain terms for plant physiology or agricultural techniques such as “rhizoma” (rhizome), or “estiercol” (manure).<sup>132</sup> The almanac’s redactors do not assume that the target group knows nothing but rather base the content on concrete situations, realities and knowledge of rural Central Americans, demonstrating commitment to a codification-based methodology.

*Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* adheres to the liberationist principle of presenting a unified body of knowledge or relating the “world to the word.” That is to say that *Escuela Para Todos* presents educational material un-mechanistically, establishing that knowledge, like people, are intrinsically interconnected. A glance at any one educational article acts as an adequate example of how the almanac presents specific knowledge in a globalized and interdisciplinary context. A scientific article tends to connect the presented information with societal implications or cultural knowledge. One article about invasive toads in Australia manages to cover the toad’s history, physiology and potential medical uses in two pages.<sup>133</sup> Similarly, an article about Noah’s ark relates religion, a topic of interest for rural communities, to learning about archeological excavations and geography.<sup>134</sup>

The almanac also ensures that the articles do not stand alone as fragmented information. Certain large themes such as religion, Latin American culture and outer space are present in every edition. Critical reflection allows for readers to make simple connections between each article (and even each edition, over the years), creating a unified body of knowledge.

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<sup>131</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 4, 55.

<sup>132</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 1, 64; *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 31 (Costa Rica: ICECU, 1996), 88-90; vol. 45, 62.

<sup>133</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 21 (Costa Rica: ICECU, 1986) 120-121.

<sup>134</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 11, 65.

Furthermore, the redactors unify the content of the almanac by making connections to other articles in the same edition. For example, an article about converting mist to water mentions the Quechua people and refers the reader to “an article about this *pueblo* [that] can be found on page thirty-five.”<sup>135</sup> Some articles even make extensive connections to other almanacs, as seen when a 2015 article presents the continued relevance of tuberculosis by mentioning similar articles in the 1968 and 1996 publications.<sup>136</sup> The dialogue that each article has with overarching themes and with other articles demonstrates a conscious effort to present a synthesis of information and relate specific knowledge to a global context.

Lastly, *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* unifies knowledge and practice by providing practical demonstrations for abstract concepts. The unification of knowledge and practice is primarily used in the case of scientific knowledge when the almanac accompanies an article with an experiment. For example, to “see” soundwaves, the redactors suggest placing an analog watch in a jar and using a piece of wood to alter the ticking sound coming out of the jar.<sup>137</sup> In combination, the different tactics used by *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* develop an interdisciplinary conception of knowledge that contextualizes specific information within a larger theme of humanity in the world.

The ability to connect specific articles to larger themes also represents the next intersection between liberation pedagogy and *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*: the development of a critical consciousness. The almanac provides space for reflection even in the entertainment articles and attempts to invoke a problem-posing education in the explicitly informative articles. The *cuentos*, too, primarily act as a tool to stimulate critical reflection and extract a moral lesson, and most served a didactic purpose. Some *cuentos* explicitly state the moral lesson, which

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<sup>135</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 31, 113.

<sup>136</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 50, 88.

<sup>137</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 11, 95. You can find this image in Picture 4 of the Appendix on page 75.

suggests to the reader that there may be other lessons to be learned from the story. The stories, which typically follow a folkloric structure, indirectly teach lessons about the harm of keeping a secret, the value of humility or the need for peace.<sup>138</sup> One story, called “How to fix the world,” tells a story about a scientist trying to fix the world while his son was in the office. To keep his son entertained, the scientist gives him a puzzle of the world, thinking it will be too complex for him to solve. After a few hours, however, the son completes the puzzle. When the scientist asks his son how he accomplished such a difficult task, the son states, “I don’t know what the world looks like, but I noticed on the other side was a figure of a man... so I began to repair the man... [and] when I repaired the man...I realized I had repaired the world.”<sup>139</sup> This *cuento* illustrates both space for reflection and a humanistic ideology. The indirect connection between the scientist’s lofty problem and the son’s solution can be made through critical reflection, and further reflection leads readers to conclude that fixing our problems can also fix the larger world. In addition, other entertainment-based sections, such as *Adivinanzas* (riddles) and *Pasatiempos* (hobbies) present material for critical analysis, such as one activity that asks readers to draw geometric figures without lifting the pencil.<sup>140</sup>

The explicitly educational articles also promote critical reflection through a question-based and critical methodology, mirroring Freire’s problem-posing education. Some articles are presented in the form of a question. One article titled “Where are we going?” comprehensively covers the Central American Free Trade Agreement, or the TLC. After presenting the facts of the agreement and stating its negative implications for rural farmers, the article asks, “are we forgetting about our homeland?”<sup>141</sup> By asking this question, the almanac invites readers to think

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<sup>138</sup> I use R.M Dawkin’s definition of a folktale: a narrative, typically based in an oral cultural tradition, “bearing some relation to the human nature and experience.”

<sup>139</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 50, 169.

<sup>140</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 31; The image can be found in Image 5 of appendix (page 75).

<sup>141</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 41, 68-72.

critically about government and sovereignty. The article presents information in a fashion that allows for interpretation, moving past a narrow or mechanistic explanation of the TLC agreement. *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* uses this strategy in scientific articles as well, as they explain microbes by first posing the title question, “Are all microbes bad?”

In addition, *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* stimulates critical thinking by presenting causal thinking for considering previously unsolvable problems. One article explains that before discovering electricity, humans thought it was the anger of spirits. However, the almanac replaces that “mythical” thinking with a causal scientific explanation, demonstrating a characteristic of a critical consciousness.<sup>142</sup> Moreover, the almanac does not present itself as authoritative. The authors of the articles recognize at times that they may be incorrect, or that knowledge on a subject is undeveloped. One article in the first almanac explains that “based on(?) our understanding,” eskimos do not have any house-making material.<sup>143</sup> This concession implies that knowledge is not definite and that there may be materials that are unknown to the redactor. Another article outlining near-death experiences explicitly states the following: “These things can be believed or not believed. The best is that each of you, based on your own experiences and feelings, form your own criterion.”<sup>144</sup> Demonstrating the open nature of knowledge stimulates critical reflection and intellectual curiosity, effectively developing the critical consciousness Freire believes is essential to a liberating education.

The content of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* continues the Freirean alignment by emphasizing humanization and liberation throughout various editions. Freire stated that *conscientização* is not genuine unless it is linked to social change, and *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* displays characteristics that engender human development, pride in local community and

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<sup>142</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 41, 102.

<sup>143</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 1, 65.

<sup>144</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 21, 51.

social change. A beautiful article titled “Last Night I Dreamt” best displays the almanac’s goal of humanization. The article tells the first-person story of a reader who stopped a man from kidnapping his four-year old daughter. The narrator asks after looking into the kidnappers’ eyes how two men who came equally into a world “ready to grow in the immense holiness of love,” one in which people have the opportunity to do genuine good, can stray on two radically different paths.<sup>145</sup> He then urges readers to try and find the heart they had when they were young, the one filled with love and hope. The story ends with the narrator asking to look the kidnapper in the eyes once again, as two equal humans filled with love. I believe this article epitomizes the almanac’s moral emphasis on love and hope, as well as the broader goals of humanization and liberation. Despite solidarity, isolation and a bad path in life, there is always the opportunity to change your reality towards one of love and good deeds. On the page, next to the story, the goal of equality is emphasized with a drawing of two hands shaking, further exemplifying how the almanac uses illustrations that aid overall comprehension. The emphasis on collaboration, understanding and equality provides an example of the almanac’s humanistic nature while the statement about how one can choose his or her own path illustrates a liberationist ideology.

*Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* continually lauds the rural way of life, which instills pride in a community and helps readers believe that their situation is not unchangeable. The almanac’s attempts to engender local pride have been consistently applied since its inception. In the first edition, one *cuento* talks about a man who manages to be happy despite a lack of money. The man states “I take advantage of what I have...I can earn my daily bread using my two hands... I can hear the bird’s songs every morning... I am happy, in sum, because I live...appreciating everything that has been given to me.”<sup>146</sup> The themes of manual labor, nature

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<sup>145</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 41. 56-59.

<sup>146</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 1, 92-95; The praise of country over the city also serves as a frequent topic in the Hispanic tradition.

and humility resonate with rural communities, while an affirmation of these values instills pride in the rural way of life. This method of generating pride can be seen in every edition with phrases praising the beauty of Central America and faith in God or songs with names such as “In my Ranch I am Happy.”<sup>147</sup> The formation of local pride helps marginalized communities believe in their way of life, combatting the fatalistic worldview Freire associates with a banking education and historical intransitivity.

Finally, the content of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* develops liberation through articles that promote rural social change. Certain articles implicitly mention social change, as seen in an article about the founder of the Red Cross, which notes, “one man, with valor and determination, can accomplish profound changes in the world.”<sup>148</sup> Other articles advance social change by promoting civic awareness. After Nicaragua enacted a new constitution in 1995, the 1996 *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* summarized the constitution’s indigenous rights statutes, engendering a high level of political awareness for marginalized communities.<sup>149</sup> Helping rural citizens understand their own rights correlates with the promotion of democracy that Freire argues is linked to liberating education. The almanac also attempts to produce social change through technical and agricultural suggestions. However, at first glance, the technical suggestions seem to align with Freire’s negative description of agronomist extension. As a result, I look at the extension articles in the “Problematic Areas” subsection on page sixty-four.

Nevertheless, the almanac strengthens their application of liberation pedagogy by adapting the moral considerations Freire believes are necessary for a progressive education. Specifically, the almanac expresses an immense amount of love, hope and respect for the target group. The article that highlights the life of *Escuela Para Todos* enthusiast Justo Ugalde,

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<sup>147</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 2, 164; vol. 41, 160.; vol. 11, 159.

<sup>148</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 21, 47.

<sup>149</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 31, 54-57.



mentioned briefly in the introduction, demonstrates the ICECU's emotional commitment to the targeted rural communities. Ugalde barely attended formal public school, but he "eagerly" waits every year for his wife to read him the new *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*. The article praises his quotes, such as "you must take hatred from people, and replace it with love", stating that they demonstrate "the farmer's soul". The almanac's high valuation of Ugalde's comments allude to the idea that teacher and student can learn together in a progressive education. The author(s) of the piece weigh in at the end to share their admiration for Ugalde, stating that hearing of his commitment to *Escuela Para Todos* "makes us tremendously happy... At *Escuela Para Todos*, we never forget what our purpose is...to help others, but especially the rural man and women, whom we admire, respect and love."<sup>150</sup> The redactors of the *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, along with Freire, know that a genuine educational program must be completed with an emotional commitment. Although the primary directive of the publication may seem to be the presentation of neutral information, education should not be separated from love of the target group.

This love and hope extends beyond individuals to include entire communities as can be seen in the article "Finally! Light on the Ranch." The article reads:

In...1981 and 1993, we published articles that indicated how to produce electricity in the field...in 1995 we received a card that filled us with happiness. Don Benito Gómez Aguilera, a Honduran farmer...told us there was no electricity on his farm... for that reason he decided to make an electric plant following the instructions we gave in the 1993 article... it gives us an enormous satisfaction when something we write is useful for our readers.<sup>151</sup>

The almanac affirms an emotional commitment to rural Central America by stating that an act of social change makes the redactors happy. Furthermore, demonstrating that the almanac's suggestions lead to tangible change may encourage rural populations to believe in their

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<sup>150</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 45, 78.

<sup>151</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 31, 92.

ability to change issues in their lives or communities. Through education, readers are able to identify and address historic problems in their lives. Transmitting readers' accomplishments helps produce hope in similar communities, and the almanac's emotional commitment to such change provides an external source of hope for the rural readership. *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* demonstrates love, hope and respect for its readership, and communicates those values through the content in the almanac.

The aforementioned characteristics of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* can be categorized as the key principles of liberation pedagogy reflected consistently throughout the content of the almanac. However, my reading served to flag some problematic aspects – mistakes or shortcomings in the earlier editions that were addressed over time in later editions. In keeping with the goals of the publication to provide readers with up-to-date information, there was a continual updating of topics in line with current cultural trends. I believe these shifts in content are representative of the dynamic re-evaluation of an educational program necessary to the application of a progressive education. One striking example of the re-evaluation of content I noticed was the elimination of “othering” when discussing indigenous Central Americans. In the 1966 and 1976 almanacs, the articles talking about indigenous communities use the word *indio*, implying a potential white-based ideology and describing indigenous communities as separate from the rest of Central America. One article explains, “in Central America, where we live, there was a great quantity of *indios* that lived in many cities.”<sup>152</sup> Although the article portrayed indigenous populations positively and lauded their accomplishments, they implicitly separate indigenous communities from the rest of Central America. In the 1986 edition, the redactors changed their descriptive language from *indio* to *nativo* (native) and eventually transitioned to *indigena* (indigenous) in 1996. Subsequent articles do not differentiate between indigenous and

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<sup>152</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 1, 50.

Central American culture. For instance, an article celebrating an ancient Aztec market states “when we visit a market, let’s feel proud of our customs. In them, the food we look for...is a demonstration of our way of life and our traditional roots.”<sup>153</sup> Currently, the almanac provides a unified knowledge of history by presenting indigenous history as an important part of Central American culture, marking a re-evaluation and shift towards liberation pedagogy.

Next, the almanac demonstrates critical re-evaluation by correcting previous mistakes. One section in the 1996 almanac corrects every mistake from the previous five years and states that the majority of those mistakes are found by readers. This concession helps readers believe in their critical thinking abilities and demonstrates a commitment on the part of the almanac to continually improve the educational program and further supports the dialogic process that is characteristic of liberation pedagogy.

Finally, the almanac stands firm in providing relevant content, adapting and changing material based on societal development and the needs of the target group. The articles mentioned earlier covering the 1995 Nicaraguan Constitution and the TLC Free Trade Agreement provide valuable examples of addressing relevant rural issues and at times seem to suggest that the content changes based on larger societal problems. While *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* always transmitted a message of environmental consciousness, at a certain point the almanac shifted towards providing specific techniques and stressing the importance of saving the environment. For example, the 2015 almanac had five articles that either explicitly mentioned the importance of environmental consciousness or provided environmentally-friendly technical suggestions. In contrast, the previous five editions I analyzed only explicitly mentioned environmental preservation or provided environmentally conscious tips on four occasions. The 2015 edition also mentioned mental health awareness for the first time, providing readers with

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<sup>153</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 50, 41.

comprehension of a very relevant yet complex societal issue. The shift in language, areas of relevance, and the concession of mistakes suggest that *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* dynamically re-evaluates the material to ensure consistent alignments with its liberationist principles. In turn, the almanac both consistently applies key aspects of liberation pedagogy and adapts material that may not align with liberation pedagogy through a critical re-evaluation. The completed body of work, therefore, acts as a relevant example of liberation pedagogy in practice.

### **1. Problematic Areas**

Although the content of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* reflects the effective incorporation of liberation pedagogy in an educational program, certain aspects in the almanac struck me as anti-liberationist at first glance – namely, the almanac’s fairly rigid and unchanging structure and a number of specific articles that focus on religion and technical knowledge that seem to go against Freirean principles. The relatively unchanged nature of the almanac as a physical artefact could be understood to reflect a lack of critical re-evaluation; the mixture of religion and science struck me as dogmatic; while the practical knowledge articles seemed to typify Freire’s description of agronomist extension. Unsure of what to make of these seeming contradictions, I decided to look more closely to see whether the redactors themselves address these potentially problematic issues.

The first potentially anti-liberationist aspect of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* is its static structure. The almanac has been remained essentially the same since 1966, with the major content categories unchanged. Despite the addition of new types of articles, such as the “Last Night I Dreamt” article or a section on “Curiosities,” there have been no changes in structure to the almanac. Initially, this structural uniformity in the face of modernization may suggest a lack of continual improvement and self-reflection on the part of those who produce it. However, as I mentioned earlier, I believe the shifts in content suggest the dynamic re-evaluation Freire calls

for in an educational program and am convinced that structural shifts may prove unnecessary given the almanac's user-based programming to diffuse general education to marginalized Central Americans based on the respective communities' educational demands. *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* reflects this goal by creating an almanac that has an extremely open, albeit static structure. The open nature of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* allows for space to create new content-categories without changing the almanac's overall structure. In turn, the almanac's static structure is not a characteristic of an uncritical educational program but rather the structure reflects an inherently critical perspective since it allows for additions and deletions of content at will.

One could argue that the almanac did radically modernize its structure – or at least its mode of delivery – by digitizing every edition. The ICECU recognized that using the internet would increase accessibility to *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, so it intentionally moved away from a print-only almanac. The shift to internet suggests that the ICECU was cognizant of and addressed structural shortcomings. While static, the open structure of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* provides space for changing major parts of the almanac without changing the essential structure. Therefore, the almanac's unchanged structure does not preclude adherence to liberation pedagogy.

A second area that may not seem aligned with liberationist pedagogy and Freirian ideology is the almanac's continual and positive portrayal of Christianity through the consistent use of language that reflects a Christian-based ideology. Certain articles even mixed religion and science, a fact that surprised me given the ICECU's goal of presenting neutral information. I expected the almanac to diminish the emphasis or shift its portrayal of Christianity over time, in keeping with what many see as growing secularization, but the almanac stood firm in its religious focus. When explaining the big bang, the 1976 almanac reads “with a tremendous

explosion, God launched [the planets] towards all space. Since then...they have not received another impulse.”<sup>154</sup> The mix between religion and science seems problematic, as Freire urges educational programs to replace “mythical” thinking with causal explanations. While the almanac does correctly present the history of the big bang, their statement affirms the correctness of a Christian view of science. The affirmation of creationism is also seen in the 2015 almanac, illustrating that the Christian-centered view of the universe has not been diminished. For me, this issue was the hardest to grapple with. On one hand, Freire and the ICECU argue against presenting dogmatic ideologies. On the other, though, *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* seems to be partially based in a Christian view of the universe, perhaps due to the religiosity of the target group.. This pedagogical tension begs the question of purpose. Did *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* portray a religious ideology based on the desires of the rural target group, or is the Christian ideology inherent to the almanac?

I found the ICECU’s answer in a section of *Comprender Lo Comprensible*. The ICECU states that “the questions on religion, by their quantity and variety, demonstrate the relevance of the Christian influence in the participants of the ICECU’s programs. The ICECU does not impose, nor attempts to impose a given conception of man. Rather, it is dedicated to maximally lifting... those persons who we hope to better serve.”<sup>155</sup> In other words, the driving factor behind the almanac’s religious emphasis comes, once again, from the cultural context of the target group. While the mixture of information and religion may be problematic, the presented information is still politically neutral and objective. The focus on religion helps readers connect to the educational process and “see” the fruits of God’s labor. Furthermore, the almanac forms a unified view of a rural reality by connecting religion with history and science while ensuring that

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<sup>154</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 11, 37.

<sup>155</sup> Malavassi, *Comprender lo Comprensible: Tomo I*, 244.

the information is correct. Consequently, the heavy inclusion of religion should not be considered as anti-liberationist. Close analysis suggests that the religious elements of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* do act as basis of comprehension and a process in the dialogical action between the ICECU and the rural readership.

The final content area that could be considered anti-liberationist are articles outlining new practical techniques for rural populations. Freire argued that the dissemination of new techniques from a foreign source acts as a form of ideological propaganda and thus does not align with liberation pedagogy. I was initially confused about how to reconcile this position with articles in *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* that provide agricultural or other practical techniques. The ICECU does not attempt to impose any ideology, but some articles do urge the necessity of adopting certain techniques, such as a process to recycle non-renewable resources.<sup>156</sup> However, after reviewing the articles that could be categorized as agronomic extension, I found that the categorization would be incorrect. If an article introduces a new technique, there is no prescriptive language. The almanac simply presents the new methods as suggestions to be used if desired. If there is an emphasis on the importance of adopting a technique, or an in-depth discussion on the adaptation of a technique, it tends to be based in liberationist principles. The article urging for new waste disposal system can be associated with the Freirean ideology of education for social change because the information presented can motivate communities to positively change their own reality. In addition, in-depth articles on practical techniques stem from dialogical action between the almanac and reader. An article covering a new foresting technique was based on a rural farmer who had communicated with the ICECU. Similarly, the 1993 article explaining how to make electricity on a farm that led to the “Finally! Light on the Ranch” article in 1996 was published because, “We have received a lot of letters from people

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<sup>156</sup> *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 50, 156-58.

that want to do the experiment.”<sup>157</sup> While the format of the practical knowledge articles mirrors Freire’s idea of agronomic extension, the articles are developed through processes that constitute liberation pedagogy. Therefore, the practical knowledge articles serve as dialogical suggestions for the target group rather than anti-liberationist extension.

The inconsistencies that I initially identified between liberation pedagogy and *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* can be resolved after a close analysis of the problematic content. The static structure, use of religion, and practical knowledge articles serve dialogical purposes, thus underscoring the validity of categorizing *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* as a successful implementation of liberation pedagogy. In my next section, I will summarize the results of my investigation and discuss the significance and implications of my conclusions.

## VI. Conclusion

Through my analysis, I have not only introduced *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* to a wider academic audience, but have also answered the three research questions I posed:

1. How do I explain the structure of content of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*?
2. Where do *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* and the ICECU fit in Latin American educational theory?
3. To what degree does the content of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* reflect the values of liberation pedagogy?

I found that the theory guiding the almanac closely mirrors the principles of liberation pedagogy, as seen in the almanac’s emphasis on dialogue, *conscientização*, relating the word to the world, the end goals of liberation and humanization, and the rejection of traditional pedagogy. An analysis of seven *Escuela Para Todos* editions spanning the almanac’s fifty-three-year history reveals a consistent and focused application of these liberationist principles over

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<sup>157</sup>*Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, vol. 28, 94.



time, suggesting that the continual adherence to Freirean principles acts as a driving force for the project. As a result, I conclude that *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* functions as an example of a successful project in liberation pedagogy. In the following paragraphs I outline the relevance of my project, address the challenges I faced, and identify avenues for further research.

My project provides a baseline understanding of several factors. First and foremost, my thesis exposes English-speaking audiences to one of the longest running, non-formal educational programs in Latin America and its founding organization, the Central American Institute of Cultural Extension (ICECU). Second, I have provided an explanation of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*' place in the larger context of Latin American educational thought, popular and non-formal education movements and the pedagogical philosophy of Paulo Freire. The establishment of *Escuela Para Todos* as an application of liberation pedagogy also ties the almanac to the larger academic field of critical pedagogy. Lastly, my project highlights how pedagogical theory can be successfully implemented in a long-standing educational program.

Despite a comprehensive study of the ICECU's pedagogical theory and a detailed study of the *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* as an example of pedagogical practices, my baseline analysis points to the need for further research regarding these questions as I barely scratched the surface of the almanac's complexities. In an effort to address my lack of expertise in pedagogy and education, I have provided an expository description of the theory and content of *Escuela Para Todos* with the hope that researchers in either field may find one aspect I highlighted useful for further investigation or may notice that a theme I outlined relates to another subfield of educational academia. For example, one could examine the use of didactic literature in an educational program or the incorporation of music and folklore in popular education. Time constraints required that I limit my content analysis to seven of the almanac's fifty-four issues though I did choose issues that represented different stages in the *Escuela Para Todos*' history.

Given the immense amount of material, there is much that could be looked at for further research.

Ideally, readers of the thesis may find points that act as a catalyst for continued investigation of *Escuela Para Todos* in a number of relevant academic fields. However, I would like to highlight certain implications and avenues for further research that could be valuable to the literature on non-formal education and critical pedagogy. First, the pedagogical strategies of the ICECU could be studied as a model for a non-formal educational program. While the application of the strategies would look different based on local context, the approach the ICECU took to connecting with marginalized communities seems to have been successful and may be applicable to other situations. In addition, it may be useful to examine more closely the specific strategies that align with liberation pedagogy, for example, the role of dialogue, the use of codification and love as a thematic and rhetorical recourse in the almanac.<sup>158</sup> Research could also focus on the radio show developed by ICECU by using discourse analysis to study how a dialogue was established with listeners.<sup>159</sup>

Beyond these specific questions, the case study of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* raises larger questions related to the implementation of radical pedagogy and access to education, such as the following:

1. Can an idealistic pedagogy be successfully incorporated as a large-scale educational experiment?
2. How can educators engender intellectual curiosity in a geographically and educationally marginalized community?

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<sup>158</sup> Freirean moral valuations in educational practices is an established area of study. See Smith-Campbell Charmaine, "Freirean Pedagogical Love in P-12" Education." PhD Diss. Mercer University, 2018, among others for examples.

<sup>159</sup> See Theroux, James, "Effective Educational Radio: An Approach to Analyzing Programs" (1978) or Brofman, Alejandra, *Isles of Noise: Sonic Media in the Caribbean* (2016) for varying examples on radio program analysis.

3. How can we, as educated members of society, ensure that the information we research and discuss does not remain in our closed circles?

The ICECU's cultural projects, including the *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*, could serve as the object of interdisciplinary studies that may help us understand how to better democratize education in the United States.

When I look at my thesis project in retrospect and on a personal note, I am astounded by how much *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* continues to teach me. In my analysis of the almanac, I found myself laughing at a story, attempting a puzzle or spending thirty minutes learning about a topic presented in an article. I didn't go out of my way to do this – usually, I'd catch myself procrastinating and return to my research – but I think my distraction only emphasizes how effective the almanac is at engendering curiosity. I felt compelled to learn about Incan medicine after reading about how they performed brain surgery without any modern technology, and I even tried some chords from a song on the piano after reading one of the articles. *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* manages to captivate the mind at any age, whether that age is nine or twenty-one. The ability to stimulate curiosity in one article is one thing; to do so consistently in fifty-four publications is nothing short of a miracle. The first time I read the cover of *Milagro*, the most recent publication on the almanac, I thought the use of the term “miracle” seemed biased and superfluous. However, after doing my best to pick apart the inconsistencies of the almanac, I am inclined to agree with Dr. Suñol, that *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos* is an incredibly successful application of a radical pedagogy and should be lauded as one of the most fruitful non-formal educational projects in Latin American history. Acting as the interlocutor between Central America and English-speaking academia has been an honor, and I hope my English-speaking audience can understand why hundreds of thousands of Central Americans treasure each edition of *Almanaque Escuela Para Todos*.

## VII. Appendix

### 1. Key Principles of Banking Education and Liberation Pedagogy

Banking Education	Liberation Pedagogy
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Simple deposition of knowledge</li> <li>2. Narration of fact vs. space for interpretation</li> <li>3. Articles purporting a fragmented worldview</li> <li>4. Dogmatic Ideology</li> <li>5. Static Structure over time indicating lack of critical re-evaluation</li> <li>6. Complacency with social position/Lack of <i>conscientizacao</i> efforts</li> <li>7. Lack of dialogue</li> <li>8. Unilateral content selection from ICECU</li> <li>9. Cultural extension vs. communication</li> <li>10. Memorization-based information</li> <li>11. Vertical teacher-student relationship</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Space for dialogue</li> <li>2. Space for interpretation</li> <li>3. Stimulation of critical thinking</li> <li>4. Dynamic re-evaluation of almanac</li> <li>5. Target-group driven content</li> <li>6. Ideology without Dogmatism</li> <li>7. Content engendering social change/ <i>conscientizacao</i></li> <li>8. Codification of real world situations</li> <li>9. Relating knowledge to experience → understanding the “word and the world”</li> <li>10. Respecting the cultural knowledge of target group</li> <li>11. Horizontal teacher-student relationship</li> <li>12. Humanization, centered around man</li> <li>13. Problem-posing education</li> <li>14. Technical skills with applicable uses</li> <li>15. Love and hope</li> </ol>

## 2. Cover Pages



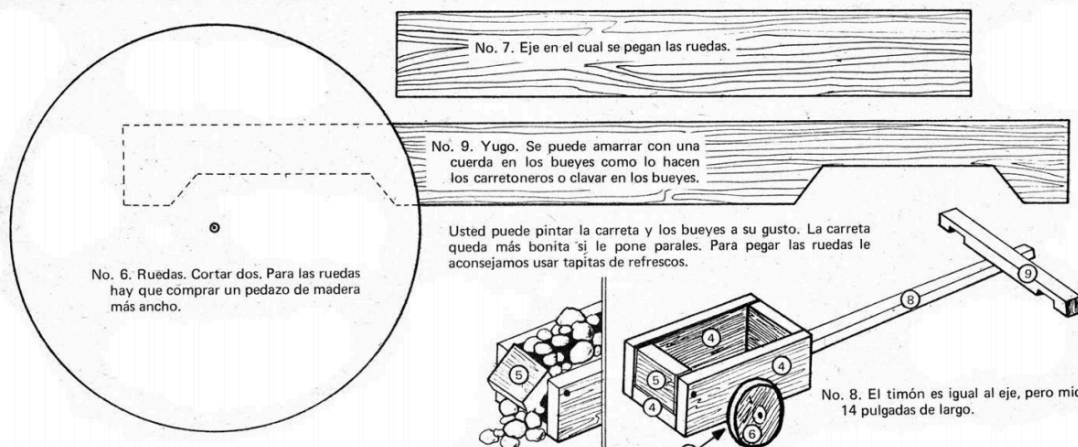
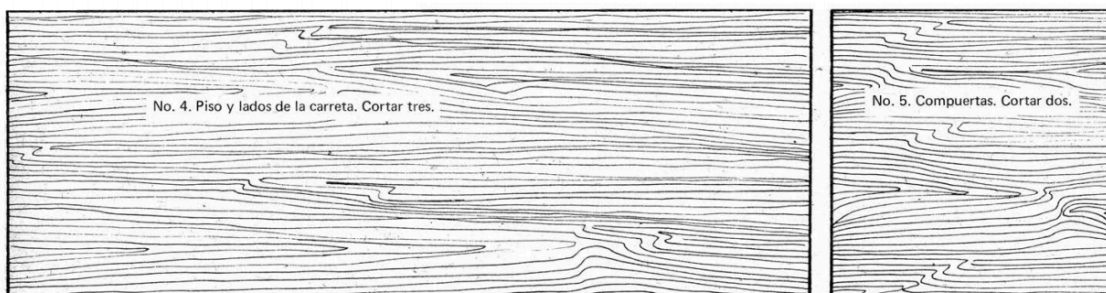
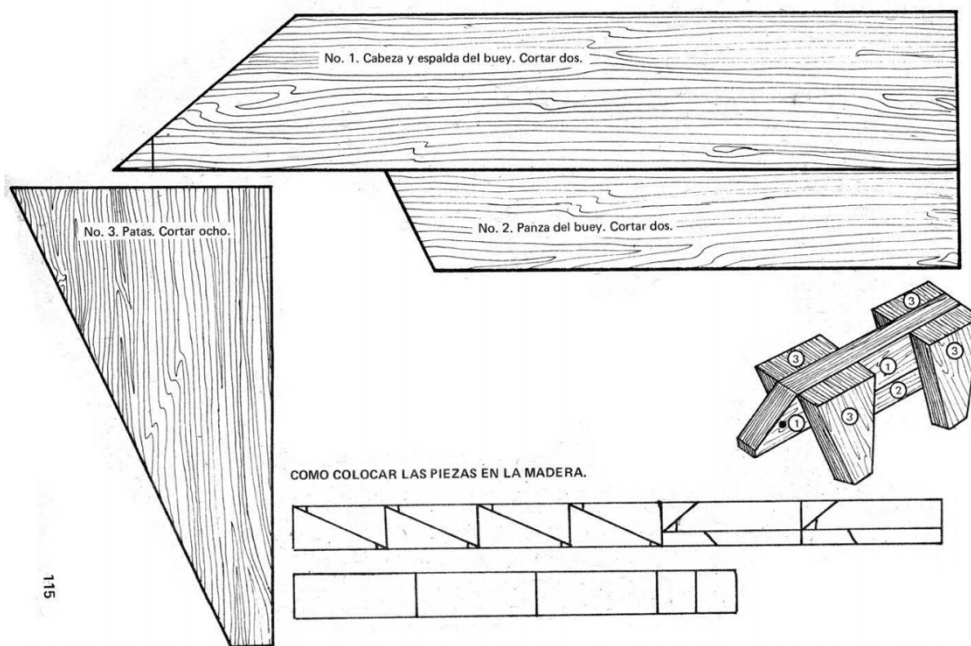




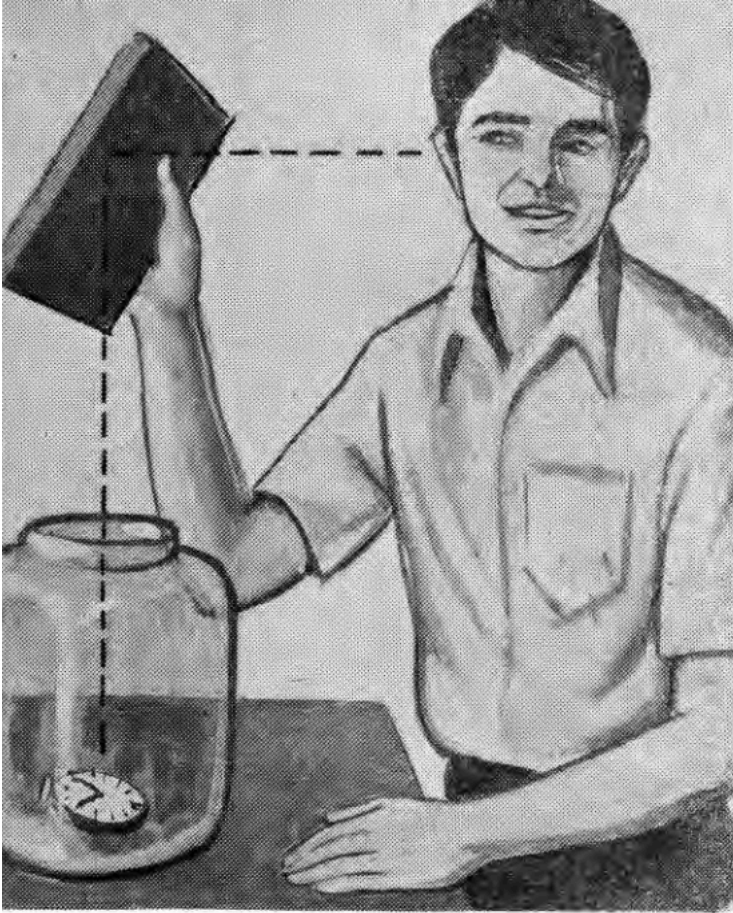
3. 1976 Cover and Toy





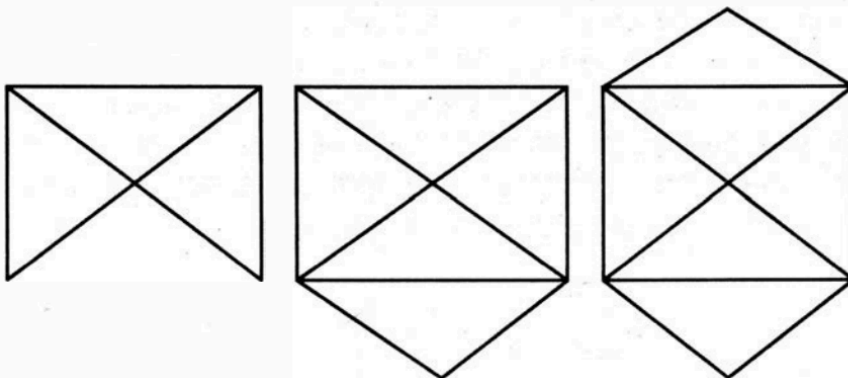


#### 4. Soundwaves Experiment



#### 5. Critical thinking game example

4. ¿Podría usted dibujar estas figuras sin levantar el lápiz? Comience por la de izquierda que es la más fácil.



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